

Economics 311a
History of Economic Thought
Fall 2011

John Miller
Office: Knapton 006
Phone: 286-3667
Email: jmiller@wheatonma.edu
Office Hours:

Required Books:

A History of Economic Thought (2009) William Barber
History of Economic Thought: A Critical Perspective (3rd Ed.) by Hunt and Lautzenheiser
The Worldly Philosophers (7th ed.) by Robert Heilbroner
Teachings of the Worldly Philosophers (1997) by Robert Heilbroner
[Readings Available on onCourse](#)

“A study of the history of ideas is a necessary preliminary to the emancipation of the mind.”

J.M. Keynes

This course can't guarantee you intellectual emancipation from modern economic thinking. But it will go a long way toward helping you better understand why modern economics asks the questions it does and provides the answers you have learned in your microeconomics and macroeconomics courses. This course will also acquaint you with what the economists whose names are most often invoked in economic and public debates (e.g., Smith and Marx) actually had to say and how that differs from what is attributed to them in the popular press and by most economists.

To gain these insights we must learn something of earlier economic theories and reach an understanding about the relationship between economic theorizing and historical setting.. To do that, we will study the works of the most famous economists, or “worldly philosophers” as Robert Heilbroner calls them: Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, Mill, Marx, Marshall, and Keynes. We examine their writings from two perspectives. The first, an externalist perspective that documents the ways in which these economic writers are products of “their times” and how their historical setting prompts them to develop economic theories different from those of today's economics. The second, the internalist perspective, traces the development of economic ideas from one generation of economic writers to the next, assessing the contribution each writer makes to modern economics. Through out the course, we will compare these perspectives and what they reveal about the nature of economic theory, its ideological content, and the history of our discipline.

Class sessions will be largely discussion. I will provide you with study questions for each set of readings. Students are expected to read the assignments prior to class and to come to class prepared to discuss the questions. Students will submit their discussion questions electronically prior to class. Also each week one student will report on a “further reading” assignment.

You will be evaluated in this course on the basis of your class participation, your answers to the discussion questions on the readings, an oral report on a further reading, two essays (about 7 pages in length), and a take-home final essay. **Missing more than two classes will lower your final grade.**

As the description above suggests, this course is writing intensive. We will devote part of our class time to talking about writing economic essays and to developing outlines for your papers.

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Aug. 30
Sept. 1, 6

Introduction and Methodology

Barber, prologue.
Hunt and Lautzenheiser, preface.
The Worldly Philosophers, ch.1.
Excerpts from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by T. S. Kuhn.
“The Structure of Scientific Revolutions in Economic Thought,” by
Martin Bronfenbrenner in *History of Political Economy*, 1971,

Sept. 8, 13, 15
Value

Before Smith: The Mercantilists, Physiocrats and The Theory of

Barber, Part I, intro.
The Worldly Philosophers, ch.2.
Hunt and Lautzenheiser, ch. 1, ch. 2.
Teachings, ch. 2 read Mun and Turgot.
“The Great Industrial Wall of China,” by Carolyn Bartholomew,
American Prospect, Jan./Feb 2010.
Listen to “A 'Postcard' View Of China's Global Prominence,”

Interview

with James Fallows, 1/6/09
www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99039196
“Ideas, Events, and Environment: The Case of the French

Physiocrats,”

by Meek, in *Events, Ideology, and Economic Theory* ed. by Eagly.

Further Reading

“The Swedish and English Bullionist Controversies,” in
Events, Ideology, and Economic Theory ed. by R. Eagly.

Sept. 20, 22,
27, 29

Adam Smith

The Worldly Philosophers, ch. 3.
Barber, Part I, ch. 1.
Hunt and Lautzenheiser, ch. 3.
Teachings, “Bernard Mandeville” and “Adam Smith.”
Barber, pp. 31-38.
Heilbroner, *Behind the Veil*, ch. 5
“Adam Smith’s Relevance for Today,” by Michael Forsyth, Adam
Smith Institute, 7/17/90.
“The Use and Abuse of Adam Smith” by Gerald Houseman and
“Adam Smith and the Contradictions of the Free Market” by
Peter Nolan, both in *Challenge*, May-June 2003.

Further Reading

“Mandeville, Rousseau, and Smith” by Lucio Colletti, in
From Rosseau to Lenin by Colletti.
“Uses and Abuses of Adam Smith,” by Amartya Sen,
History of Political Economy, Summer 2011.

Oct. 4, 6*, 13
18, 20

Malthus, Ricardo, and The General Glut Debate

The Worldly Philosophers, ch. 4.

Barber, Part I, ch. 2, ch. 3

Hunt and Lautzenheiser, ch. 4, ch. 5. (skip pp. 103-112)

Teachings, “Malthus and Ricardo,” pp. 111-123.

Population: The First Essay by Malthus, ch. 1 - ch. 7. Available at:

<http://socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/malthus/popu.txt>

“Food, Economics, and Entitlement,” by Amartya Sen in *Political Economy of Hunger* edited by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen.

“The 9 billion-people question,” *The Economist*, 2/26/11, pp. 1-6 &

14.

“Free Trade's Great, but Offshoring Rattles Me,” by Alan Blinder, *The Washington Post*, 5/6/07 and “Shaking Up Trade Theory,” by Aaron Bernstein, *Business Week*, 12/6/04.

Further Reading

Poverty and Famines by Amartya Sen, ch. 4 – ch. 6: pp. 39-85.

The Making of the English Working Class, by E.P Thompson, ch. 9, “The Weavers.”

Underconsumption Theories by Michael Bleaney, ch. 2

Oct. 25, 27

J. S. Mill, The Classical School and Economic Policy

The Worldly Philosophers, ch. 5.

Barber, Part I, ch. 4, postscript.

Hunt and Lautzenheiser, ch. 8, pp. 185-201.

Teachings, “John Stuart Mill.”

“Ecological Armageddon” by Robert Heilbroner in *Problems in Political Economy*, first edition, edited by David Gordon.

“Is Prosperity Possible Without Growth?” by Bergmann, *Challenge*, September 2010,

“The Bishops on the U.S. Economy” by Crotty and Stormes, *Challenge*, March/April, 1985, pp. 36-42.

Further Reading

“Retrospectives: Gender in Classical Economics,” by Dimand, Forget, and Nyland, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Winter 2004.

(JSTOR).

Mill and Marx, by Graeme Duncan, a chapter on Mill and one on Marx.

Nov. 1, 3, 8, 10

Karl Marx and Marxist Economics

The Worldly Philosophers, ch. 6.

Barber, Part II.

Hunt and Lautzenheiser, ch. 9 (skip pp. 222 - 231).

Teachings, “Karl Marx,” pp. 161-192.

“Why Marx is man of the moment,” by Francis Wheen, *The Observer*, 7/17/05.

“The Communist Manifesto” by Marx and Engels. Available at: <http://www.marx.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf.htm>

Robert Heilbroner *Beyond Boom Crash*, pp. 11-37.

“Crises of Capitalism: A Video Cartoon,” by David Harvey, available at: <http://comment.rsablogs.org.uk/videos/>

“Is Capitalism Doomed?” by Roubini, *Project Syndicate*, 8/15/11.

Further Reading

“Karl Marx and The Industrial Revolution,” by Sweezy, *Events, Ideology, and Economic Theory* edited by Meek.

“What is Marxism?” by Magdoff and Sweezy, *Monthly Review*, March 1985 and “The Return of Karl Marx,” by John Cassidy, *The New Yorker*, Oct. 20. 1997.

Nov. 15, 17,
20, 29

The Marginalist Revolution and Neo-Classical Orthodoxy

The Worldly Philosophers, ch. 7.

Barber, Part III.

Hunt and Lautzenheiser, ch. 10 (pp. 247-256), ch. 11.

Teachings “William Stanley Jevons,” and “Alfred Marshall.”

Further Reading

"The Transition from Classical to Neo-Classical Economics: A

Scientific

Revolution," by DeVroey, *Journal of Economic Issues*, (Sept. 1975).

“Not an Average Human Being: How Economics Succumbed to Racial

Accounts of Economic Man,” by Peart and Levy, Dec. 2001.

“The future of the Working Classes: A comparison of J.S. Mill and A. Marshall,” by Opocher, *The European Journal of Economic Thought*, May 2010,

The Evolution of Economic Thought, by Stanley Brue, ch. 17. “The Departure from Pure Competition.”

Dec. 1, 6, 8 **Keynes, The Keynesian Revolution, and Keynesian Economics**

The Worldly Philosophers, ch. 9.

Barber, Part IV.

Hunt and Lautzenheiser, ch. 15 (pp.398 – 426).

Teachings, “John Maynard Keynes,” pp. 289-296.

“The General Theory of Employment” by Keynes, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Feb. 1937.

“Are We depressed? Top 10 ways to recognize the next Great Depression,” by John Miller, *Wheaton Quarterly*, Spring 2009.

“What Good Are Economists Anyway?” *Businessweek*, 4/16/2009.

Further Reading

The Coming of Keynesianism to America edited by Colander and Landreth. Introduction, and one of the following economists: Hansen, Galbraith, and Samuelson.

Ron Stanfield, "Kuhnian Scientific Revolutions and the Keynesian Revolution," *Journal of Economic Issues*, VIII, I (March 1974), 97-109.

"Keynes and Capitalism," by Backhouse and Bateman, *History of Political Economy*, Winter 2009.

* Field Trip to Slater Mill, on a date and day to be announced.

Classroom Expectations

1. Students are expected to attend class regularly, to come to class prepared, and to participate actively in class.
2. You need to bring the materials we are discussing with you to class. We will often refer to passages from the assigned reading in class and sometimes read them aloud.
3. Please arrive for class on time and remain in class for the entire period.
4. Students shall abide by the Whelan Act on Honor Code.
5. Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off or turned to silent during class. Texting is not permitted during class.
6. Laptop use in class must be silent and with the permission of the instructor.
7. The two essays and the take-home final essay are intended to assess your understanding of our readings and class discussions. You may not use outside sources in your essay without the permission of the instructor.

A FEW USEFUL WEBSITES

Economics Education [http://www.frbsf.org/education/activities/treasureHunt and Lautzenheiser/](http://www.frbsf.org/education/activities/treasureHunt%20and%20Lautzenheiser/)

History of Economic Thought <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/>

New School History of Thought Page <http://www.newschool.edu/nssr/het/>