

# Scottish Enlightenment

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**Scottish Enlightenment, Skidmore College**

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

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## **Course Description:**

In this course we will seek to understand and assess the distinctive contributions 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):**

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

## **Other Readings (handouts):**

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

## **Course Outline:**

- **Introduction: 9/1**
- **Part I: On the Origins and Ground of Government**

- Locke, Second Treatise
- ST, chs. 1-5 (9/9)
- ST, chs. 7-9 (9/11)
- Hume, Essays
- Of the Original Contract, Of Passive Obedience, Of the Coalition of Parties (9/16)
- Of the First Principles of Government, Of the Origin of Government, That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science, Of the Liberty of the Press(rec) (9/18)
- **Part II: The Moral Life**
- Hobbes, Leviathan, Part I, chs. 6, 13-14 (9/23)
- Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees (9/25)
- Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals
- Enquiry, Sec. I, Of the General Principles of Morals; Sec. V, Why Utility Pleases (9/30)
- Enquiry, Sec. IX, Conclusion; Appendix II, Of Self-Love (10/2)
- Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments
- Part I, sections 1 (10/7)
- **NO CLASS 10/9 YOM KIPPUR**
- Pt. I, sec. 2-3 (10/14)
- Pt. II, chs., 1-2 (10/16)
- Pt. III, chs. 1-4 (10/21)
- Pt. IV, chs. 1-2; (10/23) FIRST PAPER DUE
- Pt. VI, sec. 1-2 (10/28)
- Pt. VI, sec. 3 (10/30)
- Pt. VII, sec. 1; sec. 2, ch. 4; sec. 3 (11/4)
- **Part III: Liberty, Commerce and the Arts**
- Voltaire, “The Worldling”; “The Man of the World” (11/6)
- Rousseau, “Liberty, Commerce, and the Arts” (11/6)
- 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)
- Smith, The Wealth of Nations
- Bk. I, chs. i-iii (11/13)
- Bk. I, chs. iv-v, viii (11/18)
- Bk. II, chs. iii, Bk. III, ch. I (11/20)
- Bk. III, chs. iii-iv (11/25)
- **NO CLASS 11/27 THANKSGIVING BREAK**
- Bk. IV, ch. ii, ch. iiic, ch. ix (12/2)
- Bk. V, ch. I, f-g (12/4) SECOND PAPER DUE
- Hume, Essays, Of Commerce, Of Money, Of the Balance of Trade (12/9)
- **FINAL EXAM: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 9AM-12PM**

**Course Requirements:**

1. Reflection Papers, 10%
2. Essay #1, 25%
3. Essay #2, 30%
4. Final Exam, 35%

### **Reflection Papers:**

- In an attentive reader, the act of reading evokes a response. A response can take many different forms. Some readers underline key passages. Some write comments in the margins. Some take notes on a separate sheet of paper. All of these are ways of carrying forward your inquiries. In this course I will be asking you to pursue yet another method: reflection papers. These short papers (two pages) are an extension and heightening of the more casual and distracted responses which you may now give to the things you read.
- In preparation for class, you should commit to paper your thoughts about the text (or a portion of the text) and the questions that arise from it. This should be more than some scratchy, appreciated notes intelligible only to you; however, this is some a polished essay. You have the leisure to explore, inquire, question, and wander. By wandering, I do not mean aimless wandering. Since our discussions in class will be guided always by two questions, your reflection papers should be so guided: what is the author saying? Is it true? Sometimes it will take all of your effort to figure out what the author means. Other times you will want to take a step back and evaluate the claims made in the text. These are distinct questions, but in pursuing one, the other should always be kept silently in mind.

### **Essays:**

These are formal essays where you are expected to have an identifiable thesis with arguments to support it. They should demonstrate a command of the text at hand, and a thoughtfulness about the claims made therein. I will hand out topics approximately two weeks before the essays are due. These are not research papers and you are not required to read any secondary literature. I want you to engage these authors directly.

### **Final Exam:**

This will be a comprehensive, essay exam taken during the exam period.

### **General Expectations:**

- You are expected to read the assignments carefully and reflectively, remaining open to the possibility that what you are reading is right. Your first duty as an attentive reader is to understand the what is being said. This means grasping the argument of the author—identifying central claims and seeing how these claims are supported. When you encounter something you strongly disagree with, make sure you first understand the argument. You are expected to give reasons for your opinions.
- You will be attentive in class and always display the demeanor of one who is interested in the material and respectful of others. You will take your share of responsibility for the quality of class time, coming prepared to discuss the assignments thoughtfully.

**Attendance:**

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.