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ENGL 151-05, Adam Smith Goes Shopping, Fall 2009

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ENGLISH 151: FIRST-YEAR WRITING SEMINAR
FALL 2009

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.

Amartya Sen, *New York Review of Books*, March 26, 2009

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.. Helibrone (New York: Norton, 1986)
A. Fowler *How to Write* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006)
(R. Finlayson) *A Guide to Effective Paper Writing* (Rhodes College, 2007)
Additional materials in handouts and on reserve at Burrow Library

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, or how they conflict with your own experience and opinions. Develop ideas and arguments that energize you, and commit to writing and rewriting them, until you've worked them out in their full complexity.

Daily 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 *every class of the semester*. These daily writing exercises will take the following forms:

- When there is a reading assigned for the class: Write a response of some kind, as assigned. These responses may involve writing a 250-word informal reflection on the reading, suggesting discussion questions, identifying key concepts, etc. Always bring a printed copy to class.
- When a workshop is scheduled: Write a 200-250 word summary of your recommendations to each of the students in your peer workshop group. Email your summary recommendations to each student and copy the email to me and to Writing Fellow Halley Johnson.
- When a paper of some kind is due in class: The paper serves as your daily writing; no need to submit a response.

On some days I will collect and comment informal responses, grading each with a \surd , $\surd+$, or $\surd-$ to indicate how successful the response was. When not collected, responses contribute to your own reading notes.

Seminar Discussion: Seminars are a place to experiment with ideas when you're writing. 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 is 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 written and spoken communication with peers, professor, and writing Fellow this semester, you are required to maintain a high level of respect and decorum. This includes communication via email.

In-Class Workshops: In addition to discussing readings, we will spend time talking about drafts of your peers' writing. For these sessions to be useful, you have to be willing to say what you really think about a paper, to comment in detail, and to spend some focused time considering how the paper could best be improved. You will take workshop drafts home for comment before each workshop session.

Writing Conferences: Several times during the semester, I will schedule individual 15 minute conferences to discuss a paper you're working on. At least once during the semester you must discuss a draft of a paper with the class Writing Fellow, Halley Johnson, and you must make at least one visit to the Writing Center to discuss a draft with one of the Writing Fellows there.

Writing Assignments: Unless the assignment specifies otherwise, all writing for this course must be submitted in hard copy; no email attachments. All writing must be double-spaced and carefully proofread. 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 brief distillation of Adam Smith's theory of human moral judgment (1000 words)
2. A more extended analysis of Smith's theory of the consumer, perhaps in comparison with another theorist's work (1500 words)
3. A longer paper requiring outside reading on your part. You will choose a book or major article dealing with a contemporary economic issue or phenomenon and analyze this text using Adam Smith's ideas. (2500 words)
4. A final reflection on arguments about contemporary capitalism, drawing from debates encountered this semester. (1000 words)

Grades:

Paper 1	10%
Paper 2	20%
Paper 3	30%
Paper 4	10%
Engagement with the course, including:	30%

Informal daily writing, drafts, peer responses, preparation for and participation in class discussion, respect for the course and for the work of your peers, enthusiasm for assignments and discussions. (I will provide written assessment of your engagement at mid-semester.)

Late work: Graded papers 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+.) 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 paper 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 may 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. Unless noted otherwise, all readings not contained in *The Essential Adam Smith* or in Fowler's *How to Write* will be provided separately.)

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

F 8/28 Smith *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 65-69 (Fowler, Ch. 1, Pen and Computer)

M 8/31 Heilbroner, "The Man and his Times" (in *Essential Adam Smith*, 1-11)
Smith 69-77

W 9/2 Smith 77- 88 (Fowler, 2. Material Reading)

F 9/4 Smith 100-113, paragraph 1 (3. Beginning)

Draft of Paper 1 due at Palmer 316 by 9AM

9/7 Labor Day—No Class

9/9 Workshop

9/11 xxx (4. Drafts)

II. Virtue in the Marketplace

9/14 Smith 113-118 (5. Outlines)

Revision of Paper 1 due in class

9/16 118-123 (6. Paragraphs)

9/18 123-132 (7. Paragraph Types)

9/21 Veblen (8. Arguments)

9/23 Veblen (9. Signposts)

9/25 Postrell (10. Sentences)

Monday 9/28: Draft of Paper 2 due at Palmer 316 by 9AM

9/28 Postrell (11. Word Order)

9/30 Workshop

III. From Virtue to Economics

F10/2 Smith, *Wealth of Nations*. Discussions led by student teams.

10/5 Continue Smith, readings tba (12. Punctuation)

Revision of Paper 2 due in class

10/7 (13. Quotation)

10/9 (14. Originality)

10/12 Continue Smith (15. Readers)

10/14 (16. Words)

10/16 (17. Metaphors)

10/19 *Fall Break – No Class*
10/21 Amartya Sen “Capitalism Beyond the Crisis” (18. Performance and Concurrence)
Online at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/22490>
10/23 Arielly (19. Revising)

10/26 Fox (20. Correctness)
10/28 Fox (21. Reducing)
10/30 Robert Frank (22. Research)
“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>

11/2 Library Session
Project Proposal Due in Class
11/4 Tett (23. Reference Books)
11/6 Tett (24. Practicalities)
Preliminary Analysis Piece Due at Palmer 316 by 9AM

11/9 Workshop of Preliminary Analysis
11/11 Project Presentations
11/13 “ ”

11/16 Project Presentations
11/18 **Draft of Essay #3 Due in Class**
11/20 Workshop

11/23 **Paper #3 Due in Class**
11/25 & 27 Thanksgiving – No Class

IV. Futures

11/30 Klein (25. Recapitulation)
12/2 Klein
12/4 McCloskey

12/7 McCloskey. **Draft of Paper 4 due in Class.**
12/9 Final Workshop