

**GROWTH, INEQUALITY, AND GLOBALIZATION:
THE GREAT COMMODIFICATION, FROM ANCIENT
TABLETS TO THE ALGORITHMIC SOULS**

Professor: **David Duhamel**
Session: **July 2026**
Language of instruction: **English**
Number of hours of class: **36h**
Format: **On campus**



Objective of the Course

While discussing how ideas and material conditions intertwine with history to create our world, we will attempt to make sense of our time. The last two hundred years have been characterized by a series of changes or shifts of unheard and poorly understood depth and promptness. Since 1800, wealth has been multiplied by 80, world population by 8, life expectancy by 2, child mortality divided by 10 and so on. Individualism, mass consumption, mass education and the emancipation of women have been the landmarks of an evolution that some dubbed: “The great acceleration.” Add on top of that, ever-growing technological changes, rising inequalities and environmental degradation and you get a multi-faceted situation that this course aims to understand synthetically or even dare we say “holistically.”



Summary

The course is an overview of how commodification (market mentality) has risen over the centuries, and how it has influenced neighbouring disciplines such as political philosophy, common law, political science, sociology and psychology.

Globalization, free trade, growth and its possible end, the crisis, inequalities, the rise of AI and its impact on the labor market, populism, demographic trends... all those

subjects will be studied. From Gilgamesh and Aristotle to neuroeconomics, AI and labubus, this course aims to contextualize contemporary debates and underline how an economic “way of thinking” is now one of, if not the, dominant scheme in our lives, whether it is at the individual, societal or planetary levels. Whether facing a Tinder account, a fiscal policy proposition or global warming, it seems that one’s “natural” reaction to the problem is the same: a combination of cost/benefit analysis in a coordination game framework. How did we come to that?

As Keynes wrote, “The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.”

Better to be a self-aware economist than the slave of a dead one.



Organization of the course

Each course will be devoted to a theme and a select number of authors. Economic and current events in the largest sense will be mobilized to emphasize the longevity of our subject. We will use case studies, whether historical, or experimental, to engage discussion and show how the history of economic thought shaped - if not totally constructed - some of our most important contemporary debates (the undesirability of inequalities, the value of globalization, the commodification of human interaction, the quantification of, well, everything etc.).

Tentative outline

- Class 1. Introduction and Pre-History of Economic Thought
- Class 2. The rise of Individualism, from Thomas Aquinas to Rousseau
- Class 3. Setting Up the Table: Adam Smith and the Invention of Growth
- Class 4. With a bang (Malthus, climate change) or with a whimper (demographics)?
- Class 5. The Case for Globalization (Ricardo and Montesquieu) and the Case Against It
- Class 6. The rise of Quantification (utilitarianism) and commodification (neoclassicism)
- Class 7. The Keynesian Revolution. The invention of macroeconomics
- Class 8. The Neo-Liberal Counterrevolution.
- Class 9. Rising Inequality: The Revolt of the Rich
- Class 10. Imperialism and Rational Choice Theory: The Trojan Horse

- Class 11. The Limits of Imperialism. Behavioral economics, economics of convention and neuroeconomics
- Class 12. We will probably be running late by then. Recap + Final Exam



Bibliography

At this point, there is only suggested readings. Some additional material might be added.

- Sanne Blauw, 2018, The Number Bias, Sceptre
- Rutger Bregman, 2014, Utopia for realists, Bloomsbury
- David Duhamel, 2024, Un Monde sans enfants, Buchet Chastel
- Ingrid Robeyns, 2024, Limitarianism, The case against extreme wealth, Allen Lane.
- Hand Rosling, 2018, Factfulness, Sceptre
- Michael Sandel, 2012, What money can't buy, MacMillan
- Michael Sandel, 2020, The Tyranny of Merit, MacMillan
- Thomas Sedlacek, 2011, Economics and Good and Evil, Oxford University press
- Matthew Stewart, 2021, The 9.9 percent, Simon Shuster



Requirements for validation

A final written test during the last class	75%
Class Participation	25%

No particular knowledge is necessary prior to the class.



Professor's Biography



David Duhamel

Economist, author and lecturer
Economics teacher at Scpo and Parsons Paris.
PhD in economics

Specialises in teaching history of economic thought and demographic change

Occasional consultant for documentaries.

Author of "Un Monde sans enfants." (Buchet Chastel 2024).

Author of the podcast "Un monde sans enfants".

<https://open.spotify.com/show/5QDnNFHSPCuc3fx2EfxO1G?si=56846a320d74469f>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/fr/podcast/un-monde-sans-enfants/id1654011683>