

HERTOG 2020 SUMMER COURSES

EDMUND BURKE: LIBERTY & AUTHORITY

Greg Weiner, provost, Assumption College

During this week, students will explore the roots of conservative thought through the writings of Edmund Burke (1729–1797). Burke—supporter of the American revolutionaries, liberator of the Irish Catholics, resistor of royal power—is often reduced to a mere traditionalist opposed to all change or a simple historicist who deferred wholesale to the authority of the extant. Instead, for him, political prudence lay in the effort to combine “original justice” with circumstance. To place some authority in tradition was simply to recognize the limits of human reason.

Taking its guide from a comment by Winston Churchill, this course considers two “Burkes”: the Burke of Liberty and the Burke of Authority. That there are these two Burkes is not a mark of political inconsistency, but a reflection of Burke’s theoretical choice to anchor his reflections in the concrete, using circumstance as an occasion for contemplation about the political. In short, in reconciling the two Burkes, we find a statesman of paramount prudence.

Books:

- Edmund Burke, *Select Works of Edmund Burke, Vol. 2 (Reflections on the Revolution in France)* [1790], Foreword and Biographical Note by Francis Canavan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999)
- Course reader

Discussion Papers: Each fellow will be responsible for completing a brief discussion paper (1-2 pages, single-spaced). See below for your assignment. The papers are due the day before the session by **5 PM ET**. They should be posted on Slack and will be part of the assigned readings for the session. Paper-writers should be ready to briefly present their ideas during the seminar.

Resources

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites. These sites are aimed at introducing important thinkers in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on politics and philosophy.

Relevant pages include Burke, Smith, Locke, and Mill (on The Great Thinkers).

Tuesday, June 16, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET The Burke of Liberty

Readings:

- Winston Churchill, excerpt from “Consistency in Politics” (1932)
- Burke, “Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies,” *Select Works of Edmund Burke, Vol. 1*, pp. 225–28, 235–46, 253–56, 278–79, 284–89

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What is the source of Burke’s opposition to “refined policy”?
2. Why is it imprudent to try to subdue the Americans by force?
3. What does Burke say is the predominant temper and character of Americans? What are the six reasons he cites that made Americans this way?
4. What is Burke’s reasoning for complying with the American Spirit as a “necessary evil”?
5. Why is Burke uninterested in “the right of taxation” as a philosophical question? What does this suggest about his political and philosophical disposition overall?

Thursday, June 18, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET The Burke of Authority

Readings:

- Burke, *Select Works of Edmund Burke, Vol. 2 (Reflections on the Revolution in France)* [1790], pp. 88–158

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What is the relationship between “circumstances” and “metaphysical abstraction”? Which does Burke prefer and why? (p. 93ff.) How is this related to his later claim (p. 118ff.) that revolution is not a matter to be settled by “positive rights”?
2. What does Burke mean by “a manly, moral, regulated liberty”? As opposed to what?
3. How does Burke respond to the purported “three rights” that the English acquired during the Glorious Revolution? (p. 102ff.)
4. What can we deduce about Burke’s views on prudence from his claim that an exception from a principle is not the same as a principle? (p. 110ff.)
5. What does Burke’s metaphor of liberty as an “inheritance” (p. 119ff.) say about his politics more generally? What does he mean by “preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state”?
6. Why does Burke argue against a government founded on “natural rights”? (p. 152ff.) He claims to support “real” rights and liberty. What does he mean? What are the foundations of British rights and liberties?

Monday, June 22, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET The Burke of Authority, continued

Readings:

- Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 158–211

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. Why is the French revolution in manners and chivalry important to Burke? (p. 163ff.)
2. Burke prefers prudence to abstract reason and “barbarous philosophy” (p.171). What is the difference between the two? Why does Burke prefer prudence?
3. Can prejudice be good? Under what circumstances?
4. What is Burke’s view of the social contract, and how does it differ from those of other social contract theorists?
5. Why is Burke concerned about “political Men of Letters”? (p. 208ff.)

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET The Burke of Authority, continued

Readings:

- Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 211–30, 269–78, 292–94, 307–09, 361–65

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. According to Burke, governmental power is not enough to stabilize society. How do property, religion, and prejudice help governmental power to stabilize society?
2. Is Burke opposed to all social and political change? Under what circumstances, if any, is revolution justified?
3. Is politics an art (a matter of practical know-how) or a science (a matter of theoretical knowledge)?
4. On p. 272, Burke draws a contrast between “the boasting of empirics” and the “vastness” of philosophical promises.” Which side is he on, and why?
5. What is Burke’s case for moderation in political change (pp. 274-275ff.)?
6. What are Burke’s standards for political change (p. 364ff.)?

Friday, June 26, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET Reconciling the Burke of Liberty and the Burke of Authority

Readings:

- Burke, excerpts from “An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,” *Further Reflections on the French Revolution*, pp. 88–93, 99–116, 146–201

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. Who are the “New Whigs,” and how do their political ideals differ from the “Old Whigs” with whom Burke identifies?

2. What does Burke mean in saying that “nothing universal can be affirmed” in politics and morals? (p. 91) Does this mean he is a moral relativist?
3. Does Burke oppose republican government? Why or why not?
4. What is Burke’s case for his consistency between his early positions on America and his later ones on France?
5. How do we incur obligations to others (p. 161ff.)? What political conclusions can we draw from Burke’s view?

HERTOG 2020 SUMMER COURSES

ADAM SMITH

Ryan Hanley, professor, Marquette University

For this course, students will turn to Adam Smith, perhaps best known as the founding father of capitalism. Students will read and discuss excerpts from Smith's landmark works, and examine the core concepts of Smith's social vision, elaborating his views on economics, politics, ethics, religion, morality, and philosophy.

Books:

- Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Penguin Classics)
- Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (two volumes, Penguin Classics)
 - Note: for the purposes of the syllabus below, "Vol. 1" refers to *Wealth of Nations Books 1–3* and "Vol. 2" refers to *Wealth of Nations Books 4–5*.

Discussion Papers: Each fellow will be responsible for completing a brief discussion paper (1-2 pages, single-spaced). See below for your assignment. The papers are due the day before the session by **5 PM ET**. They should be posted on Slack and will be part of the assigned readings for the session. Paper-writers should be ready to briefly present their ideas during the seminar.

Resources

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Relevant pages include Burke, Smith, Locke, and Mill (on The Great Thinkers).

Tuesday, June 30, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET *Theory of Moral Sentiments*

Readings:

- *Theory of Moral Sentiments*
 - I.i (pp. 13–33)
 - I.iii (pp. 55–78)
 - IV.1 (pp. 209–17)

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What is “sympathy”? How does it compare to what we today might call “pity” or “compassion”? What role does Smith think that sympathy plays in moral life?
2. What role do ambition and “vanity” play in commercial life, on Smith’s account? What sorts of virtues does Smith think commercial life can encourage? What sorts of “corruptions” does he think it can lead to?
3. What is the point of the story of the “poor man’s son, whom heaven in its anger visited with ambition” (p. 211)? What does it reveal of Smith’s understanding of the relationship of economic ambition to human happiness?
4. What is the “invisible hand” (p. 215)? And more importantly: what effect does it have on the distribution of goods?

Thursday, July 2, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET *Theory of Moral Sentiments*

Readings:

- *Theory of Moral Sentiments*
 - II.ii (pp. 95–110)
 - III.3 (pp. 156–80)
 - VI.1 and 3 (pp. 250–56, 280–308)

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What is the difference between justice and beneficence for Smith? Why does he consider justice to be more important politically? Does this lead him to dismiss beneficence as worthless?
2. Who does Smith consider to be “the man of the most perfect virtue” (p. 175)? How does this individual compare to conceptions of human excellence and perfection that various ancient and religious traditions value? That we value today?
3. What is prudence, according to Smith? What sorts of concerns does the prudent man focus on? What sorts of actions does prudence prompt him to undertake?
4. What is self-command, according to Smith? What sorts of actions does self-command lead us to perform, or not perform? What place might self-command have in a capitalist order?

Monday, July 6, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET *The Wealth of Nations*

Readings:

- *Wealth of Nations*
 - Introduction and Plan of the Work (Vol. 1, pp. 104–06)
 - I.i–ii (Vol. 1, pp. 109–21)
 - I.vii (Vol. 1, pp. 157–66)
 - II.iii (Vol. 1, pp. 429–49)

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. Reread the end of *TMS* IV.1. What does Smith have in mind there when he speaks of “political disquisitions” (p. 217)? Is the *Wealth of Nations* a “political disquisition” of this sort?
2. What role does the love of beauty play in the opening chapters of *WN*? What is it about the rhetorical presentation of the story of the pin factory that makes it so effective?
3. Smith says that market orders are “not originally the effect of human wisdom” (p. 117). What then accounts for their regularity? What light might the story of the butcher, brewer, and baker shed on this?
4. *WN* II.iii returns to the question of our efforts to “better our condition” (p. 441). How does Smith’s account here compare to that given in *TMS*? Does he still think that vanity drives this, or are there other dispositions in human nature that encourage our commercial ambitions?

Wednesday, July 8, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET *The Wealth of Nations*

Readings:

- *Wealth of Nations*
 - III.i (Vol. 1, pp. 479–84)
 - III.iv (Vol. 1, pp. 507–20)
 - IV.ii (Vol. 2, pp. 29–49)
 - IV.ii.c (Vol. 2, pp. 66–77)

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. What does Smith consider to be the likely social effects of the individual’s desire to better his condition? What role should the government play in encouraging or restraining this desire?
2. *WN* III offers a history of the end of feudalism and the birth of commercial society. To what particular historical actions and human passions does Smith trace this transition? What are the specific beneficial effects of this transition?
3. What is the difference between the practices of a “vulgar politician” and the true “science of the legislator,” according to Smith (p. 45)? What general rules does Smith think legislators should strive to follow?
4. Why does Smith defend free trade? What are the specific benefits that he thinks it brings? Why is he so skeptical of political efforts to regulate trade?

Friday, July 10, 2020

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. ET *The Wealth of Nations*

Readings:

- *Wealth of Nations*
 - IV.ix.48–52 (Vol. 2, pp. 272–75)

- V.i.a (Vol. 2, pp. 279–97)
- V.i.f.1–18 (Vol. 2, pp. 348–54)
- V.i.f. 48–61 (Vol. 2, pp. 368–75)
- V.i.g.1–15 (Vol. 2, pp. 375–84)
- V.i.i (Vol. 2, pp. 405–06)

Reading Questions & Writing Prompts:

1. Under the “system of natural liberty” (p. 274), to what three duties is the state limited? Why does Smith charge the government with these three responsibilities? What sorts of functions that we today commonly associate with government does he exclude from this list?
2. What is Smith’s complaint with university education? How does he use market-based mechanisms to improve it? Do you think that these are likely to work? Why or why not?
3. What is this “mental mutilation” that Smith discusses (p. 374)? How is it related to the division of labor for which he argues earlier in *WN* 1? What are its effects on political life? How does Smith propose to cure or manage these effects?
4. What does Smith emphasize in his discussion of religion? What are its effects on political stability? How does he propose to cure or manage these effects? How does this cure or scheme of management draw on certain market principles that he elsewhere emphasizes?