



The Forum on Social Wealth

Developing a New Vision
of Wealth and Value

Lewis Hyde

Jefferson's Taper: How America's Revolutionaries Imagined our Cultural Commons



"If nature has made any one thing less susceptible than all others of exclusive property, it is the action of the thinking power called an idea... He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me." — Thomas Jefferson

The framers of the U.S. Constitution inherited conflicting ways of thinking about cultural wealth. In one tradition, scientific inventions and literary works were thought to be private properties belonging to those who created them. In another tradition, they were understood to be no kind of property at all, but instead something closer to air or water or fire — useful to everyone but owned by no one. Lewis Hyde's talk will describe how America's revolutionaries resolved this tension, hoping to establish a 'Republic of Knowledge' to complement the political republic that the Constitution sought to bring to life.

Lewis Hyde is a cultural critic with a particular interest in the social life of the imagination. His 1983 book, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, is an inquiry into the place of artists in a highly commercial society. His more recent book, *Trickster Makes this World* (1998), is a portrait of the kind of disruptive imagination that promises to keep any culture lively and flexible. Hyde is currently the Richard L. Thomas Professor of Creative Writing at Kenyon College, and a Fellow at the Berkman Center on Internet and Society at the Harvard Law School.

Thursday, March 2
7:30 pm

Gordon Hall • 418 N. Pleasant St. • UMass Amherst
third floor conference room

The fourth in a distinguished lecture series

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