

1274: St. Thomas Aquinas finishes
the *Summa Theologica*

1513: Machiavelli writes *The Prince*

1689: Locke publishes *Two Treatises of Government*

1776: Smith publishes *The Wealth of Nations*

1762: Rousseau publishes *The Social Contract*

1651: Hobbes publishes *Leviathan*

1700: Rousseau publishes *The Social Contract*

1750: Rousseau publishes *The Social Contract*

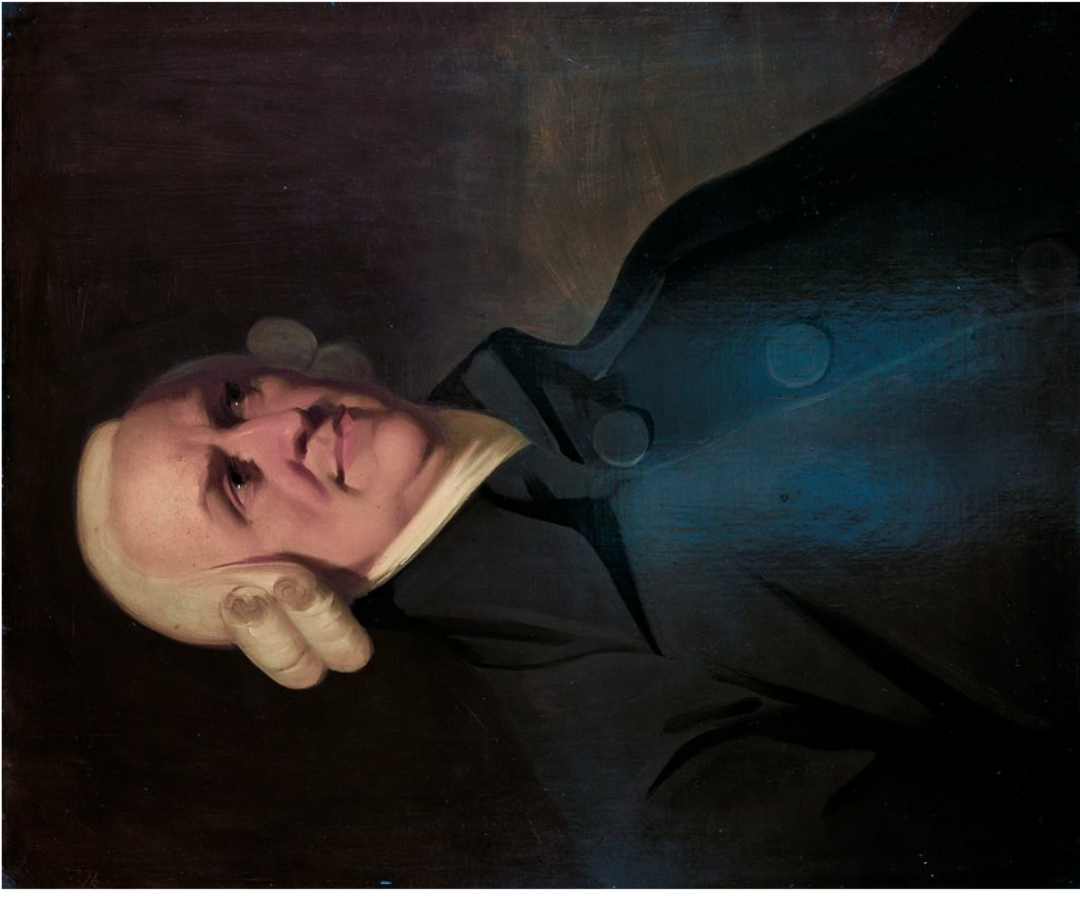
1800: Rousseau publishes *The Social Contract*

1850: Rousseau publishes *The Social Contract*

1900: Rousseau publishes *The Social Contract*

Adam Smith (1723-1790)

- Scottish economist and moral philosopher
- Like Rousseau, he lives during the high tide of the Enlightenment
- While thinkers like Locke and Rousseau are especially important for the political ideas of the Enlightenment, Smith is especially important for its economic ideas
- *The Wealth of Nations*, his major work that we will see today, is still regarded as one of the founding works of the economic ideas of liberalism



- So far, we talked more about the political ideas of liberalism:
 - Individuals have inalienable and inviolable rights
 - The legitimacy of the government comes from the governed
 - To prevent violations of rights, the power of the government is divided and limited
- We briefly talked about one of liberalism's major currents, free-market liberalism:
 - In favor of strong property rights
 - Critical of expansion of the government in commerce
 - In favor of national and international commerce
- The synthesis of these two strands together is often called classical liberalism
 - Classical liberalism was the dominant ideological paradigm of the 19th century in much of the Western world

- John Locke's ideas of individual rights are particularly important for political liberalism:
 - Social contract, artificiality of the government, natural rights, limited government...
- Of course, Locke's ideas are crucial for free-market liberalism:
 - For instance, his ideas of private property and minimal role of government
- However, Smith is often seen as the main figure of free-market liberalism:
 - Arguments in favor of free-market
 - Arguments in favor of international commerce
 - He provides, not just political, but also economic arguments for why the government should do very little and not upset free-market exchanges

- In our classes on Rousseau, we started with a “diagnostic” class then a “solution” class
 - First, we looked at what he thought was wrong about Hobbes' and Locke's social contract theories (relational desires)
 - Then, we looked at Rousseau's solution to these problems (the general will)
- First, we look at Smith's "diagnostic" of an issue that he feels is very problematic and that we really need to solve
 - Then, we will look at the solution that Smith proposes to solve that problem

- Smith reacts to the thought of this poet, Bernard Mandeville
- The *Fable of the Bees* (1714) was a poem that received strong reactions of shock at the time it was published
- What does Mandeville say in the poem? Why was it shocking?

- What does Mandeville say in the poem? Why was it shocking?
- The *Fable of the Bees* is a poem about a hive of bees full of vices (sloth, greed, luxury, cunning...)
- They have a government that enforces its laws but the bees are cunning, materialistic, and ruthless, at every chance they get
- Instead of criticizing this terrible hive, Mandeville says that the hive is actually wealthy and prosperous precisely because the bees are cunning, competitive, and strive for material wealth

- Eventually, a fairy makes the bees virtuous, and the poem ends with the hive breaking down since the bees no longer compete like they used to
 - The bees no longer go to the pub or buy expensive luxuries, they no longer compete for wealth... the economy starts to break down.
- Why is this shocking from a Christian (and Aristotelian) perspective?
- Mandeville goes directly against the idea that the sovereign promotes the public good by promoting the virtues
- On the contrary, it sounds like *private vices create public benefits*, as Mandeville famously said

- Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* was shocking at the time because he was criticizing a very old assumption:
 - The idea that private virtues contribute to the public good
 - Mandeville says that, on the contrary, a community only thrives thanks to private vices (selfishness, ambition, pursuit of material wealth...)
- For Mandeville, individuals are moral and virtuous because it furthers their self-interest
 - E.g., I will give to charity because it will set me apart from the ones that are not charitable
 - E.g., the happiness of my family and my friends only matters to me because it benefits me
- For Mandeville, *that's a good thing*. If everyone was unselfish, we would end up like the hive at the end of the fable.
 - Virtues like hard-work, charity, justice, or honesty exist precisely because we seek to gain something from them. Selfishness incentivizes us to create more wealth.

- In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith criticizes this idea

- To be sure, Smith is also fascinated by how the individuals' pursuit of their private interests contributes to the public good. He doesn't completely reject Mandeville.
- But he criticizes Mandeville's idea that individuals are inherently selfish and that selfishness is what contributes to the public good

- As we will see, Smith disagrees that human beings are as selfish as Mandeville says: virtues do not arise out of pure selfishness; in fact, selfishness is destructive of social bonds.

- Let's then look at the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*

- In the very first lines, how is he directly disagreeing with Mandeville?

- “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.” (p. 11)

- It's not true that the happiness of my family and my friends only matters to me insofar as it benefits me: there are things which “render their happiness necessary to [me], though [I derive] nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.”

- What is it? What renders “their happiness necessary to [me], though [I derive] nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it”?
- As human beings, we are naturally attuned to the feelings of the ones around us. We have an innate capacity for sympathy (p. 13), i.e., for putting ourselves in the shoes of our interlocutors and feeling, to a greater or lesser extent, what they are feeling.
 - I feel some sadness when someone else is sad, happiness when someone is happy
 - We even attune our feelings with fictional entities in books (p. 13)

- What is he saying in p. 12, n°3?
- When someone is about to get hit on the leg or the arm, we intuitively touch our arm or leg as well (as if we were the ones that are about to be hit)
- When watching a football game, we do this when we see a player suffer a really bad injury

- But do we sympathize with emotions and with people indiscriminately (pp. 13-14)?
- No, our capacity to sympathize heavily depend on the *context* of these emotions
- Someone's parent died: that's a situation where most people intuitively sympathize
- If someone is outraged for no apparent reason, we might at first think "what's up with him?!" : we don't feel anything but slight annoyance
 - But as the outraged person make his case, we might come to think "What a terrible situation! He's right, that's outrageous!" and we slowly come to feel their outrage as well

- We are not just *attuned* to one another's feelings: we *fine-tune* our sympathy according to the context
- If someone tells a joke, we have a sense of how hard we should laugh (17-18, 21)
 - If I laugh too little, people will look at me weird (“why isn’t she laughing?!”)
 - If I laugh too loudly, it’s going to be awkward (“woah! I guess she really liked that joke!”)

- What are some examples of situations where we use our sympathy and our fine-tuning capacities?

- For Smith, we are able to feel sympathy precisely because we are *not* naturally selfish
 - Sympathy is this intuitive capacity to put ourselves in another person's shoes and feel as they do
- We are not aiming at any gain except the pleasure of being in sympathy with others
- When we're children, this capacity is still under-developed: we are still very self-centered creatures and we often have reactions that are too much or too little
- However, we refine our sympathy over time and become better at putting ourselves in other people's shoes
- We become increasingly good at striking the right middle ground in all kinds of social situations

- He's not saying that there aren't human beings who read others' emotions or feign their own emotions purely to get what they want
- He's saying that, if human beings did not have this natural and instinctive capacity, then it wouldn't be possible to fine-tune with other human beings (e.g. laugh exactly the right amount)
 - Human beings do feign and use emotions to fool one another, but they have this more primary, intuitive, and un-selfish capacity for sympathy and fine-tuning

- Although this is not a distinction that Smith himself makes, we could say that Smith distinguishes between selfishness and enlightened self-interest
 - Smith says: the reason why we develop virtues and morality is because we imagine ourselves as if we were in the position of the other person
 - For instance: my house was just robbed! I feel sadness, and other people around me feel my sadness.
 - Virtues and moral behavior (e.g. justice) develop out of the other persons instinctively putting themselves in my shoes.
 - “What if *my* house was robbed? I would feel devastated!”

- Smith criticizes Mandeville: he mixed up the fact that individuals are selfish with the idea that individuals have enlightened self-interest
- It's only half-true that people act virtuously and morally out of self-interest
- We think about the others by thinking about ourselves, and we think about ourselves by thinking about the others
- Virtues and laws that regulate justice emerge from the fact that we can feel what it means to be victims of unfairness and oppression
- (Remember that Smith doesn't make this distinction between selfishness and enlightened self-interest like I do, but it helps to easily understand him)

- Individuals create laws that regulate justice out of this mechanism where they put themselves in someone else's shoes
- We see someone that was hurt by someone's else insult and we feel for them: we also feel hurt
 - Therefore, we develop virtues such as kindness and patience
- Virtues and morality come from the fact that individuals can imagine and therefore feel what it means to become victim of vices, crimes, etc.
 - As we can see, Smith doesn't completely reject Mandeville: it's true that virtues and morality emerge because we, individually, feel sadness, frustration, pain...
 - But this is not Mandeville's selfishness: we think about ourselves by thinking about the other; we put ourselves in their shoes and feel as they do.

- Both Mandeville and Smith are promoting a big break in the way we think about morality and human beings
- We already saw with Hobbes and Locke that human beings essentially act out of self-interest
 - Government exists, not because individuals innately pursue virtue, God, etc., but because individuals act to pursue their own self-interest
- Smith, however, says that humans are not merely selfish, but that they have enlightened self-interest: they are capable of unselfishness because they put themselves in other peoples' shoes
- Next class, we will look at how Smith applies this idea to his economic theory
 - As we will see, it will help explain how enlightened self-interest (and not mere selfishness) promotes general wealth and the common good