Law 622. Jurisprudence Readings Seminar (Spring 2012)

Education for Liberty in Adam Smith, Locke, and Rousseau

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The American Declaration of Independence assumes without argument that governments are instituted to secure our unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Even assuming that no argument is needed for that proposition, it leaves unexplained what liberty and happiness are. The necessary complement to these rights, and to the governments and laws that secure them, is education. No one would think that a license to operate a motor vehicle is all that one needs to be a good driver, and there is general agreement about the kind of education one should get before a driver’s license is issued. Political and legal rights presumably also require a complementary education, but there is much less agreement about what kind of education that should be.

This seminar will look at three important modern efforts to describe the education that is needed for the successful pursuit of happiness.

Starting with the week of January 16, everyone will email me a short paper about the readings for the coming week, which will be due each week on Monday by 5:00 p.m. These required papers can be as short as a page or two and will not be graded, though well-done papers will count positively toward the 25% class participation component of the grade for the course. The principal purpose of the weekly papers is to help you get started in thinking about the readings for that week’s classes. They can be a summary of the reading assignment, or brief reflections on some puzzle or difficulty in the reading, or anything else that you find useful in preparing for class.

The last two classes will be reserved for student presentations of an initial draft of the seminar paper, which will constitute 75% of the grade for the course. These presentations will be optional, but I encourage everyone to take advantage of the opportunity to get some feedback before completing the paper.

We will use the following editions:


Tentative Assignments

Week of January 9  Locke, *Thoughts on Education*

Week of January 16  Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*

Week of January 23  Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Parts I-III

Week of January 30  Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Parts IV-VII

Week of February 6  Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, and Replies to Critics

Week of February 13  Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*

Week of February 20  Rousseau, *Emile*, Preface and Book I

Week of February 27  Rousseau, *Emile*, Book II

Week of March 5  Rousseau, *Emile*, Book III

Week of March 12  Spring Break

Week of March 19  Rousseau, *Emile*, Book IV, pp. 211-313

Week of March 26  Rousseau, *Emile*, Book IV, pp. 313-55

Week of April 2  Rousseau, *Emile*, Book V

Week of April 9  Rousseau, *Letter to D'Alembert on the Theater*

Week of April 16  Student presentations