



Prof. Brad Gregory (University of Notre Dame, IN)

Legitimizing Avarice from Hobbes to Hume: A Retrospective from the Anthropocene

Thursday, May 28th, 2026 (16:30-18:00)

UZH, Karl Schmid-Strasse 4, 8006 Zürich ([KO2-F-150](#))



The ideational conditions of the Anthropocene reach far deeper into the past than is often recognized. Central factors that have contributed to our current global environmental crisis already arose *before* the Industrial Revolution in England, including the rejection of the traditional Christian sin of avarice and its replacement by the open-ended pursuit of wealth and possessions as an ostensibly benign, beneficial expression of “self-interest.”

In this public lecture, Brad S. Gregory explores key contributions to this changing discourse of acquisitiveness in early modern Britain through the writings of Thomas Hobbes, Nicholas Barbon, Bernard Mandeville, and David Hume.



Brad S. Gregory is a historian of Western Europe in the Reformation era, analyzing the effects of early modern religious disagreement and religio-political conflict, not only in the 16th and 17th centuries, but also in the long-term shaping of Western modernity down to the present. In recent years, the scope of his work has further expanded and takes the Anthropocene as its point of departure, while retaining an emphasis on the assumptions, ambitions, practices, and institutions of premodern Western Europeans that antedated the Industrial Revolution while fostering the anthropogenic trajectories that led our planet out of the Holocene. He is currently working on a major project on the relationship between Western Christianity and the long-term formation of our current global environmental realities, titled *The Way of the World: Power, Wealth, and Civilization from the Last Ice Age to the Anthropocene*. (University of Notre Dame, Indiana)