

# **The Roots of Technological Optimism: A Foucauldian Critique of the Economics of Climate Change**

by

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## Abstract/Summary

This thesis is a critique of the technological optimism of climate change economics, the basis for climate change policies world-wide. It utilises a Foucauldian genealogy – a form of critique that deploys history strategically – to show how the “truth” of the present was produced under very particular circumstances, circumstances not at all in conformity with the notion of progressive, scientific discovery. Using this methodology, I am able to chart the process by which economists became experts on technological change. I show how, in Adam Smith, technological change first became predictable, and locate the cause in Smith’s pantheistic theology. The subject Smith creates, *homo oeconomicus*, is rendered entirely knowable, as is her ingenuity. She acts in ways uniformly predictable and positive, as long as she is left free from government interference. This motors the vision of harmonious progress that thereafter becomes the rationality of the discipline, what I call *negative progress*. Moreover, it is this subject, translated into two growth theories, that lies at the heart of climate change economics. The major conclusions and contributions of the thesis are, firstly, that an underlying metaphysics is in fact what allows economists to speak “truth” about the future of technological change; and secondly, that the optimism of the resulting projections is made possible only as a result of the divine essence at the heart of economic man.

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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*Such rare designs inventing (wretched me!)*

*For mortal men, I yet have no device*

*By which to free myself from this my woe*

- Prometheus Bound

## Acknowledgements

The only people that carefully read acknowledgements are those that expect to be mentioned in them. Hence, this is perhaps a moment of trepidation for you, kind reader. I can only hope that your expectations will be met; but if not, you clearly failed to be suitably helpful. And for that, you should feel shame.

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