Adam Smith was born in a small village in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, where his widowed mother raised him. At age fourteen, as was the usual practice, he entered the University of Glasgow on scholarship. He later attended Balliol College at Oxford, graduating with an extensive knowledge of European literature and an enduring contempt for English schools.

He returned home, and after delivering a series of well-received lectures was made first chair of logic (1751), then chair of moral philosophy (1752), at Glasgow University.

He left academia in 1764 to tutor the young duke of Buccleuch. For more than two years they traveled throughout France and into Switzerland, an experience that brought Smith into contact with his contemporaries Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, [**François Quesnay**](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Quesnay.html), and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot. With the life pension he had earned in the service of the duke, Smith retired to his birthplace of Kirkcaldy to write *The Wealth of Nations.* It was published in 1776, the same year the American Declaration of Independence was signed and in which his close friend [**David Hume**](http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Hume.html) died. In 1778 he was appointed commissioner of customs. In this job he helped enforce laws against smuggling. In *The Wealth of Nations,* he had defended smuggling as a legitimate activity in the face of “unnatural” legislation. Adam Smith never married. He died in Edinburgh on July 19, 1790.