

The World in 1776/2026: *The Wealth of Nations* at 250

Conveners: [Maha Rafi Atal](#) and [Craig Smith](#), University of Glasgow

The University of Glasgow and the British Academy invite submissions to "The World in 1776/2026: *The Wealth of Nations* at 250," a workshop to be held alongside the annual convention of the International Adam Smith Society in Glasgow from 17-20 June 2026.

The Wealth of Nations is one of the most influential, yet misunderstood, books in human history. Smith's analysis of the new form of freedom that was emerging during the Enlightenment has shaped the way we think about morality, politics, and economics. Yet *The Wealth of Nations* is known today mostly as a work of academic economics, when it was much more. It was written against the backdrop of a revolutionary age, in which the emergence of empires transformed the global economy and new Enlightenment ideas sowed the seeds of representative government. Writing on the eve of the American Revolution, Smith used his expertise in political economy to argue against the imperial policies of the time, including slavery, as inconsistent with Enlightenment values. He critiqued the power of large corporations and accused them of corrupting the British government and undermining the free market.

The Wealth of Nations is a book that engaged with its time and speaks to ours. The debates Smith engaged are still with us: How should we regulate business? How can we protect workers from exploitation? How can we address inequality? What economic and political relations should countries have with one another? We can use Smith's answers as a springboard to generate new answers for our time.

We particularly welcome proposals that explore Smith in his 1776 context, addressing issues of empire and revolution, and proposals that apply Smithian ideas in our 2026 context, addressing contemporary issues in political economy such as monopoly, corporate governance, commerce and justice. Papers can be submitted to four themed panels addressing these issues, detailed below.

To submit, send a title and 250-word abstract to maharafi.atal@glasgow.ac.uk by Monday, December 15th, indicating which panel your paper could contribute to. Following the workshop, full papers will be compiled into an edited volume or journal special issue. When submitting abstracts, authors should additionally confirm they are prepared to deliver a full paper by summer 2026.

Panels

The World in 1776: The Wealth of Empires.

This panel will cover Smith's radical critique of the Atlantic slave trade, the East India Company, and British imperialism in India and Africa; and the way Smith's ideas fit into Enlightenment debates on empire; and the relevance of Smith's critique for contemporary debates on the legacies of slavery and empire.

The World in 1776: The Age of Revolutions.

This panel will cover Smith's analysis of the politics and economics of British rule in the American colonies, and situate his prescient critique on the eve of the American Revolution at the midpoint of a revolutionary century that saw uprisings from France to Haiti to Venezuela.

The World in 2026 Monopolists and Robber Barons

This will cover Smith's critique of corporations and their role in both state capture and the oppression of workers, but from a contemporary perspective, considering what Smith's ideas contribute to our understanding of the power of Amazon or Exxon Mobil, or the conditions of workers in global supply chains.

The World in 2026: Commerce and Justice

This panel will examine Smith as a moral theorist, drawing on his account of sympathy (empathy), and the economic as a relational and social domain to comment on contemporary issues like wealth inequality, generational inequality, climate change and climate justice.