

Peace, Prosperity, and Jealousy of Trade: The State of Political Economy in Early Modern Europe

Description

This workshop examines the correlation between the rise of the modern state and the idea of commercial society in the early modern period. By the eighteenth century, as David Hume observed, commerce had inextricably come to be seen as an affair of state. The conjunction between politics and economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries rendered apparent both a problem and a promise. On the one hand, what Hume called “jealousy of trade” had reshaped the relationship between Europe’s territorial states and urged them to engage in global market competition, necessary for their own glory and survival. On the other, the politics of commerce held up a vision of a new future; one that was characterised by international peace and national prosperity.

Debates about the theory and practice of political economy were pivotal to this story. Across early modern Europe, discussions about political economy became the driving force behind domestic projects of social, economic, and political reform. Drawing on epicurean and stoic conceptions of human nature and economic agency, these projects invoked contested ideas about liberty, the place of commercial societies in the history of mankind, and the effects of luxury on Europe’s monarchical and republican states. Debates about political economy, moreover, offered different models of how to succeed in international trade and how to rescue modern states from the perils of economic and military rivalry, which led to competing and sometimes incommensurable conceptions of state power, empire, and colonial expansion.

Approaching the discussion of political economy both through its theoretical formulation and its different contexts of application, the workshop aims to address two central historical issues. The first concerns the *unity of the problem*, or, that is, the extent to which theories and practices of political economy responded to the same problem across time and space. Was the way in which cameralist writers of the eighteenth century diagnosed the problem of commerce continuous with earlier mercantilist thoughts on the subject? Did merchants, bankers and other financial agents share the diagnosis of contemporary political philosophers and economic theorists? Did commercial society and global competition pose the same problems to Europe’s small republics as they did to Europe’s large territorial monarchies and global empires? The second concerns the *unity of the solution* offered by political economy to the problem of commercial society. Were the solutions the same across time and space? Did power and plenty as advocated by seventeenth-century Spanish mercantilists promise align with eighteenth-century French theories of *doux commerce*? Tracking the marriage of politics and economy through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the workshop seeks to reassess the state of political economy as a unifying feature of early modern and Enlightenment thought.



Georg Haas, after C. A. Lorentzen, *Frédéric Prince Royal de Danemark dans le voisinage de Frederiksberg*, ca. 1790–1794 (National Gallery of Denmark: SMK.OPEN).

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Jointly organised by:

Brian Kjør Olesen | The Moritz Stern Institute, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen
Francisco Cebreiro Ares | Departamento de Historia Moderna e Historia Contemporánea, Área de Historia Moderna, Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Programme

9:00–10:00 **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Brian Kjær Olesen

10:00–11:30 **Panel 1: Economic Practices and Agency**

Francisco Cebeiro Ares | *The Political Economy of the Banco Nacional de San Carlos and the exchange crisis of 1793*

Jaime Harguindeguy | *A Lordship Linen Factory: The Economic Practices of an Industrialist Aristocrat in 18th-Century Spain*

Chair: Brian Kjær Olesen

11:30–12:00 **Coffee/Break**

12:00–13:30 **Panel 2: Languages, Translation, and Emulation**

Giovanni Lista | *Translating Languages of Empire: Andrew Fletcher's Discorso delle Cose di Spagna (1698)*

Brian Kjær Olesen | *After Melon: Doux commerce and the Political Economy of Danish Imperialism*

Chair: Benoît Marechaux

13:30–15:30 **Lunch**

15:30–17:00 **Panel 3 (online): Financial Networks and Political Projects**

Alberto Hernández Pérez | *The Consulate of Commerce of Mexico and the Financing Networks of the Presidios and Strongholds of the Viceroyalty of New Spain (1680-1725)*

Laurelin Middelkoop | *Before doux commerce: the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's political economy for peace and prosperity*

Chair: Brian Kjær Olesen

17:00–17:30 **Coffee/Break**

17:30–18:00 **Summary and Plenary Discussion**

20:00 **Dinner**

List of Participants

Jaime Harguindey (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

Giovanni Lista (IZEA, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

Laurelin Middelkoop (European University Institute/GHI Washington DC)

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