ENGLISH 151: FIRST-YEAR WRITING SEMINAR
FALL 2009

TOPIC: ADAM SMITH GOES SHOPPING

The present economic crises do not, I would argue, call for a "new capitalism," but they do demand a new understanding of older ideas, such as those of [Adam] Smith . . . many of which have been sadly neglected. What is also needed is a clearheaded perception of how different institutions actually work, and of how a variety of organizations—from the market to the institutions of the state—can go beyond short-term solutions and contribute to producing a more decent economic world.


In the aftermath of a recent financial crisis, now is a better time than most to give careful consideration to the work of Adam Smith, one of the first and still most insightful theorists of capitalism. In this course we will consider the major questions Smith discussed from the vantage point of our own twenty-first century society: Do consumer goods improve our lives? Does the division of labor make us smarter or dumber? Does capitalism promote virtue? Does free trade promote political freedom? Our focus throughout will be on the philosophical and ethical questions that Smith emphasizes in his work. We begin by reading substantial portions of Smith's two major books, Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759) and Wealth of Nations (1776). We then consider works by later writers who take up aspects of Smith's argument.

COURSE MATERIALS.

A. Smith The Essential Adam Smith, ed. Heilbroner (New York: Norton, 1986)
J. Williams Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace (New York: Pearson, 2009)
(R. Finlayson) A Guide to Effective Paper Writing (Rhodes College, 2007)
Additional materials on Moodle and online.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Careful Preparation: Writing well is much more a matter of daily hard work than of inspiration. Writing is a way of thinking through ideas and preserving a record of this thought. If you want to improve your writing, work hard at considering the ideas that come up in readings, in class, and while you're writing. Try to see how they might apply to your own experience of the world. Develop ideas and arguments that energize you, and commit to writing and rewriting them, until you've worked them out in their full complexity.

Informal Writing: The activity of writing is most difficult and intimidating when it is foreign to your regular experience. Part of the purpose of this course is to help you develop an engrained habit of writing, and to do this I will ask you to write in preparation for many class sessions. These writing exercises might take the following forms:

- A 250-word reflection on the reading
- A series of suggested discussion questions on the reading
- A summary of comments on another student's rough draft, etc.

On some days I will collect informal writing and grade it √, √+, or √- to indicate how successful the response was.

Class Discussion: Speaking is often the beginning of writing; when you sit down to draft an essay, you'll know where to start if you've talked through some ideas beforehand. But this only works if you are committed to developing your own ideas, not just saying what everyone else is saying. Always bring your own copy of each assigned text to class, marked with your notes. In October our discussions of Smith's Wealth of Nations will be led by teams of students, with each team responsible for preparing the discussion in advance and for leading the seminar.
Decorum: I require an atmosphere of respect, in which we can disagree and discuss disagreements without insult or silent sneer. Disagreement and difference are the very core of writing; indeed if all perceptions were the same, there would be no need for writing, no need for language at all. In all your communication with peers, Professor, and Writing Fellow this semester, including email, maintain a high level of respect and decorum.

Writing Conferences: Each of you will schedule at least one 15-min writing conference with me, and one with Writing Fellow Andrew Miller. We encourage you to consult with us more regularly; one appointment with each of us is a bare minimum.

Writing Assignments: All writing for this course must be submitted in hard copy, double-spaced, and carefully proofread. Email attachments are not accepted unless cleared in advance. All writing submitted for this course must be original work, written by you in accordance with all provisions of the Rhodes Honor Code. You may not submit work done for other courses. There are four major papers for the course:

1. A short analysis of Adam Smith’s theory of moral judgment (1000 words)
2. A longer analysis of Smith’s argument about how consumers behave in the market, perhaps in comparison with another theorist’s work (1500 words)
3. A longer paper requiring outside reading on your part. You will choose a major contemporary economic phenomenon or question and analyze it using Adam Smith’s ideas (2500 words)
4. A final reflection drawing from debates encountered this semester (1000 words)

Tests: Without knowledge of the basic building blocks of the sentence, you cannot succeed in conveying your ideas to a reader. While this course assumes competence in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, it will include a rapid review of these things, often in conjunction with readings from Williams’s Style. There will be two tests on this material.

Grades:
- Paper 1: 10%
- Paper 2: 20%
- Paper 3: 30%
- Paper 4: 10%
- Grammar Test (covering only material in readings and class sessions): 10%
- Punctuation Test (covering only material in readings and class sessions): 10%
- Engagement with the course, including:
  - Informal writing, preparation for and participation in class, respect for the course and for the work of your peers, enthusiasm for assignments and discussions: 10%

Late work: Writing assignments must be turned in complete and on time. Late papers will be marked down one third of a grade for each day they are late. (E.G. a B paper that’s 1 day late would become a B-, 2 days late a C+, etc.) If I have to return a paper to you for proofreading, it will be considered late until I get it back. If you fail to turn in any assignment entirely, you will not be able to pass the course.

Attendance: You may miss three classes during the semester without penalty or excuse. Further absences will affect your final grade for course engagement. If you miss more than six classes, for any reason, you will not be able to pass the course. If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to keep up with any work you may have missed. If you’re repeatedly late or unprepared for class—no book, haven’t done the reading—don’t expect to be counted as present.
**Schedule of Readings and Assignments**

(Expect some adjustments and additions as we go forward. Unless noted here, all readings not contained in *The Essential Adam Smith* or in Williams’s *Style* will be provided separately.)

### I. The Origins of Virtue: Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*

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| F 8/27 | Smith *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 65-69  
(2ndry Assignment: Biographical Intro on Smith, 1-11) |
| M 8/30 | Smith 69-77 |
| W 9/1 | Williams ch. 1 |
| F 9/3 | Williams ch. 3; Develop examples from Smith |
| 9/6 | Labor Day — No Class |
| 9/8 | Smith 77-88; 2ndry Assignment Smith 100-113 |
| 9/10 | **Paper 1 Due** |

### II. Virtue in the Marketplace

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<tr>
<td>9/13</td>
<td>Smith 113-117</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/15</td>
<td>118-123</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/17</td>
<td>Williams ch. 4</td>
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<td>9/20</td>
<td>Smith 123-132</td>
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<td>9/22</td>
<td>Veblen</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/24</td>
<td><strong>Grammar Test</strong> (covering Williams chs. 1, 3, and 4, and material from class)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/27</td>
<td>Veblen</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>Postrell</td>
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<tr>
<td>F10/1</td>
<td>Williams ch. 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/4</td>
<td>Postrell</td>
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<td>10/6</td>
<td><strong>Paper 2 Due in Class</strong>. Bring Williams, a ruler, and a red pen.</td>
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<td>10/8</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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### III. From Virtue to Economics

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| 10/11 | Smith, readings T BA from *Wealth of Nations*, students lead discussion  
“ |
| 10/13 |  |
| 10/15 | **Punctuation Test** |
| 10/18 | Fall Break – No Class |
| 10/20 | Smith, continued |
| 10/22 | Williams ch. 7 |
| 10/25 | Smith, continued  
“ |
| 10/27 |  |
| 10/29 | Williams ch. 8 |
Schedule, Continued

11/1  Amartya Sen “Capitalism Beyond the Crisis”
Online at http://www.nybooks.com/articles/22490

11/3  Arielly

11/5  Williams ch. 9

11/8  Robert Frank
“The Invisible Hand is Shaking,” NY Times, April 25, 2008
Online at http://www.robert-h-frank.com/PDFs/PDFs/EV.05.25.08.pdf
Lecture at Commonwealth Club of California. Listen at:
http://www.commonwealthclub.org/archive/09/09-06frank-audio.html

11/10  Project Presentations

11/12  “”

11/15  Project Presentations

11/17  Draft of Paper 3 due to Workshop Groups in class

11/19  Workshop in class

11/22  Paper #3 (2500 words) Due in Class

11/24 & 26  Thanksgiving – No Class

IV. Futures

11/29  Klein

12/1  Klein

12/3  McCloskey

12/6  McCloskey.

12/8  Williams ch. 10

Paper 4 (1000 words) due During Exam Week