William Whewell’s Place in the History of Economics
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Abstract
William Whewell is known among economists for his brief excursion into mathematical economics, about which there are mixed views, and perhaps as a whipping boy for Mill’s *Logic* as part of a story of the triumphant march towards the current methodological consensus. This paper attempts a more contextual treatment of Whewell’s economics, emphasising his early reading of Malthus and Ricardo under the influence of his friend Richard Jones, his struggle to reconcile political economy with Christian theology in the way that he believed he had reconciled other sciences (in particular his reaction to Malthus theodicy in an unpublished 1827 sermon), rejection of the twin evils of premature deduction and utilitarian ethics, and his placement of political economy among the other sciences in his hugely influential work on the history and philosophy of the sciences. Whewell as Master of Trinity College Cambridge and centre of scientific circles in mid-19th century Britain exerted an enormous influence which has been neglected by historians of economics looking to tell a particular story of the development of theory and method.
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