**Adam Smith (1723-1790)**

[**http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Smith.html**](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Smith.html)

Adam Smith was born in a small village in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, where his widowed mother raised him. At age fourteen, as was the usual practice, he entered the University of Glasgow on scholarship. He later attended Balliol College at Oxford, graduating with an extensive knowledge of European literature and an enduring contempt for English schools. He returned home, and after delivering a series of well-received lectures was made first chair of logic (1751), then chair of moral philosophy (1752), at Glasgow University.

He left academia in 1764 to tutor the young duke of Buccleuch. For more than two years they traveled throughout France and into Switzerland, an experience that brought Smith into contact with his contemporaries Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, [**François Quesnay**](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Quesnay.html), and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot. With the life pension he had earned in the service of the duke, Smith retired to his birthplace of Kirkcaldy to write *The Wealth of Nations.* It was published in 1776, the same year the American Declaration of Independence was signed and in which his close friend [**David Hume**](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Hume.html) died. In 1778 he was appointed commissioner of customs. In this job he helped enforce laws against smuggling. In *The Wealth of Nations,* he had defended smuggling as a legitimate activity in the face of “unnatural” legislation. Adam Smith never married. He died in Edinburgh on July 19, 1790.

Today Smith’s reputation rests on his explanation of how rational self-interest in a free-market economy leads to economic well-being. It may surprise those who would discount Smith as an advocate of ruthless individualism that his first major work concentrates on ethics and [**charity**](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/Charity.html). In fact, while chair at the University of Glasgow, Smith’s lecture subjects, in order of preference, were natural theology, ethics, jurisprudence, and economics, according to John Millar, Smith’s pupil at the time. Smith did not view sympathy and self-interest as antithetical; they were complementary. “Man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only,” he explained in *The Wealth of Nations.*[4](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Smith.html#lfHendersonCEE2BIO-084_footnote_nt466)

Charity, while a virtuous act, cannot alone provide the essentials for living. Self-interest is the mechanism that can remedy this shortcoming. Said Smith: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we can expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest” (ibid.).

Someone earning money by his own labor benefits himself. Unknowingly, he also benefits society, because to earn income on his labor in a competitive market, he must produce something others value. In Adam Smith’s lasting imagery, “By directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.”[5](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Smith.html#lfHendersonCEE2BIO-084_footnote_nt467)

*The Wealth of Nations,* published as a five-book series, sought to reveal the nature and cause of a nation’s prosperity. Smith saw the main cause of prosperity as increasing division of labor. Using the famous example of pins, Smith asserted that ten workers could produce 48,000 pins per day if each of eighteen specialized tasks was assigned to particular workers. Average [**productivity**](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/Productivity.html): 4,800 pins per worker per day. But absent the division of labor, a worker would be lucky to produce even one pin per day.

Smith used this insight on equality of returns to explain why wage rates differed. Wage rates would be higher, he argued, for trades that were more difficult to learn, because people would not be willing to learn them if they were not compensated by a higher wage. His thought gave rise to the modern notion of [**human capital**](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/HumanCapital.html). Similarly, wage rates would also be higher for those who engaged in dirty or unsafe occupations (see [**Job Safety**](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/JobSafety.html)), such as coal mining and butchering; and for those, like the hangman, who performed odious jobs. In short, differences in work were compensated by differences in pay. Modern economists call Smith’s insight the theory of compensating wage differentials. In the fourth book of *The Wealth of Nations*—published, remember, in 1776—Smith told Great Britain that its American colonies were not worth the cost of keeping.

Adam Smith has sometimes been caricatured as someone who saw no role for government in economic life. In fact, he believed that government had an important role to play. Like most modern believers in free markets, Smith believed that the government should enforce contracts and grant patents and copyrights to encourage inventions and new ideas. He also thought that the government should provide public works, such as roads and bridges that, he assumed, would not be worthwhile for individuals to provide. Interestingly, though, he wanted the users of such public works to pay in proportion to their use.

**Questions**

1. Where was Adam Smith’s origin and how did he feel about the education he received in England?
2. How did tutoring the young duke of Buccleuch help Smith develop his philosophy on economics?
3. What events in America coincided with Smith’s publication of ***The Wealth of Nations***?
4. How did Adam Smith explain society’s views on sympathy and self-interest?
5. According to Smith, what causes wage differences in the economy?
6. What was Adam Smith’s view on the British colonial system?
7. According to Smith, what is the role of government in economic life?
8. Opinion- How do people balance their individual economic needs and wants with the cost of public services provided by the government?

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hobbes/>

Thomas Hobbes was born on 5 April 1588. His hometown was Malmesbury, which is in Wiltshire, England. Very little is known about Hobbes's mother. His father, also called Thomas Hobbes, was a somewhat disreputable local clergyman. Hobbes's seventeenth-century biographer John Aubrey tells the story of how “The old vicar Hobs was a good fellow and had been at cards Saturday all night, and at church in his sleep he cries out ‘Trafells is troumps’” [i.e., clubs are trumps] (Aubrey 1696, 1.387). The older Thomas Hobbes eventually (in 1604) left Malmesbury, when a dispute with another clergyman, Richard Jeane, escalated to the point of a fight in a churchyard. In Aubrey's words: “Hobs stroke him and was forcd to fly for it” (Aubrey 1696, 1.387).

By that point the future philosopher Hobbes had himself left Malmesbury (in 1602 or 1603), in order to study at Magdalen Hall, Oxford. His studies there were supported by his uncle, Francis Hobbes. After graduating from Oxford in February 1608, Hobbes went to work for the Cavendish family, initially as a tutor to William Cavendish (1590–1628), who later became the second earl of Devonshire. Hobbes would work for the same family most of the rest of his life. 1His work for the Cavendish family is part of what allowed Hobbes to think and write as he did: it gave him access to books, and connections to other philosophers and scientists.

Hobbes had also interacted with various prominent intellectual figures. Aubrey claims that “When he [Hobbes] was at Florence … he contracted a friendship with the famous *Galileo Galilei*” (Aubrey 1696, 1.366), although curiously Hobbes's autobiographical writings do not mention this. Earlier on, around 1620, Hobbes worked for some time as a secretary to Francis Bacon.

*De Cive* (1642) was Hobbes's first published book of political philosophy. This work focuses more narrowly on the political: its three main sections are titled “Liberty”, “Empire” and “Religion”. *De Corpore*, which is discussed below, covers issues of logic, language, method, metaphysics, mathematics, and physics.

Hobbes spent the next decade in exile in Paris, leaving England late in 1640, and not returning until 1651. His exile was related to the civil wars of the time. Hobbes was associated with the royalist side, and might also have had reason to fear punishment because of his defense of absolute sovereignty in his political philosophy.

After his return to England in 1651, Hobbes continued to publish philosophical works for several years.  But Hobbes's attention was not on philosophy alone. Indeed, in the 1670s he published translations of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. And in the late 1660s he wrote a history of the civil wars, *Behemoth; or, The Long Parliament*, which was published posthumously (Hobbes 1668a).

Hobbes died on 4 December 1679 at Hardwick Hall, one of the homes of the Cavendish family, with whom he was still associated after seventy years.

Hobbes thought we would better understand how individuals interact in groups if we understand how individuals work. Thus the first part of *The Elements of Law* is titled “Human Nature” and the second “De Corpore Politico” (i.e., “About the Body Politic”). Hobbes did not insist it was necessary to work through all the issues about individuals before tackling the issues about groups, as he acknowledged when he published the third part of the *Elements of Philosophy*(*De Cive*) first. But he did think it helpful. Thus even in *Leviathan*, with its focus on political and religious matters, Hobbes starts with a story about the workings of the mind. The first six chapters work through issues about the senses, imagination, language, reason, knowledge, and the passions.

**Questions**

1. What challenges did Hobbes face during his childhood?
   1. What happened to his father?
   2. Who ultimately stepped in to provide Hobbes with an education?
2. What family did Hobbes work for the majority of his life, and how did this influence his political views?
3. Why did Hobbes spend a decade in exile in Paris?
4. What other topics did Hobbes write about besides politics?
5. How did Hobbes explain his analysis of society?
6. Opinion- Hobbes believed people are driven toward cooperation because it is their best chance to survive. What is your input?

**Baron de Montesquieu** (1689-1755)

<http://www3.gettysburg.edu/~tshannon/hist106web/site6/montesquieu.htm>

Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu was born in 1689.  He was an aristocrat from South-West France, and although he had a high position in society, he was critical of the government nonetheless.  Montesquieu is most known for his systematic classification of governments.  He assigned different principles for the operation of each.  Republics operated on virtue, Monarchies on honor and Despotism on fear.  Montesquieu, like other philosophes, wanted freedom and tolerance.  In *Persian Letters*, he criticizes the church and the state remarking on the people's lack of liberty and the existence of religious intolerance.  He also dealt with the subject of censorship in *Persian Letters.*

   In his most famous work, *De L'esprit de lois (Spirit of the Laws)* he outlines his classification of governments.  Different governments would be best suited in different environments.  He thought there was a best government and that it was embodied in the new English Constitution.  He was a supporter of the separation of powers into judicial, executive and legislative branches.  Montesquieu combined this idea with his support for the aristocracy and the parlements in France, stating that they should share the power.  He saw that the aristocracy was corrupt but believed this was the cause of Louis XIV's absolutism.

*Spirit of the Laws* is seen as the main work of political science from the Enlightenment.  Montesquieu, although preceding a later generation of philosophes who became concerned with discovering man's natural place in the universe, moves past this and accepts as common sense that man is an intelligent being created by an intelligent God.  He reflected the materialist thinkers of England who sought to discover the laws through which God set the world in motion.  Through such beliefs Montesquieu began to discover the laws by which men were supposed to govern themselves.

He shared most of the same Enlightenment dismay over intolerance and oppression.  He believed the Church held back society not only through the strict enforcement of their beliefs but in an economic sense.  Through its vow of celibacy in the priesthood, Montesquieu saw the Church as contributing to depopulation.  In his *Persian Letters*, Montesquieu becomes maybe the first to beg the question of the dominance of one religion over another.  He thinks that the bringing together of these religions under one nation can only benefit the nation.  Montesquieu died in 1755.

Questions

1. What was the irony with Montesquieu’s position in society and his political beliefs?
2. Identify the government with the following characteristic:

a) Virtue= b) Honor= c) Fear=

1. What problems did Montesquieu have with the Church?
2. What did the Age of Enlightenment offer intellectuals of the era?
3. Why was Montesquieu’s vision of multiple religions under one nation, like those of democracies in the world today, such an absurd concept during his lifetime?
4. Why does our government insist upon a separation between Church and State?

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rousseau/>

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born in the independent Calvinist city-state of Geneva in 1712, the son of Isaac Rousseau, a watchmaker, and Suzanne Bernard. Rousseau's mother died nine days after his birth. On his father's exile from the city to avoid arrest, Jean-Jacques was put in the care of a pastor at nearby Bossey. Rousseau spent some time working as a domestic servant in a noble household in Turin.

Rousseau then spent a brief period training to become a Catholic priest before embarking on another brief career as an itinerant musician, music copyist and teacher. Rousseau moved to Lyon in 1740 to take up a position as a tutor. This appointment brought him within the orbit of both Condillac and d'Alembert and was his first contact with major figures of the French Enlightenment.

In 1745 Rousseau met Thérèse Levasseur, a barely literate laundry-maid who became his lover and, later, his wife. According to Rousseau's own account, Thérèse bore him five children, all of whom were deposited at the foundling hospital shortly after birth, an almost certain sentence of death in eighteenth-century France. Rousseau's abandonment of his children was later to be used against him by Voltaire.

In 1749, while walking to Vincennes to visit the briefly imprisoned Diderot, Rousseau came across a newspaper announcement of an essay competition organized by the Academy of Dijon. The Academy sought submissions on the theme of whether the development of the arts and sciences had improved or corrupted public morals. According to Rousseau's own subsequent accounts, he then and there experienced an epiphany, which included the thought central to his worldview that humankind is good by nature but is corrupted by society. Rousseau entered his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (conventionally known as the *First Discourse*) in the competition and won first prize with his contrarian thesis that social development, including of the arts and sciences, is corrosive of both civic virtue and individual moral character. The *Discourse* was published in 1750 and is mainly important because Rousseau used it to introduce themes that he then developed further in his later work, especially the natural virtue of the common person and the moral corruption fostered by the urge to distinction and excellence. The *First Discourse* made Rousseau famous and provoked a series of responses to which he in turn replied.

Rousseau repeatedly claims that a single idea is at the center of his worldview, namely, that human beings are good by nature but are rendered corrupt by society. Unfortunately, despite the alleged centrality of this claim, it is difficult to give it a clear and plausible interpretation. One obvious problem is present from the start: since society, the alleged agent of corruption, is composed entirely of naturally good human beings, how can evil ever get a foothold? It is also difficult to see what “natural goodness” might be.

Rousseau’s view of *The Social Contract* states each person will enjoy the protection of the common force whilst remaining as free as they were in the state of nature. The key to this view is the idea of the general will: that is, the collective will of the citizen body taken as a whole. The general will is the source of law and is willed by each and every citizen. In obeying the law each citizen is thus subject to his or her own will, and consequently, according to Rousseau, remains free. Rousseau died in 1778 exiled from France. In 1794 the French revolutionaries transferred his remains to the Panthéon in Paris.

**Questions**

1. How did Rousseau earn recognition for his philosophical views on government?
2. Why did other French intellectuals, like Voltaire, question Rousseau’s ethical behavior?
3. According to Rousseau, what corrupts humankind?
4. Rousseau indicated that a person’s morality is negatively affected by his ambition for distinction and excellence. What is your input on this statement?
5. Rousseau believed people remain as free under a social contract as they would in their natural state. Since each citizen participates in the process, there is no actual sacrifice of liberty. What is your input on this view?
6. Why would French revolutionaries honor Rousseau’s contributions by transferring his remains to French soil?

**John Locke** (1632-1704)

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/>

John Locke is among the most influential political philosophers of the modern period. In the *Two Treatises of Government*, he defended the claim that men are by nature free and equal against claims that God had made all people naturally subject to a monarch. He argued that people have rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and property that have a foundation independent of the laws of any particular society. Locke used the claim that men are naturally free and equal as part of the justification for understanding legitimate political government as the result of a social contract where people in the state of nature conditionally transfer some of their rights to the government in order to better ensure the stable, comfortable enjoyment of their lives, liberty, and property. Since governments exist by the consent of the people in order to protect the rights of the people and promote the public good, governments that fail to do so can be resisted and replaced with new governments. Locke is thus also important for his defense of the right of revolution. Locke also defends the principle of majority rule and the separation of legislative and executive powers. In the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke denied that coercion should be used to bring people to (what the ruler believes is) the true religion and also denied that churches should have any coercive power over their members.

The most direct reading of Locke's political philosophy finds the concept of consent playing a central role. From a natural state of freedom and independence, Locke stresses individual consent as the mechanism by which political societies are created and individuals join those societies. While there are of course some general obligations and rights that all people have from the law of nature, special obligations come about only when we voluntarily undertake them. Locke clearly states that one can only become a full member of society by an act of express consent (*Two Treatises* 2.122). The literature on Locke's theory of consent tends to focus on how Locke does or does not successfully answer the following objection: few people have actually consented to their governments so no, or almost no, governments are actually legitimate.

Locke claims that legitimate government is based on the idea of separation of powers. First and foremost of these is the legislative power. Locke describes the legislative power as supreme (*Two Treatises* 2.149) in having ultimate authority over “how the force for the commonwealth shall be employed” (2.143). The legislature is still bound by the law of nature and much of what it does is set down laws that further the goals of natural law and specify appropriate punishments for them (2.135). The executive power is then charged with enforcing the law as it is applied in specific cases. Interestingly, Locke’s third power is called the “federative power” and it consists of the right to act internationally according to the law of nature. Since countries are still in the state of nature with respect to each other, they must follow the dictates of natural law and can punish one another for violations of that law in order to protect the rights of their citizens.

Questions

1. Whose authority did Locke challenge in *Two Treatises of Government?*
2. According to Locke, what natural rights do people have?
3. What is meant by Locke’s explanation that people must provide consent to be governed in order to maintain legitimacy?
   1. Do governments actually gain consent from their citizens? Explain your viewpoint.
   2. Does the United States of America request consent to govern its citizens? Explain your rationale.
4. How does a separation of powers legitimize a government?
5. How could a country enforce Locke’s “federative power” onto another country that does not value natural rights?