Reader Abstract: This reader focuses on the contributions of Hume and Smith during the Scottish Enlightenment. The first two sessions deal with their respective moral views, regarding justice, the social contract, and virtue. The last two sessions deal with their views on political economy, regarding Hume’s principles of government and trade, and Smith’s insights about the division of labor.

Session 1: Hume on Justice and the Social Contract (72 pages)


Session Abstract: The first reading offers Hume’s theory of property and, derived from that, his theory of justice. The second selection presents Hume’s perspective on the social contract, arguing that the formation of a government is the “original contract” in society that is a prerequisite for any other contracts to have meaning.

Session 2: Smith on Sympathy, Justice, and the Impartial Spectator (47 pages)


Part I, Section I, “Of Propriety”:

Chapter 3, “Of the Manner in Which we Judge of the Propriety or Impropriety of the Affections of Other Men, by their Concord or Dissonance with our Own,” (pages 16–19).
Chapter 4, “The same subject continued,” (pages 19–23).
Chapter 5, “Of the Amiable and Respectable Virtues,” (pages 23–26).

Part II, Section II, “Of Justice and Beneficence”:

Chapter 1, “Comparison of those Two Virtues,” (pages 78–82).

Part III, “Of the Foundation of our Judgements concerning our own Sentiments and Conduct, and of the Sense of Duty”: 

Session Abstract: The readings in this session give a very broad overview of Smith’s thoughts about morality. The first few readings present his perspective on empathy as an element in human incentive that guide human beings to virtue. The second set of readings deal with Smith’s two virtues: justice and beneficence. The final excerpts gives Smith’s ideas about morality as being derived from a judgment of other people and our desire to gain their approval.

Session 3: Hume’s Political Economy (20 pages)

Part I:


Part II:


Session Abstract: In these readings, Hume begins by establishing three foundations of government: self-interest, power, and property. The he turns to the comparison of government and family, and the tension between liberty and authority. In the last two essays, he espouses the benefits of manufacturing, commerce, and foreign trade.

Session 4: Smith’s Political Economy (19 pages)

Book I, “Of the Causes of Improvement in the productive Powers of Labour, and of the Order according to which its Produce is naturally distributed among the different Ranks of the People”:

Chapter 1, “Of the Division of Labour,” (pages 5-14).
Chapter 3, “That the Division of Labour is Limited by the Extent of the Market,” (pages 19-23).

Session Abstract: The final session deals exclusively with Adam Smith’s insights on the division of labor as the foundation for his economic views, reinforcing the Hume essays in the previous section on the benefits of commerce.