PS 931: Adam Smith’s Political Thought  
[Course # 44379; 3 units]  
Syllabus

Course Description  
Few people consider any of Adam Smith’s works as canonical in the history of Western political thought. Smith is still most remembered for his contributions to economics and, thanks to important scholarship in philosophy in literature in the last half century, increasingly for his ethics and aesthetics. Smith penned a third treatise on government and administration during his lifetime, but it was burned at his request by his executors.

Nevertheless, Smith’s works have had an enormous political impact globally (whether it was the one he intended or not). Whether directly or indirectly, Smith influenced French Revolutionaries, the German Historical School, and some of the Founding Fathers. More importantly, Smith makes explicit in his works that he is developing a political economy and that politics and morals are imbricated, even if he imagines a different or more limited role for the state than other modern theorists do. This course will thus explore Smith’s political theory through an analysis of his epistemological, ethical, and economic works, as well as its subsequent influence in France, America, and Germany.

The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which include regularly scheduled instructor:student meeting times [1hr50min each Tuesday], reading, writing, problem sets, studio time, labs, field trips, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

Course Objectives  
Students who closely and carefully engage course readings, attend and participate in class discussion, and complete course assignments will be able to:
- Explain important concepts and arguments made by thinkers in the history of political thought
- Analyze political and ethical theories, both historical and contemporary
- Assess political and ethical theories made by thinkers in the history of political thought
- Do independent research in the history of political thought
- Apply course concepts to analysis of contemporary political and ethical debates
- Dissent respectfully

Required Texts

**Recommended Texts**

**Course Expectations & Policies**
I expect you to complete the readings assigned for each week prior to our class meeting, to take notes on your readings, to prepare and submit your weekly discussion questions on time (more on this in the section below), and to actively participate in our seminar discussion. Active participation requires you bring the relevant readings to class each day (which may mean printing them beforehand) and that you respectfully engage with both the course content and your peers’ contributions. I agree entirely with the University’s institutional statement on inclusion and diversity, and value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich our intellectual community (https://diversity.wisc.edu/).

You will need to complete your assignments on time, as I will accept no late work without an approved accommodation prior to the due date. Accommodations will be made for those students who have documented proof of an emergency or those students who have documented evidence of learning disabilities. I am firmly committed to ensuring equal learning access for all and therefore encourage individuals with disabilities to participate in the McBurney Center’s available programs and activities (https://mcburney.wisc.edu/students/howto.php#contentanchor4). If you need an accommodation, you must contact the center at (608) 263-2741 or mcburney@studentlife.wisc.edu to obtain documentation for your specific
needs. I ask that you seek accommodation as soon as possible and contact me in advance to make appropriate arrangements for papers, etc.

Finally, I strictly adhere to the UW Academic Misconduct Process and will report all incidents of academic misconduct the Dean of Students Office, as it is a prerequisite for maintaining academic integrity in our course. To avoid plagiarism, be sure to use either text-specific (e.g., citations to part, section, chapter and paragraph number of Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*) or APSA-style citations (http://www.apsanet.org/files/APSAStyleManual2006.pdf) for references unless otherwise stated.

**Assignments & Grading**
Your grade will be calculated according to your score(s) on assignments in the following categories. More detail on each of these requirements is provided below. Incompletes will only be assigned under extraordinary circumstances.

**Short papers [ & optional rewrites] (30%) + Seminar paper (30%) + Discussion contribution (20%) + Participation (20%) = Final Grade (100%)**

Your final grade will assigned according to the following grading scale:

- A ≥ 93.5
- AB = 87.5-93.4
- B = 82.5-87.4
- BC = 77.5-82.4
- C = 69.5-77.4
- D = 60-69.4
- F ≤ 59.9

**Short papers:** You will be required to write two (2) one-page single-spaced response papers (12 pt. Times New Roman font) designed to allow you to critically engage with primary texts and to write concisely. Toward that end, I allow all students the option to resubmit one-page papers. I will only include the two highest scores of your submitted papers in your grade, so no student will be penalized for resubmission.

**Seminar paper:** You will be required to write a 10,000 word (12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced) seminar paper on a topic of your choice related to the course theme. This assignment will need to be completed in three stages: first, you will need to meet with me to discuss your paper proposal; second, you will need to submit a 500 word paper abstract by Week 10; and, third, you will need to submit your final paper by Week 14. Ideally, this paper would serve as a first draft of a paper to present at an academic conference, as the basis for your preliminary exam, or as a draft to revise to send out for publication.
**Discussion contribution:** Each week, you must submit a discussion remark on that week’s assigned readings by no later than Tuesday at noon on the Canvas course site. In your submission, you should offer a brief critique of one argument from the readings: explain what you disagree with and why (be specific and use evidence from the texts). Each student will be responsible for reading all of the discussion contributions submitted prior to that week’s class meeting.

**Participation:** Any course, but especially a graduate seminar, requires student participation to be successful. You must be in class, each week, on time, unless you have notified me otherwise. As aforementioned, I also expect you to actively participate in each class. I try to make a point of enabling relatively equal participation from all students.

**Schedule**

**Week 1 (9/11): Adam Smith: Liberal, Conservative, or Republican?**  
- Donald Winch, *Adam Smith’s Politics* [all]  
- Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator*, Chapter 4  
- Craig Smith, “Adam Smith: Left or Right?” [available on Canvas]

**Week 2 (9/18): Smith’s Epistemology and Ethics**  
- Adam Smith, selections from *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* and *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Parts I-III

**Week 3 (9/25): Smith’s Ethics, Continued**  
- Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Parts IV-VII  
**DUE: SHORT PAPER**

**Week 4 (10/2): Smith’s Economics**  

**Week 5 (10/9): Smith’s Politics and Jurisprudence**  
- Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Vol. 2. and selections from *Lectures on Jurisprudence*  
**DUE: OPTIONAL REWRITE**

**Week 6 (10/16): French Reception**  
- Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, Chapter 8  
- Ruth Scurr, “Inequality and Political Stability from Ancien Régime to Revolution: The reception of Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in France” [available on Canvas]  
- Eric Schliesser, “Sophie de Grouchy, The Tradition(s) of Two Liberties, and the Missing Mother(s) of Liberalism” [available on Canvas]

**Week 7 (10/23): French Reception II**  
- Condorcet, selections from *Political Writings* [available on Canvas]
- Abbé Sièyes, “What is the Third Estate?” [available on Canvas]

**DUE: SHORT PAPER 2**

**Week 8 (10/30): French Reception III**
- Sophie De Grouchy, selections from *Letters on Sympathy* [available on Canvas]

**Week 9 (11/6): American Reception**
- Sam Fleischacker, “Adam Smith’s Reception Among the American Founders, 1776-1790” [available on Canvas]
- Adam Smith, “Thoughts on the State of the Contest with America” [available on Canvas]

**DUE: OPTIONAL REWRITE 2**

**Week 10 (11/13): American Reception II**
- John Adams, *Discourses on Davila* [available on the Online Library of Liberty]

**DUE: SEMINAR PAPER ABSTRACT**

**Week 11 (11/20): American Reception III**
- James Wilson, selections from the *Lectures on Law* [available on the Online Library of Liberty]
- Ben Franklin, selections from the *Autobiography* [available on Canvas]

**Week 12 (11/27): German Reception**
- Norbert Waszek, “Adam Smith in Germany, 1776-1832” [available on Canvas]
- Tetsushi Harada, “Adam Müller’s ‘Agronomische Briefe’” [available on Canvas]
- Lisa Herzog, selections from *Inventing the Market*
- *Sam Fleischacker*, selections from *A Third Concept of Liberty*

**Week 13**: German Reception II
- Wilhelm Von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action* [available on the Online Library of Liberty]

**Week 14 (12/11): German Reception III**
- Freidrich List, selections from *The National System of Political Economy* [available on the Online Library of Liberty]

**DUE: SEMINAR PAPER**

*Schedule tentative and subject to change. Students will always be given advance notice of changes.

**Class needs to be rescheduled. For our last class, we will have dinner at my home.*