

The Scottish Enlightenment: Adam Smith and David Hume on Liberty, Commerce and the Moral Life

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GO 251D
Fall 2008
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Course Description:

In this course we will seek to understand and assess the distinctive contribution of David Hume and Adam Smith to the Enlightenment. We will compare their ideas against the backdrop of other thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such as Locke, Hobbes, Voltaire and Rousseau. Students will judge the debates and disagreements among key figures in modern political philosophy. Students will also gain an appreciation for breadth and depth of the ideas of these thinkers, Adam Smith in particular. Smith is generally known today as the father of “capitalism.” His work, however—even his most famous work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*—is not much read anymore. Students will come to understand Smith’s full view of commercial life and its relation to the political order. We will also focus on both Hume and Smith’s vision of the moral life—paying particularly close attention to Smith’s neglected work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Required Texts (for purchase):

David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, Literary*, Eugene Miller ed., Liberty Fund 1985
Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Raphael & Macfie eds, Liberty Fund 1984
Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Campbell & Skinner eds., Liberty Fund 1981 (two volumes)

Other Readings:

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*
Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*
Voltaire, “The Worldling,” “The Man of the World”
Rousseau, “Luxury, Commerce, and the Arts”

Course Outline:

Introduction: 9/1

Part I: On the Origins and Ground of Government

- A. Locke, *Second Treatise*
 1. *ST*, chs. 1-5 (9/9)
 2. *ST*, chs. 7-9 (9/11)
- B. Hume, *Essays*
 1. Of the Original Contract, Of Passive Obedience, Of the Coalition of Parties (9/16)

2. Of the Origin of Government, Of the First Principles of Government, That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science, Of the Liberty of the Press(rec) (9/18)

Part II: The Moral Life

- A. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, chs. 6, 13-14 (9/23)
- B. Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* (9/25)
- C. Hume
 1. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix II, Of the Dignity or Meanness fo Human Nature (9/30)
 2. *Essays*, Moral Prejudices, Of Impudence and Modesty, Of Avarice (10/2)
- D. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*
 1. Part I, sections 1 (10/7)

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2. Pt. I, sec. 2-3 (10/14)
3. Pt. II, chs., 1-2 (10/16)
4. Pt. III, chs. 1-4 (10/21)
5. Pt. IV, chs. 1-2; (10/23)
6. Pt. VI, sec. 1-2 (10/28)
7. Pt. VI, sec. 3 (10/30)
8. Pt. VII, sec. 1; sec. 2, ch. 4; sec. 3 (11/4)

Part III: Liberty, Commerce and the Arts

- A. Voltaire, “The Worldling”; “The Man of the World” (11/6)
- B. Rousseau, “Liberty, Commerce, and the Arts” (11/6)
- C. Hume, *Essays*, The Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth, Of Refinement in the Arts, Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences (11/11)
- D. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*
 1. Bk. I, chs. i-iii (11/13)
 2. Bk. I, chs. iv-v, viii (11/18)
 3. Bk. II, chs. iii, Bk. III, ch. I (11/20)
 4. Bk. III, chs. iii-iv (11/25)

NO CLASS 11/27 THANKSGIVING BREAK

5. Bk. IV, ch. ii, ch. iiic, ch. ix (12/2)
6. Bk. V, ch. I, f-g (12/4)
- E. Hume, *Essays*, Of Commerce, Of Money, Of the Balance of Trade (12/9)

FINAL EXAM: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 9AM-12PM

Course Requirements:

Textual Explication and Responses, 20%

Essay #1, 25%

Essay #2, 25%

Final Exam, 30%

Textual Explication

Each student must complete a 4-5 page detailed analysis of a portion of the readings assigned for a particular class day. Students must demonstrate their command of the text (the key points at issue) and attempt to reveal the logic of the argument. This paper must be made available to me and to the entire class at least two days before the class meeting (Saturday for a Monday class and Monday for a Wednesday class). All the other students in the class must write a one page response to this paper, and give one copy to the author and one to me on the day when we will discuss these readings. This response can include informed criticism and/or praise, but should always be serious and respectful. This is designed to promote a mutual engagement with the text. The author of the paper for that day will be called upon to contribute to the discussion. Please see the attached schedule for the available dates and texts.

Essays

Paper topics will be distributed approximately two weeks before the due date. These topics will be designed to force you to take a broader view of an author's argument than the textual analysis, although your efforts in the latter should be of great use here.

Final Exam

This will be a comprehensive exam.

Other requirements and expectations:

Attendance is mandatory. There is no such thing as an unexcused absence. All absences must therefore be cleared ahead of time. If you must miss class, you remain responsible for all the material covered that day. After 1 absence, each subsequent absence will bring your final grade down by one half of a letter grade. After 4 absences, I will require you to withdraw from the course.

You are expected to come to class having read the assigned texts with care. These books are difficult. You should be prepared to reread things that confuse you, and to take notes as you read. Ideally, you will learn more from these books than from me. This should make you well equipped to comprehend the lecture as well as to contribute to the discussion.