William Wordsworth—a great Romantic poet

William Wordsworth is regarded one of the finest English poets in the Romantic period, i.e. the first half of the 19th. century. He was born in 1770 in Northern England, in an area called the Lake District. The Lake District has a most beautiful scenery which came to inspire Wordsworth much in his writings. Today the Lake District is a National Park.

Isolation in Germany

1770 was by the way the same year as the composer Beethoven was born in Bonn in Germany. Wordsworth actually stayed in Germany for the winter of 1798-1799, though he never met the famous composer. Instead, living in the remote town of Goslar, he felt just like Beethoven felt through most of his life: frightfully lonely and isolated. And yet he produced some of his greatest poems during this winter (incidentally he wrote this poem in 1798). Some people say that there is no creation without suffering. Here we have an example of that perhaps.

Poetry is love!

Wordsworth became friend with another famous English poet, Samuel Coleridge, and inspired by their friendship Wordsworth began composing his short lyrical and dramatic poems for which he is perhaps best remembered by most people today. Some of these poems were loving tributes to Dorothy, his beloved sister, some were tributes to plants, birds, and other elements of "Nature's holy plan," and some were portraits of simple rural people intended to illustrate basic truths of human nature. The country girl in the poem "We are seven" is a perfect illustration of this last type of poems.

A new view on nature

When Wordsworth died in 1850 he knew that he had renewed the style of English poetry and that he had brought the Romantic revolution to England. Through his poems he had also generated a new attitude towards nature. Nature was no longer something "out there" that had to be mastered and conquered, rather nature was a part of ourselves, there was no difference between human nature and physical nature. He talks about a wedding between the two.

This view is typically Romantic and also we should not forget that Wordsworth was brought up in the Lake District—one of Britain’s most beautiful areas.

Topics for philosophical conversations

1. "No creation without suffering". Or so the text says. Do you agree? If yes, what do you mean by "creation" and what do you mean by "suffering"? Do you create something when
you make a snowball, or when you do your homework, or when you put forward an opinion? And is it possible to suffer even though you live in luxury and abundance? Which would you prefer: to suffer in order to create—or to avoid all suffering, but then never to be able to create?

2. Wordsworth believed that Nature followed a holy plan. Why do you think he believed that? Do you believe it? Are there any good reasons to believe it? What would the opposite viewpoint be? Are there any good reasons to believe an opposite viewpoint?

3. Are Nature and human beings one and the same thing, as Wordsworth believed? If he is right, does that mean that humans and Nature have something in common? What could that be? Does Nature have a soul? Do human beings have a soul?