[Note to Undergraduates: For Undergraduates who enroll in the course as Econ 496 tba (CRN tba), the requirements will be less.]

**The Esoteric Adam Smith**

Fall 2015, (Econ 895 006; CRN 75853)

Professor Daniel Klein

Select Wednesdays 1:30 – 3:00, meeting place: Blueridge Hall 127

This course is organized as a special topics course for students who have taken or are concurrently taking Smithian Political Economy. The students enrolled are expected to participate in the [Adam Smith Reading Group](http://econfaculty.gmu.edu/klein/Assets/GMU_Econ_Smith_Reading_plan.htm), which will meet on five Fridays, and to attend [the Invisible Hand Seminar](http://econfaculty.gmu.edu/klein/Assets/Invisible_Hand_Seminar.doc), which will meet on five Saturday afternoons.

In addition, students enrolled in this course will meet 7x for 90 minutes. So, all together among the three forums, your sitting-in-class time should just about equal that for a normal course.

The purpose of the course will be for students to develop papers for publication on the theme of esotericism in Adam Smith. We shall focus on political/policy esotericism, as opposed to religious esotericism. I have in mind several specific topics for papers, including: (1) Smith on usury; (2) Smith on schooling of children; (3) Smith on redistribution of wealth/poor law; (4) Smith on democracy; (5) Smith on reputation as something covered by commutative justice; (6) Smith on the public-interest view of government; (7) Smith on the centricity of liberty in his own thought; (8) Smith on ground-rent (“geo-rent”) taxation.

For years I have been thinking about esotericism in Smith. But what now prompts me to undertake this course and the plan to develop a set of papers on Smith is the book by Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (2014). We will read that book from cover to cover and discuss every chapter. Besides that book, the other readings will mainly be selections from Smith as pertain to the specific topics in his thought where esotericism is relevant.

Students enrolled are expected to be working on research projects that link at least loosely to Adam Smith. Besides reading and discussing two books indicated below, the course will direct group attention to each student’s research project, and the professor (Klein) will advise on the student’s project.

Graduate students will be required to make substantial progress on their projects, and to be more thorough and active in reading and discussion. For undergraduates, the expectations/requirements will simply be somewhat lighter.

The works that will be read and discussed include the following:

1. Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (UChicagoP, 2014).
2. Edmund Burke, *A Vindication of Natural Society* [1756] (Liberty Fund), [link](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/burke-a-vindication-of-natural-society) at Liberty Fund link.
3. Arthur Lee, *An Essay in Vindication of the Continental Colonies of America, from a Censure of Mr Adam Smith, in his Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1764.
4. Selections from Adam Smith.
5. Selections of Leo Strauss.
6. (possibly) Galiani, Dialogues on the Grain Trade (see Melzer p. 256)
7. (possibly) Lester G. Crocker, “The Problem of Truth and Falsehood in the Age of Enlightenment,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14(4): 575-603.

**Getting Help:** Four good ways to get help from me: (1) email me; (2) ask questions during class, (3) talk to me right after class; (4) talk by phone – but I call you (email your ph number to me) – **talking by phone usually works really well.** Email me, and we will go from there. I promise to respond quickly.

**Accommodations for students with disabilities:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the [Office of Disability Services](http://ods.gmu.edu/) at 703.993.2474 or [ods.gmu.edu](http://ods.gmu.edu/). All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.