

Adam Smith (1723–1790)

Biography / Overview

Expanded Biographical Details:

- **Early Life and Background:** Adam Smith was baptized on June 5, 1723, in Kirkcaldy, Scotland. His father died shortly before his birth, leaving Smith raised by his mother and an uncle who oversaw his education.
- **Education and Influences:** Smith attended the University of Glasgow at age 14, studying moral philosophy under Francis Hutcheson, then furthered his studies at Balliol College, Oxford, under a Snell Exhibition scholarship.
- **Major Life Events and Contributions:** Smith became Professor of Logic in 1751 and Professor of Moral Philosophy in 1752 at Glasgow University. He published *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759. Between 1764–1766, Smith toured Europe, meeting influential Enlightenment thinkers, shaping his economic theories. His seminal work, *The Wealth of Nations*, was published in 1776.
- **Later Life and Death:** Smith served as Commissioner of Customs in Edinburgh from 1778 until his death on July 17, 1790.

Influences & Notable For

- **Significant Intellectual and Cultural Influences:** Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Stoic Philosophy, French Physiocrats (François Quesnay, Anne-Robert Turgot).
- **Contributions to Fields or Disciplines:** Known as the "Father of Modern Economics," Smith articulated foundational concepts such as the division of labor, the "invisible hand," and the pursuit of self-interest benefiting society.
- **Notable Achievements and Recognition:** *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations* are foundational texts in moral philosophy and economic theory.

Famous Quotes

- "The real price of everything...is the toil and trouble of acquiring it." (*The Wealth of Nations*)
- "By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually..." (*The Wealth of Nations*)
- "Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition." (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*)

Bibliography / Primary Sources & Major Works / Contents

- **The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759):** Explores moral judgments based on sympathy and social norms.
- **An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776):** Analyzes economic principles, including division of labor and free market economics.
- **Essays on Philosophical Subjects (1795, posthumous):** Essays on scientific method, ancient physics, and rhetoric.
- **Lectures on Jurisprudence (1762–1763, published 1978):** Smith’s analysis of legal frameworks influencing society and economy.
- **Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (1762–1763, published 1983):** Smith's views on language and persuasion.

Academic Questions

- How did Smith's ethical theories in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* influence economic thought in *The Wealth of Nations*?
- To what extent did Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence* anticipate modern legal and economic theories?
- How do Smith's theories of division of labor compare to preceding economic models?
- In what ways does Smith’s concept of the “impartial spectator” inform contemporary moral psychology?

Legacy / Modern Significance & Modern Moments

- **Historical and contemporary relevance:** Smith’s ideas underpin classical and modern economic theory, influencing global economic policy and moral philosophy debates.
- **Documented modern references or adaptations:** His work continues to shape economics curricula worldwide; institutions like the Adam Smith Business School (University of Glasgow) bear his name.
- **Current scholarly interpretations and discussions:** Ongoing debates about Smith's intended balance between free-market principles and ethical regulations continue to stimulate scholarly discourse.

Critical Responses

- Scholarly debates revolve around the perceived tension between Smith's moral philosophy emphasizing sympathy and his economic theories highlighting self-interest.
- Critical assessments examine Smith's critique of mercantilism and the practicality of his "invisible hand" theory in modern economics.
- Contemporary scholarship reevaluates Smith's historical context, analyzing his implicit assumptions about labor and colonial exploitation.

Digital Resources

- **AdamSmithWorks:** Digital portal providing primary texts and scholarly resources. <https://www.adamsmithworks.org/>
- **University of Glasgow Archives:** Holds Smith's personal papers and lecture notes. <https://www.gla.ac.uk>
- **Project Gutenberg:** Public-domain editions of Smith's major works. <https://www.gutenberg.org>
- **National Library of Scotland:** Early editions and manuscripts related to Smith's life and work. <https://www.nls.uk>

Footnotes (Chicago Style)

1. University of Glasgow, "Biography of Adam Smith," accessed June 2025, <https://www.gla.ac.uk>.
2. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Edinburgh: A. Millar, 1759).
3. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776).
4. Project Gutenberg, "The Wealth of Nations," accessed June 2025, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3300>.
5. Project Gutenberg, "The Theory of Moral Sentiments," accessed June 2025, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/15491>.
6. Ian Simpson Ross, *The Life of Adam Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
7. Andrew S. Skinner, *A System of Social Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
8. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, eds., *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).