

Adam Smith (1723-1790)

Year	Event	Commentary
1723	Smith is either born or baptized on June 5, in Kirkcaldy, Fife; his father, Adam, had died in January; his mother, Margaret Douglas Smith, raised Smith, and the two became quite close (Margaret died only six years before Smith, at the age of 90).	This is another example of parental loss, and its apparent relationship with creative genius (see Ochse, 1990, ch. 4, and Simonton, 1999, ch. 4).
1737	Smith attends Glasgow University at the age of 14 (which was actually a bit old for his time).	Smith had two influential teachers while a student at Glasgow University: (a) Frances Hutcheson, the well-known moral philosopher, and (b) Robert Simson, a capable mathematician. The importance and role of mentors and models in the nurturance of creative genius is well documented (see Simonton, 1999, ch. 6, and Ochse, 1990, ch. 5).
1740	Smith is awarded a Snell Exhibition to Balliol College, Oxford (this was scholarship awarded to Glasgow "undergraduates" to support advanced study at Oxford); the quality of teaching at Oxford was miserable, but the library was excellent – Smith reads widely, especially in the classics, but also including Hume's <i>Treatise</i> .	Intensive, self-directed study is a common characteristic of creative geniuses, including the "Magnificent Seven" of the Scottish Enlightenment (see Ochse, 1990, ch. 8) – by "Magnificent Seven" I mean Robert Adam, James Boswell, Robert Burns, David Hume, James Hutton, Adam Smith, and James Watt (while in Scotland, we will discuss my criteria for choosing these seven from among all the <i>literati</i> of the Scottish Enlightenment).
1746	Smith leaves Balliol College (four years early), returning to Kirkcaldy to live with his mother.	
1748	Through the advocacy of influential friends, Smith is invited to give a lecture series in Edinburgh on rhetoric and <i>belles-lettres</i> ; his lectures are quite popular, and he lectures in Edinburgh for three successive years.	
1751	Smith earns an appointment to the Chair of Logic at Glasgow University, but requests a transfer to the newly vacant Chair of Moral Philosophy the following year, a position which holds for a dozen years.	Of all the "Magnificent Seven", Smith is the only one to hold an academic position – significantly, his work on <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> was completed <i>after</i> he left the academic setting and the demands of teaching.
1759	Smith publishes his <i>Theory of Moral Sentiments</i> , based on portions of his Glasgow lectures.	
1764	Smith resigns his Glasgow position (with great honor and to the chagrin of his students), to become tutor to the young Duke of Buccleuch; his salary and pension guarantee Smith the economic freedom to work on his new treatise, <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> . Smith and his young charges (the Duke and his brother, Hew Scott) travel widely in France and Switzerland, and Smith becomes a "student of the world": Smith	Smith repeats a common pattern among the <i>literati</i> of the Scottish Enlightenment of travel to France (see David Hume); especially important in Smith's case are (a) his introduction to French economic ideas, which are ahead of those in Britain at the time, and (b) an opportunity to compare the economic systems of France and Britain (according to Bateson, 1979, comparison of differences is at the heart

especially benefits from his discussions with the French economic philosopher, François Quesnay. of generative processes).

- 1766 Hew Scott dies from an illness, and the Duke and Smith return to London, where Smith continues work on *The Wealth of Nations*.
- 1767 The Duke marries, so Smith returns to Kirkcaldy to live with his mother and work full time on *The Wealth of Nations*.
- 1776 *The Wealth of Nations* is finally published, after years of work, critical feedback from friends (including Benjamin Franklin), and with critical and popular acclaim – and with almost immediate impact on public policy in Britain. Later in the year, David Hume dies (Hume and Smith were close, warm friends, with great mutual respect) and Smith's account of Hume's gracious death stirs quite a controversy.
- 1777 Smith is appointed Commissioner of Customs in Scotland, an appointment many thought odd for such a distinguished philosopher, but it allowed Smith and his mother to live in Edinburgh with his most congenial friends, especially Black and Hutton. Smith purchased Panmure House, in Edinburgh's Canongate, which he shared with his mother and cousin, Janet Douglas.
- 1787 Smith is elected Rector of Glasgow University, a position which he is honored to accept.
- 1790 Smith publishes an expanded and revised version of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*; Smith dies on July 17, and is buried at Canongate Churchyard (Edinburgh's Canongate is shown below).

The image below is by James Tassie, 1787 (National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh)

