

Class 4: Discussion
The Wealth of Nations, Chapters 1-4, Adam Smith

A pdf file of the assigned chapters is available on the course web page. Students are expected to read the assigned chapters in advance of class and to prepare preliminary answers to the following discussion questions. During the discussion, I will put the following questions to the class and guide the discussion of them. I will not offer answers myself. To check that students are prepared for discussion, I will ask one of the following questions as a small stakes pop quiz at the beginning of class.

1. Why, according to Smith, does the division of labor account for “the greatest improvement in the productive power of labor...”?
 - a. What does Smith mean by the division of labor? How is the division of labor illustrated by the pin factory?
 - b. Why, according to Smith, are “the hard-ware and the coarse woollens of England...superior to those of France, and much cheaper too in the same degree of goodness.”?
 - c. Why, according to Smith, is the invention of labor-saving machinery owing to the division of labor?
2. Why, according to Smith, is the division of labor limited by the extent of the market?
 - a. What does Smith mean by “the extent of the market.”
 - b. What, according to Smith, are the connections between geography, transportation, and the extent of the market?
3. What modern examples support Smith’s views on the connection among the division of labor, the extent of the market, and the availability of cheap transport? Are there modern examples that contradict Smith’s view?
4. Why, according to Smith, does the division of labor lead to the use of money?
 - a. According to Smith, do the benefits to society of money use outweigh the costs?
What, according to Smith, are the benefits?

What, according to Smith, are the costs?
 - b. What does Smith mean when he says that the “... avarice and injustice of princes and sovereign states, abusing the confidence of their subjects, have by degrees diminished the real quantity of metal, which had been originally contained in their coins.”?
 - c. Do you agree with Smith that the division of labor accounts for the use of money? Has Smith got it right?

Contract for Discussion

Discussion of readings is an important part of this course. As instructor, I have chosen readings that investigate major course themes and that are rich enough to provide meaningful opportunities to use important course concepts. To make our discussions as valuable as possible, I expect all to abide by the following contract.

As instructor, I agree to:

1. Read the material carefully.
2. Prepare well-thought out questions and provide them to students in advance.
3. Pose questions carefully during class.
4. Develop discussion in depth.
5. Strive for answers.
6. Avoid needlessly difficult and technical terms.
7. Listen intently.
8. Involve each student.
9. Confine myself to asking questions so that the discussion does not turn into a lecture.
10. Evaluate the discussion in a formal way.

As students, you agree to:

1. Read the material carefully.
2. Offer evidence from the reading to support your answers.
3. Not refer to “outside” sources of information unless everyone has access to them.
4. Listen carefully to each other and to the questions being asked.
5. Ask for clarification of any point that you do not understand.
6. Respectfully challenge answers that you do not agree with.
7. Be willing to change your mind.
8. Answer the questions posed by the leader before making other points.
9. Don't repeat a point that someone else has already made.
10. Be as brief as possible. Have a point, make it, and then stop talking.