

# *Middlemarch* and the Idea of Economy: A Study on the Narrative of Middle-Class Values

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## Introduction

*Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (1871–72) is a full-length novel by the Victorian writer George Eliot (1819–80). The story is assumed to take place from 1829 to 1832, the period immediately before the first Reform Act (1832), in an imaginary provincial town called Middlemarch and the surrounding area. In the novel, the narrative provides a panoramic description of the lives of people in the town. It also offers deep psychological descriptions that reveal the author's keen insights into humanity.

This essay examines Eliot's idea of economy and her quest for middle-class values as can be deduced from the narrative of *Middlemarch*. The term 'economy' originally comes from the Greek word 'οικονομία', which means the 'management of a household or family, husbandry, thrift'.<sup>1</sup> Afterwards, it expanded to encompass the management of a country or society, which is the current definition of the word.<sup>2</sup> The point is to make a country prosperous and achieve people's welfare.<sup>3</sup> In discussing the ideas of economy and moral values in George Eliot's novel in the current essay, I would like to pay attention to Adam Smith (1723–90), whose studies on moral sentiments and economics, namely *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*, had significant influences on many nineteenth-century British writers. Smith's idea is, basically, to make every nation and their people prosperous. He also makes much of morality that should go along with economic activities.

The actual society, however, tends to have many problems, and indeed Smith was aware of this and insisted on the importance of morality. In order to overcome such difficulties, nineteenth-century thinkers, too, endeavoured to find solutions for their economic and moral questions. George Eliot was one of them. As a realist novelist, however, Eliot used a different means from others, i.e. narrative technique, or the art of the novel. Eliot observed how people lived and struggled against the stern reality, and carefully portrayed their lives. This essay, then, means to analyse the narrative of one of her major novels, *Middlemarch*, by paying attention to its portrayal of social

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<sup>1</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1997), p.1204.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'economy' is '[t]he management or administration of the material resources of a community, discipline, or other organized body; the art or science of managing such resources' (economy, n.1.a).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Takayuki Nakamura, *A History of Economic Thought for Beginners: From Adam Smith to the Present* (Kodansha, 2018), pp.3–4.

conditions surrounding the province and people's attitudes and behaviours there.

Adam Smith is known for 'laissez-faire' economics, which is the idea that each individual's free participation in economic activities leads to the prosperity of the whole society. Ideally, reasonable self-interest and competition should work for this purpose, but in the real world competition is not always reasonable or fair. There are problems such as economic disparity, monopoly of market, and exploitation of colonised nations. This is why society needs to have proper moral principles. In fact, economy is inseparable from people's moral behaviours, as Smith discussed in his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

One example of influential moral principles proposed at that time was 'self-help'. Samuel Smiles (1812–1904) refers to the connection between morality and the use of money in his *Self-Help* (1859):

How a man uses money—makes it, saves it, and spends it—is perhaps one of the best tests of his practical wisdom. [...] Indeed, some of the finest qualities of human nature are intimately related to the right use of money, such as generosity, honesty, justice, and self-sacrifice; as well as the practical virtues of economy and providence. (Chapter IX 'Money—Use and Abuse', 215)

According to Smiles, the right use of money is important, and it is related to our 'finest moral virtues'.

In the latter half of the Victorian period, the middle class became wealthier, accompanied by unprecedented social mobility. Balancing money and moral was critical issue, especially for middle-class citizens who were expected to play major economic roles in the swiftly developing world. But what moral values were important for the Victorian middle class? Eliot's novels dealt with such questions.

Although Eliot has been described by some critics as a writer who represented traditional Victorian middle-class moral values,<sup>4</sup> I would like to argue that she was in fact looking for new moral principles that would be appropriate for the Victorian middle classes, which were newly formed and still developing culturally and economically. In *Middlemarch*, many characters have different ideals, while each being concerned about monetary issues. According to Nancy Henry, 'the importance of financial contexts to [Eliot's] exploration of character and personal relationships throughout her fiction [...] reflected the reality of social relations as she lived and experienced them' (336).

In the following chapters I am going to look at the novel's treatment of several characters' behaviours and morals, especially paying attention to their attitudes

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<sup>4</sup> According to John Peck and Martin Coyle, '[e]ssentially, [Eliot's perspective] is a middle-class way of looking, disdaining vulgarity and show, and approving of moderation and economy. This is the essence of Victorian realism: a shared way of perceiving the world, in which the judgements offered are those of all reasonable people' (192).

towards monetary issues and the social and economic context as represented in the novel. Since this novel professes to study the whole ‘Provincial Life’, it is essential to discuss individual characters and consider what different values they hold, and how they contribute to society. By analysing the narrative, I attempt to illuminate Eliot’s ideal of economy, and the kind of moral values she was seeking to propose that would be suitable for the middle classes of Victorian society. This essay also refers to some influential ideas like utilitarianism and Kant’s moral philosophy, making clear their similarities to and differences from our novelist’s.

### 1. The Case of Dorothea Brooke

This chapter focuses on Dorothea Brooke. When her parents pass away, Dorothea is left with an inheritance of £700 a year. She lives in her uncle Mr Brooke’s Tipton Grange. At the age of eighteen, Dorothea marries a clergyman, Edward Casaubon, hoping in vain to help him with his academic endeavours. When Casaubon dies, he leaves a will which stipulates that if she marries his cousin, Will Ladislaw, she will lose the inheritance of £1,900-per-year. She gets married to him, however, giving up the fortune.

When Dorothea learns about the contents of the will, her inward thoughts are presented as follows:

As for the property which was the sign of that broken tie, [Dorothea] would have been glad to be free from it and have nothing more than her original fortune which had been settled on her, if there had not been duties attached to ownership, which she ought not to flinch from. (493)

The ‘original fortune’ above refers to the inheritance from her parents. Throughout the novel, Dorothea is represented as a person who does not seek to materially enrich herself, and in fact hates to hold excessive wealth. The characterization of Dorothea in this way has indeed some significant implication about the virtues the novel is seeking for. Dorothea wants to be free from Casaubon’s intended constraints on her through his money. Although Casaubon is not a miser, he is indifferent to the ideal economic function of money to enrich society; instead, he abuses his wealth by trying to make it a means of wielding power over his wife. Moreover, Dorothea thinks that having substantial amounts of money means a certain social obligation. In another scene, Dorothea says, ‘I think it would be easier to give up power and money than to keep them’ (510).

Dorothea also says that money is a ‘burden’ in a later scene where she tries to help Lydgate, a doctor who has incurred a debt of £1,000 and been involved in the banker Bulstrode’s scandal. She is sympathetic, and tries to help him without making him feel obliged. She says to him,

It would be a happiness to your friends, who believe in your future, in your power to do great things, if you would let them save you from that. Think how

much money I have; it would be like taking a burden from me if you took some of it every year till you got free from this fettering want of income. (767)

Although Dorothea does not expect anything particular in return, she believes that Lydgate will be successful as a doctor and contribute to society. Thus, her intention is more than a personal favour. Investing money in promising people or objects for the purpose of social welfare is crucial.

As I have illustrated so far, Dorothea's uneasiness about holding money seems to derive from the awareness that she is yet to know its correct use either morally or economically. From the view of economy, there is a great difference between possessing and using money. What is economically important is the latter, which coincides with Dorothea's preference.

Such a tendency is further represented in her plan for land management. As the niece of a landowner, Mr Brooke, Dorothea is concerned about how to manage the land. She rejects adopting a casual, hands-off approach or leaving everything to the land agent. She seems quite confident in her attitude towards the problems there. She says, '[I]t is better to spend money in finding out how men can make the most of the land which supports them all, than in keeping dogs and horses only to gallop over it. It is not a sin to make yourself poor in performing experiments for the good of all' (17). Dorothea reminds us of utilitarian reformists who are willing to experiment with new methods.<sup>5</sup> While her uncle Mr Brooke has academic knowledge about political economy but does not practice it, Dorothea seems more ready to deal with actual problems of the world, in spite of her insufficient education. There is an apparent irony in the characterisation of them.

Dorothea also believes that if every landowner improves their farm's cottages, they will be rewarded with duties and affections from the tenants. As she says, 'Life in cottages might be happier than ours, if they were real houses fit for human beings from whom we expect duties and affections' (35). Everyone who works at the farm should live a comfortably decent life. At the same time, however, she has a business plan to revitalise the farm economically. Success in the investment will be beneficial both to the tenants there and to the farm's owner, and eventually to the whole community. Her plan of investment implies the classic idea of economy: making a profit for oneself and at the same time contributing to the welfare of society and people's lives.

Dorothea demonstrates further interest in participating in the economy of the province when she discusses her plans to build a village where people can learn about industry:

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<sup>5</sup> Utilitarianism, whose founding father is Bentham, is 'a systematic ethical theory and [...] the basis for reforming society'. Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *Utilitarianism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford UP, 2017, p. 3.

I wished to raise money and pay it off gradually out of my income which I don't want, to buy land with and found a village which should be a school of industry; but Sir James and my uncle have convinced me that the risk would be too great. (765)

Dorothea is concerned about systematic and efficient methods for improving people's lives, and hopes to put these ideas into practice. Terry Eagleton suggests that Dorothea seeks '[r]omantic self-achievement through a unifying principle of action' (37). Dorothea is portrayed as possessing a strong sense of purpose and a social mind, and is in fact willing to take risks and invest money if society can be made better. The moral about money suggested in Dorothea's story is that the objective of economic activities is not in simply accumulating money but in contributing to the welfare and comfort of the whole society. Dorothea's positive attitude towards investing money is an example of those citizens who are trying to cope with the question of how to act in the developing capitalist economy.

There is an impressive scene where Dorothea and Will Ladislaw discuss the worth of art in Italy. She expresses uneasiness about the condition of art in Italy because it does not seem to enrich people's lives:

'I should like to make life beautiful—I mean everybody's life. And then all this immense expense of art, that seems somehow to lie outside life and make it no better for the world, pains one. It spoils my enjoyment of anything when I am made to think that most people are shut out from it.' (219)

She deplores the situation of the works of art in Italy that is detached from people's lives. For her, money excessively spent on artworks there should instead be used to help the poor. However, Ladislaw is not dismissive of the worth of art, or of the joy given by it:

'I call that the fanaticism of sympathy,' said Will, impetuously. 'You might say the same of landscape, of poetry, of all refinement. If you carried it out you ought to be miserable in your own goodness, and turn evil that you might have no advantage over others. The best piety is to enjoy—when you can. You are doing the most then to save the earth's character as an agreeable planet. And enjoyment radiates. It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight—in art or in anything else. [...]' (219)

Through the conversation on art, we can assume that Dorothea's motivation is to help people by resisting her own desires, and that, in contrast, Ladislaw defends arts and everything beautiful as producing spiritual delight.

The difference between them can be associated, to some extent, with the difference between Jeremy Bentham (1748–32)'s and John Stuart Mill (1806–73)'s utilitarianism. Bentham advocated for 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' and claims that pleasures can be measured quantitatively. His successor Mill, however,

supplemented what he saw as some of the shortcomings of Bentham's theory by intensifying 'quality' or moral elements in the idea of utilitarianism.<sup>6</sup> According to Dermot Coleman, Eliot's stance is closer to Mill's and morally realistic about the social value of economy, and is concerned about both monetary, and moral or spiritual issues (75–77). However, at least in the above conversation where Dorothea and Ladislaw discuss how they can contribute to society while enjoying their lives, Dorothea seems to be more aligned with Bentham's quantitative theory and is interested in realizing 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number', for she believes every person's stable life makes society better.

Near the end of the novel, Dorothea is presented as freshly recognising the importance of actively working with others, watching people in the fields:

[Dorothea] was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (788, my emphasis)

Her social attitude has made an eminent progress. She has understood that it is difficult for us to recognise our roles in society if we always live secluded in private, self-satisfied places. Dorothea now realises the importance of being part of living society spiritually and economically. The world is a 'palpitating' body with its ever-flowing blood, or economy.<sup>7</sup>

In the novel, the heroine Dorothea is created as an important but still immature character in many ways. For example, when she decides to marry Ladislaw, she says, 'I don't mind about poverty—I hate my wealth' (811). She chooses happiness, denying the value of money itself. This choice of Dorothea's is in fact ambivalent. Her dislike of possessing substantial quantities of money and her preference for the idea of working for others suit the ideal of economy in its moral sense, but she is not aware of the fact that such an attitude is possible because she is born of a well-to-do family. She is yet to learn a lot about real life. Dorothea is in fact a diligent person, and starts studying political economy with the hope of contributing to society. She is to overcome her lack of education, as she has long desired:

[T]here were various subjects that Dorothea was trying to get clear upon, and she resolved to throw herself energetically into the gravest of all. She sat down in the library before her particular little heap of books on political economy and kindred matters [...]. (805)

Although Dorothea has plans and ability to put ideals into practice, she is yet to discover the best values for the middle-class society to which she belongs. The Prelude of the novel says, '[L]ater born Therasas were helped by no coherent social

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, pp. 42–43.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. my interpretation of the image of the 'blood [that] circulated' (144) which is going to be discussed in Chapter III.

faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul' (3). Eliot suggests to readers that they, together with the author, should seek and find out a new 'coherent social faith' for themselves.

Chapter I has surveyed the life and moral attitude of Dorothea Brooke, who aspires to take an active role in society while being uncertain about how to realise her plans and ideals. Dorothea does not value the possession of money itself, but wants to use it to make society better. It matches the essential idea of economy: managing the community and its people's lives. The development of her interest in economy may, at least partly, go along with the novel's view itself. In fact, recent studies on George Eliot pay attention to the fact that she gained wealth and invested the money in the stock market in the 1860s. The narrative describes Dorothea's attitude towards economy, favourably at least in her moral sentiment.

The way the novel's narrative presents Dorothea's aspirations together with her immaturity is significant when we study the author's stance towards the question of economy in her times. Throughout the novel, the narrative presents the lives of various people in the province around Middlemarch, and all of them have their own aspirations and limitations—some with serious flaws like Bulstrode, Featherstone and Casaubon. Readers are expected to follow the narrative's treatment of them, and to think and find, together with the author, the ideal of economy and the moral values that should sustain their economic activities, so this study is going to examine several other cases in the following chapters.

## 2. The Case of Nicholas Bulstrode

This chapter examines how the narrative presents Nicholas Bulstrode. He works as a banker and also contributes to several charity projects, but is disliked by his neighbours. Bulstrode's life reminds us of those changes and social mobility of nineteenth-century society. The capitalist economy was growing rapidly then, and the middle class was to become wealthier. Eliot represents in the novel the town of Middlemarch as changing gradually during the 1830s:

Municipal town and rural parish gradually made fresh threads of connection—gradually, as the old stocking gave way to the savings-bank, and the worship of the solar guinea became extinct; (95)

Under the situation, the banker Bulstrode is among those who come to the town from outside. Unlike Dorothea, who has been born into a family with sufficient property, Bulstrode is an 'upstart'—an orphan whose business success enables him to join the middle class.

In the novel, Bulstrode continues to accumulate money and power, and remains a central figure in Middlemarch. With his money and business skill, he plays several important roles in the town. For example, he supports Vincy's textile dyeing business and Lydgate's new hospital. Overall, however, he is disliked by his neighbours

because of his business style: for example, taking advantage of knowing ‘the financial secrets of most traders in the town’ (155). In this chapter, I am going to analyse Bulstrode’s economic activities to determine what problems Eliot represents him as encapsulating, bearing in mind the ideal of economy and of moral justice, which is to use money efficiently in order to maintain the benefits of the whole society.

Bulstrode always seeks opportunities to increase his wealth and power. Earning money and working diligently are shown to be related to his religious faith. The narrator explains: ‘It was a principle with Mr Bulstrode to gain as much power as possible, that he might use it for the glory of God’ (155). Bulstrode also professes that his money-making activities serve God’s cause. For example, he says to the Vincys, ‘I cannot regard wealth as a blessing to those who use it simply as a harvest to this world’ (129). Bulstrode despises those who live beyond their means to vainly maintain prosperity, that is, to enrich their own lives in this world, not for God’s cause or the world to come.

According to Max Weber (1864–1904), Protestants’ capitalistic profit-making activities are related to their religious faith. His study *The Protestant Ethic and the ‘Spirit’ of Capitalism* focuses on the fact that Protestants were economically more successful than Catholics, and explains why the Protestant ethic led them to devote themselves to business. Although human beings cannot know their predetermined destinies, Protestants believed they would be assured of God’s grace by working diligently and being successful in their business (118–119). Bulstrode’s diligence and hard work resemble this sort of Protestant faith.

The narrative, however, presents the complexity of Bulstrode’s claim of his faith. Terry Eagleton refers to Eliot’s suspicious view of Bulstrode’s totalizing endeavour of Evangelical Christianity, among other ‘ideological totalities’ represented in the novel (37). Yumiko Hirono classifies Bulstrode as the type of religious persons who have several flaws and tend to be the target of criticism (130). Then, I would like to examine his business and its motives to find out his problems, referring to Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy and also Adam Smith’s classic ideas of economy and morality. Kant is well known for the moral imperative: ‘Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or anyone else’s, never merely as a means, but also always as an end’ (42).

Eliot suggests that one of the problems with Bulstrode is that he abuses other people’s rights for his purposes. For example, he thinks of Doctor Lydgate as a mere tool for accomplishing his objectives:

‘[...] my relations with [Lydgate] are limited to that use of his gifts for God’s purposes which is taught us by the divine government under each dispensation.’  
(348)

Bulstrode sees other citizens as means, too, whether it is for the glory of God or not. He even regards them as enemies by justifying himself for a religious cause:



[T]o Mr Bulstrode God's cause was something distinct from his own rectitude of conduct: it enforced a discrimination of God's enemies, who were to be used merely as instruments, and whom it would be as well if possible to keep out of money and consequent influence. (619)

Bulstrode tries to logically justify his conduct of regarding others as instruments, but this actually reveals his selfishness. His conduct, indeed, may keep others away from participating in the economy. Eliot implies through Bulstrode's case that the glory of God and fellow citizens' human rights and welfare should not be mutually exclusive, but both can be motives for one's economic activities. When we follow the claim of Kant, Bulstrode's conduct is morally flawed at least because he regards others as means, and not 'as an end'.

Another problem with Bulstrode is that he harbours a secular desire, trying to obtain considerable power in Middlemarch. His faith is actually presented as inseparable from his secular desire:

Bulstrode's standard had been his serviceableness to God's cause: 'I am sinful and nought—a vessel to be consecrated by use—but use me!'—had been the mould into which he had constrained his immense need of being something important and predominating. (620)

Here, the narrator ironically contrasts Bulstrode's self-humiliation with his immense need of power. Bulstrode has a desire to be 'something important'. His final goal is 'partially withdrawing from his present exertions in the administration of business, and throwing more conspicuously on the side of Gospel truth the weight of local landed proprietorship' (519).

Peter Featherstone, an old man of large property and land, criticizes Bulstrode, saying,

'[Bulstrode]'s got no land hereabout that ever I heard tell of. A speckilating fellow! He may come down any day, when the devil leaves off backing him. [...] God A'mighty sticks to the land. [...]' (110)

Featherstone's malignant remark shows both their differences and similarities. Bulstrode accumulates wealth by business and investment while Featherstone sticks to the income from his stable possession of land, but they are similar in their desire for the possession of money itself. They are quite secular in their desire for money because they think simply possessing land and money means power and authority. This is, however, far from the ideal of economy: to use money efficiently so as to make your family, community and the whole society happy and prosperous.

From the perspective of economy, Bulstrode's doings are significant in being both beneficial to and problematic for society. His business acumen and strong sense of duty to use money turn the wheel of society. In addition, his contributions, such as building a new hospital, are not worthless. While most people in Middlemarch fail to understand Bulstrode's values, the novel's narrative objectively presents his way of

thinking and economic activities, which function at least in the community. The narrative's ambivalent stance towards Bulstrode will be explained by Adam Smith's economic and moral studies: the narrative admits his contribution to the province's advancement, while being opposed to his selfish motives and attitudes.<sup>8</sup> In other words, Bulstrode is created as an imperfect person—a peculiar example of the ambiguously flawed existence of human beings.

Mr Farebrother, who is made to give up the position of chaplain because of Bulstrode, expresses a strong suspicion against the latter's creed. Nevertheless, he recognises the importance of the hospital:

'Their system is a sort of worldly-spiritual cliqueism: they really look on the rest of mankind as a doomed carcass which is to nourish them for heaven. But,' he added, smilingly, 'I don't say that Bulstrode's new hospital is a bad thing [...]'(175)

He admits that Bulstrode's activities have a point. Farebrother's reference to the utility of the hospital to which Bulstrode is contributing may be symbolic of the novel's impartial attitude even towards weak and flawed human beings. The narrative conscientiously portrays them.

The narrative's ambivalent treatment of Bulstrode seems to show the author Eliot's typically practical attitudes towards economic and moral issues. Although Bulstrode is created as a flawed character who is obviously selfish under the name of Christian faith, the narrative admits that his faith is probably authentic in some way and that his activities are in fact substantially contributing to the welfare of the province. The problem with him is mainly in his attitude towards his fellow citizens. After all, Bulstrode prioritises his confidence that he is working 'for the glory of God' over his relations with people. Considering the ideal middle-class values this novel is searching for, the most serious problem with him is his distance and isolation from other people. According to Adam Smith, 'interaction with other minds' (Haakonssen, xvi) is essential for one's moral life. In spite of his involuntary contribution to society, he obstinately remains to be isolated under the name of religion.

If we compare Bulstrode and Dorothea, they both use, or intend to use, their money for investment. Their plans both seem to pursue 'utility' as a result because they do what society needs, but there are significant differences. While the former regards other people as instruments and makes money for his selfish purpose, the latter recognises herself as a part of the 'palpitating life'. The comparison between them suggests that Eliot places importance on both economic contribution and morals. As I have referred to so far, Eliot is influenced by both Utilitarian ideas and Kantian moral philosophy, although there are significant differences between Eliot and both of them.

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<sup>8</sup> For Smith, 'self-love' which is an essential virtue for sympathy should be clearly distinguished from 'selfishness'. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 374–75.

Kant's moral imperatives seem very close to the moral values that Eliot is in quest of, but Eliot remains constantly empirical contrary to Kant's intuitionism.<sup>9</sup> Eliot is also different from many utilitarian thinkers in that she values people's motives and dreams as well as results.

### 3. The Case of Tertius Lydgate and the Narrative's Treatment of Provincial Life and 'Low Subjects'

With Doctor Tertius Lydgate, Eliot presents another type of character. Lydgate comes to Middlemarch at the age of 27. He does not desire to be rich, but wants to be successful as a practitioner 'by the independent value of his work' (145). Subsequently, Lydgate marries Rosamond Vincy, the daughter of an old manufacturer, and gradually realises that she constantly spends a large sum of money to make her life appear posh. Consequently, Lydgate falls into debt. He borrows £1,000 from Bulstrode, involving himself in the latter's scandal.

Lydgate is proud of his profession as a medical doctor. He is convinced that medical profession presents

the most perfect interchange between science and art; offering the most direct alliance between intellectual conquest and the social good. Lydgate's nature demanded this combination: he was an emotional creature, with a flesh-and-blood sense of fellowship which withstood all the abstractions of special study. (145)

Lydgate is interested in both studying scientific matters and contributing positively to society. He is motivated by the ideal of having emotional connections with his neighbours. This idea has something in common with Dorothea's wish to be a part of the 'palpitating life' of people in the fields (788).

The narrator continuously refers to Lydgate's meritocratic ideas. He plans to succeed as a practitioner by building up social status based on his professional skills, which suggests his self-help tendency:

[Lydgate] would keep away from the range of London intrigues, jealousies, and social truckling, and win celebrity, however slowly, as Jenner had done, by the independent value of his work. (145)

The narrator refers to Edward Jenner (1749-1823) as a role model for Lydgate. Jenner is discussed in Smiles's *Self-Help* as the person who developed a vaccination for smallpox. Although the discovery was published as a treatise in 1798, it was initially ignored and even denounced. Gradually, the efficacy of his vaccine was acknowledged and he was publicly honoured (Smiles, 86-89). Lydgate, too, is eager to contribute to

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<sup>9</sup> Although Eliot criticizes Kant's a priori theory in her essay 'The Future of German Philosophy', they seem to have a lot in common in moral values themselves (Coleman 87-90).

establishing the ‘rational basis of his profession’ (147). Following Bichat’s study,<sup>10</sup> he is enthusiastic to study ‘the primitive tissue’ (148). The physiological structure of the human body is the topic he is especially keen on.

Lydgate is also interested in reforming the medical system and improving medical education. Such plans can be read as reflecting his rationalist values and utilitarian thinking. Lydgate hopes for the general advance of the medical system, but chooses to be a general practitioner in Middlemarch because

it seemed to Lydgate that a change in the units was the most direct mode of changing the numbers. He meant to be a unit who would make a certain amount of difference towards that spreading change which would one day tell appreciably upon the averages[.] (146)

Lydgate is a sort of utilitarian reformist who seeks ‘utility’ to increase happiness by changing the inefficient systems. In being responsible for their positions and searching for better ways through their deeds, Lydgate and Dorothea seem to have something in common. Lydgate, as a doctor, feels the need to reform the medical system, while Dorothea thinks about how she can use money to benefit society.

In spite of his strong sense of purpose, Lydgate has difficulty in taking part in the actual economy of Middlemarch. He comes to have relationship with Bulstrode, and his ignorance of financial management causes him eventually to fail.

Although unwillingly, Lydgate first has to establish a relationship with the banker Bulstrode to manage the new hospital. Lydgate plans a new ward there in case of cholera epidemic. He also intends to test new medical treatments and improve the quality of medical education. Reforming medical systems requires not only scientific knowledge but also considerable amount of money. Asa Briggs refers to the relationship between technological innovations and economy: ‘The success of the inventors themselves, who came from varying social backgrounds and ranged from millwrights to clergymen, required qualities other than inventiveness. Business acumen was one of those’ (259). If scientists want to make use of their arts or knowledge to improve the world, they must involve themselves in economic matters.

In this way, the storylines of Bulstrode and Lydgate merge together in their management of the hospital: Bulstrode aims to glorify God and by extension to increase his own power, whereas Lydgate hopes to be committed to the science of medicine and its social contribution. Initially Lydgate was sure he could be independent, both morally and financially, from Bulstrode’s influence when he adopted the latter’s plan about the hospital:

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<sup>10</sup> Marie-François-Xavier Bichat (1771-1802) is a French anatomist and pathologist. Bichat is known for his idea that ‘living bodies [...] must be regarded as consisting of certain primary webs or tissues, out of which the various organs—brain, heart, lungs, and so on—are compacted [...]’ (Eliot 117).

Lydgate had so many times boasted both to himself and others that he was totally independent of Bulstrode, to whose plans he had lent himself solely because they enabled him to carry out his own ideas of professional work and public benefit [...]. (677)

Here Lydgate, however, is in fact suffering from a double bind between the practical need of finance and the ideal of his profession.

In addition, Lydgate's shortcomings are explained. In spite of his initial resolution not to work for money, Lydgate in the end finds his household involved in financial problems and gives up the original plans. The narrative mentions Lydgate's 'hereditary habit' or 'commonness' of his lifestyle. He uses money without caring much about the cost:

[H]e was no radical in relation to anything but medical reform and the prosecution of discovery. In the rest of practical life he walked by hereditary habit; half from that personal pride and unreflecting egoism which I have already called commonness, and half from that naiveté which belonged to preoccupation with favourite ideas. (348–49)

His problem is that he does not consider life from the viewpoint of economy. Since he has but a naïve notion on financial matters, he does not know how to get out of debt, and therefore feels increasingly frightened. He is aware that this crisis must be overcome, but Rosamond's defiance and Bulstrode's scandal make it difficult. In spite of his 'self-help' philosophy and meritocratic values, Lydgate has a weakness of disdaining money, which finally ruins his success. Lydgate's marriage with Rosamond, who is characterised as a woman of 'conspicuous consumption', makes his failure the more serious.

Now, I would like to draw attention to a striking simile (or cognitively a metaphor) that the narrator uses about Lydgate in his younger days:

A liberal education had of course left [Lydgate] free to read the indecent passages in the school classics, but beyond a general sense of secrecy and obscenity in connection with his internal structure, had left his imagination quite unbiased, so that for anything he knew his brains lay in small bags at his temples, and he had no more thought of representing to himself how his blood circulated than how paper served instead of gold. (144, my emphasis)

Here, Lydgate is inspired and decides to take up medical study. Until then, he did not have any knowledge either of the circulation of blood in the human body or of that of money in society. His knowledge about the latter remained naïve even after that. What is striking here is the metaphoric combination of two disciplines: medicine and economy. This shows the author's strong interest in and concern about both of them. Then the simile (as shown in the underlined part) should be read as a metaphor for capitalist economy, or more precisely, credit economy. Blood is to a human body what paper money is to society. It is desirable for paper money to circulate smoothly in

society just as blood circulates throughout the human body to keep it alive. Then each person in society who deals with money is like an individual organ of the body, which is kept alive by the constant circulation of blood.

This image may remind readers of George Eliot's view and handling of the question of economy. In *Middlemarch*, middle-class people's various economic activities are described. The third-person narrative objectively depicts the situation, showing that even though there are both those who succeed and those who fail, the economy must be kept going. Eliot's narrative focuses not only on individual persons' activities but also on how their activities and behaviours work together or respond to each other and make a wholesome society. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Eliot must have been interested in economy, but since she was a novelist, she chose to deal with this topic by writing substantial narratives that described people's lives in the provincial town, or 'A Study of Provincial Life'.

Since Eliot seeks ideal economy and morals for middle-class citizens by using narrative art, let us see how the narrative of *Middlemarch* treats other examples. The narrative frequently focuses on how each character thinks about and uses money. Money functions as a barometer of people's habits.

For example, the novel observes how one family in the province, the Garths, live stable lives after their financial difficulties. Their father, Caleb Garth, shows his noble spirit in contributing to society through his business. Although his weakness is that 'he could not manage finance' well, he 'ha[s] a reverential soul with a strong practical intelligence' (250) in his business. Caleb's daughter, Mary, is also proud of her family living independently. She says, 'My family is not fond of begging, Fred. We would rather work for money' (253). Though the Garths are not rich, they do not humiliate themselves before those in power. Their self-help attitudes mean steady participation in the economy of Middlemarch. Then Mary marries Fred, the eldest son of the Vincys. Fred starts to work as a land agent and finally succeeds in achieving a stable livelihood. The future is entrusted to the younger generation like Mary and Fred, who have the notion of self-help. People need to work diligently and involve themselves in society as Fred eventually gets a job and is relied upon by his family and neighbours. Working and earning money for themselves and being proud of their jobs may be one of the important examples of middle-class values Eliot is suggesting to the reader.

The Vincys, from which Fred comes, is another middle-class family which is contrastive to the Garths. The Vincys are lavish spenders who live 'in an easy profuse way':

[T]he children had no standard of economy, and the elder ones retained some of their infantine notion that their father might pay for anything if he would. Mr Vincy himself had expensive Middlemarch habits—spent money on courting, on his cellar, and on dinner-giving, while mamma had those running accounts with tradespeople, which give a cheerful sense of getting everything one wants

without any question of payment. (230)

They do not have sound financial instincts, and are indifferent to how money should be spent. They are concerned solely about their own prosperity and do not think about contributing to society.

When Mr Featherstone's inheritance is contested by his relatives, the Vincys become involved as well. Featherstone is a typical example of those who simply hold money and use it to show their power. The narrative here comically presents an episode of the people who gather hoping to inherit their relative's legacy. There Fred, who was still a bachelor then, criticised other relatives as misers:

'They are as rich as Jews, those Waules and Featherstones, I mean, for people like them, who don't want to spend anything. And yet they hang about my uncle like vultures, and are afraid of a farthing going away from their side of the family.' (105)

To this Mrs Waule retorts, calling Fred's family as lavish spenders. She claims that Fred is 'losing hundreds of pounds, which, if what everybody says is true, must be found somewhere else than out of Mr Vincy the father's pocketz'. She continues: '[Mr Vincy]'s been losing money for years, though nobody would think so, to see him go coursing and keeping open house as they do' (106). Then the narrative continues to describe a trivial quarrel like this for pages.

At the end of this petty scene, the narrator addresses the reader, seemingly apologising for his/her narrative that reports such an unimportant 'low subject' to a full length:

And here I am naturally led to reflect on the means of elevating a low subject. Historical parallels are remarkably efficient in this way. The chief objection to them is, that the diligent narrator may lack space, or (what is often the same thing) may not be able to think of them with any degree of particularity, though he may have a philosophical confidence that if known they would be illustrative. It seems an easier and shorter way to dignity, to observe that—since there never was a true story which could not be told in parables, where you might put a monkey for a margrave, and vice versa—whatever has been or is to be narrated by me about low people, may be ennobled by being considered a parable; so that if any bad habits and ugly consequences are brought into view, the reader may have the relief of regarding them as not more than figuratively ungenteel, and may feel himself virtually in company with persons of some style. Thus while I tell the truth about loobies, my reader's imagination need not be entirely excluded from an occupation with lords; and the petty sums which any bankrupt of high standing would be sorry to retire upon, may be lifted to the level of high commercial transactions by the inexpensive addition of proportional ciphers. (341, my emphases)

This apparent apology is, in fact, a humorously worded manifesto reflecting the

author's stance as a writer of realist novels. First, the narrator addresses the reader, who may expect to gain noble lessons from the novel. The narrator attempts to teach readers how they can derive refined, middle-class values by elevating such examples of 'low subject', claiming that observing reality through 'historical parallels' can help readers gain insight. In the context of the nineteenth century, 'history' is a science of positivism that seeks to record facts objectively and accurately. Therefore, the 'historical parallels' which the narrator refers to in the novel, need to be based on facts. The author Eliot gives the narrator the role of a historian reporting real lives of people in and around Middlemarch.<sup>11</sup> Although Middlemarch is an imaginary town, for the narrator, the lives of the characters are not fictional.

The narrator goes on to suggest that if such facts were known, they would prove illuminating to all. If readers exercise their 'imagination', or think about questions deeply, they can tease out noble lessons even from 'low' subjects. In this way, the novel's readers are expected to interpret and moralise for themselves those humble examples that are presented. According to David Russel, the narrator of *Middlemarch* takes the style of thinking with readers. He writes: 'The narrator is not a kind of omniscient God, but more like someone thinking with us as we read [...] (xv). The narrator describes people's lives realistically as examples for readers to interpret rather than imposing specific morals.

At the end of this address to the reader, the narrator uses an interesting metaphor about money, as a joke. The narrator likens enriching one's reading through imagination to increasing the amount of money via the innocent trick of adding 'ciphers'. After reading examples of 'low people' involved in trivial monetary issues, readers are supposed to consider high matters, such as social finance. Behind this metaphor, there is a capitalistic image of increasing money. This sort of metaphor, I think, is suggestive of the author's strong interest in economy.

Recent researches have shown that Eliot was interested in economic theories and real investment. Coleman explains how Eliot deepened her understanding of political economy. For example, in the 1850s, Eliot participated in the real world of business, as in the 'relaunch of the *Westminster Review*' (17). And in the 1860s, she rapidly gained wealth and invested it in the stock market. Being unmarried, she managed her 'invested assets in her own name' (10). Furthermore, Eliot had a good knowledge of her contemporary theories of political economy.

Eliot shows us how the plot of the individual can be intertwined with the plots of other characters by assuming a broader perspective. Compared with other Victorian writers, Eliot's characteristic point is that she tries to grasp the whole society. The third person narrative flexibly observes society from a variety of vantage points. According to Russel, Eliot's novel focuses on the relationship between the individual

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<sup>11</sup> The narrator calls him-/herself a 'belated historian(s)' (82).



and society:

How people relate to each other; one of the questions the novel openly wonders about is how people overcome their various self-cures for intimacy and come to gain more exposure to the lives of others, towards what the narrator calls ‘a sense of fellowship deep enough to make all efforts at isolation seem mean and petty instead of exalting’ [...]. (vii)

Eliot’s novel does not compel the reader to adopt any specific set of morals; instead, it encourages them to think alongside the author about how one should behave in society.

## Conclusion

In this study, I have taken up *Middlemarch*, and studied George Eliot’s idea of economy and the way she sought after ideal moral values for middle-class citizens of her times. I assumed that Eliot’s idea was basically not very different from what the original meaning of the word ‘economy’ implies: the management of one’s household, and then of the whole society, so as to make its members—family or citizens—happy and prosperous. This idea will basically apply to all economic thoughts of modern times, including those of Adam Smith and of successive economists. As a novelist, Eliot coped with these questions using her art of narrative.

The narrative presents various people’s thoughts and behaviours, and expects readers to think of their own answers to these questions together with the author behind. What should be noted is the fact that the novel describes the weakness and immaturity of every human being carefully and conscientiously. Therefore, I specially paid attention to the novel’s generously objective narrative to examine the author’s ideas about the questions of what are ideal economy and moral values for the developing Victorian middle classes.

Through chapters I to III, I took up several characters in the novel and examined how the narrative deals with them. At the same time, I bore in my mind the economic and moral thoughts of Adam Smith, along with those of Samuel Smiles, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant and Max Weber. I have found several values that are notable in the novel. Accumulating or possessing money must not be the end, but the proper use of it is necessary. Sympathy, or ‘interaction with other minds’ (Haakonssen, xvi) is important, both morally and economically. One must not use other people as a means for one’s economic success. In other words, one must not be selfish either in economic or moral sense. Although Eliot’s method is empirical like many utilitarians, she makes much of not only the results but also the motivation of one’s endeavours. As represented in the story of Fred and Mary, the notion of self-help is also important.

The author’s interest in economy is not only imagined in individual stories, but also in the characteristic way the narrative deals with them. For example, there are several

impressive metaphors and symbolic expressions which remind us of the author's concern about economy: blood, palpitation, paper money, and gold. At one point of the novel, the narrator addresses the reader in a peculiar way, and this gives us a hint for understanding the author's stance on the issues of economy and middle-class values. After a long description of quarrels between different families about Featherstone's inheritance, the narrator tells readers that recording those trivial facts correctly is extremely important because readers are expected to use their 'imagination'. Imagination can be interpreted as examining and comparing factual examples carefully in order to find the best solutions for moral and economic questions for themselves.

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