

Edited by Maria Pia Paganelli,  
Dennis C. Rasmussen and Craig Smith

# Adam Smith and Rousseau

Ethics, Politics,  
Economics



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## Citations and Abbreviations

This volume uses the author/date in-text citation style with two exceptions. Scholars of Adam Smith have adopted a standard citation system to the Glasgow Edition of the Works of Adam Smith, published in hardback by Oxford University Press and in paperback by Liberty Fund Press, Indianapolis, and we have used this system in citations of Smith throughout the volume. Details of the standard abbreviations appear below.

For Rousseau, in the absence of a universally agreed standard English translation, we allowed the authors to select their own preferred translations (or indeed to make their own). In each case a note is offered to explain the editions and translations used. In several cases the citations are accompanied by reference to the French-language *Œuvres complètes*.

- AL     *The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of the Ancient Logics and Metaphysics*. In EPS (cited by paragraph: page).
- AP     *The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of the Ancient Physics*. In EPS (cited by paragraph: page).
- CL     *Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages*. In LRBL (cited by paragraph: page).
- Corr.   *Correspondence of Adam Smith*. Edited by E. Mossner and I. Ross (1987) (cited by letter: page).
- ED     *Early Draft of Part of the Wealth of Nations*. In LJ (cited by paragraph: page).

- EPS *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*. Edited by W. Wightman, J. Bryce and I. Ross (1982).
- ES *Of the External Senses*. In EPS (cited by paragraph: page).
- HA *The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy*. In EPS (cited by section. paragraph: page).
- IA *Of the Nature of that Imitation which takes place in what are called the Imitative Arts*. In EPS (cited by page).
- Letter *Letter to the Edinburgh Review*. In EPS (cited by page).
- Life *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.* Dugald Stewart. In EPS (cited by page).
- LJA *Lectures on Jurisprudence* 1762/3. Edited by R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael and P. G. Stein (1978) (cited by page).
- LJB *Lectures on Jurisprudence* 1766. Edited by R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael and P. G. Stein (1978) (cited by page).
- LRBL *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. Edited by J. Bryce (1985) (cited by section. paragraph: page).
- TMS *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Edited by A. L. Macfie and D. D. Raphael (1982) (cited by part. section. chapter. paragraph: page).
- WN *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Edited by R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (1981) (cited by book. part. chapter. paragraph: page).

## Introduction

*Maria Pia Paganelli, Dennis C. Rasmussen and  
Craig Smith*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith were two of the foremost figures of the European Enlightenment. They made seminal contributions to moral and political philosophy and shaped some of the key concepts of modern political economy. For some time there was a popular, if crude, notion that the two were in some sense opposites or even enemies. This crude reading of Smith as the advocate of liberalism, commercial society and progress as contrasted to Rousseau's advocacy of republicanism, the noble savage and a return to nature invited the unwary reader to see Smith as the champion of selfishness and progenitor of capitalism, in stark opposition to Rousseau as the champion of egalitarianism and the intellectual forefather of socialism. Fortunately the turn towards contextual and textual scholarship in the history of ideas has put paid to these stereotypes and has allowed the much more complex and rich connection between these thinkers to emerge. We are no longer dealing with caricatures where these two great thinkers are used as emblems for later intellectual developments, but we are still in the early stages of the exploration of their relationship. The present volume advances the analysis of their ideas by exploring a series of shared themes and preoccupations that can be traced in their writings.

This introduction sets the scene for the collection of essays that follows by briefly describing some of the biographical and textual elements of the Smith–Rousseau connection, and then providing a brief sketch of some of the recent scholarly work on the relationship between the two thinkers.

### Rousseau and Smith: Some Context and Connections

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) and Adam Smith (1723–90) were near contemporaries, but they never corresponded and probably never met one another. It is just possible that they met in Paris in late December 1765 or early January 1766, but the evidence seems to point against such a meeting (see Rasmussen 2008: 53–4). They did, however, have many mutual acquaintances and interlocutors among Europe's 'republic of letters'. Smith befriended a number of the leading *philosophes* during his stay in Paris in 1766 – Dugald Stewart, Smith's first biographer, singles out 'Turgot, Quesnai, Morellet, Necker, d'Alembert, Helvetius, Marmontel, Madame Riccoboni' (Life: 302–3) – and most of these figures knew Rousseau as well. The individual with the closest links to the two of them, however, was surely David Hume. Hume was Smith's best friend for more than a quarter of a century (see Rasmussen 2017), and his quarrel with Rousseau in 1766 created a considerable stir throughout the European literary world (see Zaretsky and Scott 2009). This quarrel occasioned a number of comments on Rousseau in the correspondence between Smith and Hume (see Corr. 90: 110; 93: 112–13; 96: 118; 103: 125; 109: 132; 111: 133–6; 112: 136–7). As might be expected, given the circumstances, these comments were mostly quite negative in tone. At one point Smith called Rousseau a 'great . . . Rascal' and a 'hypocritical Pedant' (Corr. 93: 112–13).

Rousseau never mentions Smith in any of his surviving letters or other writings, but Smith's references to Rousseau were not confined to his correspondence. In fact, one of Smith's earliest published works, an anonymous letter to the editors of the *Edinburgh Review* (1756), included a substantial review of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755). In the letter Smith urged the *Review* to extend its ambit beyond Scottish publications and to bring news of the latest European works to Scottish readers. Smith's worry that Scotland's nascent cultural institutions ran the risk of becoming parochial indicates that he was aware that the intellectual life of Enlightenment Europe depended on the exchange and circulation of ideas (for analysis, see Lomonaco 2002). As an example of the sort of works that the *Review* should discuss, Smith turned to Rousseau's *Discourse*. He began by pointing to some unexpected parallels between Rousseau and Bernard Mandeville, the notorious defender of commercial vice, and then translated three



long passages from the *Discourse* for the *Review*'s readers (Letter: 250–4). This letter demonstrates that Smith was actively engaged with Rousseau's thought from the early stages of his career, as he was writing *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). (The letter is discussed in more detail in a number of the contributions to this volume, particularly those of Hill, McHugh and Rasmussen.)

While the *Letter to the Edinburgh Review* was the earliest and most extensive of Smith's explicit discussions of Rousseau, it was not the only one. Smith also mentioned 'the ingenious and eloquent M. Rousseau of Geneva' in his *Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages* (1761), where he attempted to answer a question that Rousseau had raised in the *Discourse on Inequality*, that of how general names were first formed (see CL 2: 205). Smith also commented on Rousseau in a similar context in his lectures on rhetoric and *belles lettres* at Glasgow University in 1762–63 (see LRBL i.19: 9–10). Another reference to Rousseau can be found in Smith's essay *Of the Imitative Arts* (1795), in which he discussed Rousseau's argument in the *Dictionary of Music* (1768) that music has the power to imitate sights and events as well as sounds (see IA: 199–200). We have a record of a further comment by Smith on Rousseau from Barthélemy Faujas de Saint-Fond, a French geologist who visited Edinburgh in 1782. Smith 'spoke to me of Rousseau with a kind of religious respect', Saint-Fond reported: "'Voltaire," said he, "sought to correct the vices and the follies of mankind by laughing at them, and sometimes even getting angry with them; Rousseau, by the attraction of sentiment, and the force of conviction, drew the reader into the heart of reason. His *Contrat Social* will in time avenge him for all the persecutions he suffered"' (Saint-Fond 1907: 246). It is also worth noting that Smith owned many of Rousseau's works (in French), including the *Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theater* (1758), the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* and Rousseau's replies to his critics, the *Letter on French Music*, his comic play *Narcisse*, his opera *Le Devin du village* (*The Village Soothsayer*), the *Encyclopédie* entry on *Political Economy*, and the *Discourse on Inequality* (all found in a collection of Rousseau's *Oeuvres diverses* from 1760), *Julie, or the New Heloïse* (1761), *Emile* (1762), *Letters Written from the Mountain* (1764), and a few miscellaneous volumes from later collections (see Mizuta 2000: 217–18).

Smith never mentions Rousseau by name in either of his books, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) or *The Wealth of Nations*

(1776), but this omission is not particularly surprising: apart from Part VII of the former ('Of Systems of Moral Philosophy'), Smith rarely named any contemporaneous philosophers in these works, even the ones with whom he frequently and clearly engaged, such as Hume. Charles Griswold (1999: 47) suggests that Smith declined to explicitly name the thinkers with whom he engaged because he was 'intent on appealing directly to our everyday experience and reflection' and wanted to '[avoid] the impression that he wishes to debate another philosopher rather than engage the reflective reader in consideration of a view that naturally suggests itself'. In any event, there is good reason to believe that Smith had Rousseau in mind while writing several important passages in his books. Not only do some of his arguments appear to be directed at Rousseau, but at a few crucial junctures he also came close to duplicating phrases from Rousseau – phrases that, moreover, appeared in the very passages that he himself had translated in his *Letter to the Edinburgh Review*. As it happens, these paraphrases are found in some of the most famous passages in Smith's corpus.

The first of Smith's paraphrases of Rousseau appears in the passage on the ambitious 'poor man's son' in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The poor man's son admires the advantages of the rich – their palaces, carriages, servants and so on – and imagines how much happier he would be if he were in their situation. Yet in the process of seeking these advantages for himself, he endures far more toil and anxiety than he would have endured by simply doing without them. In his attempt to distinguish himself, Smith writes, the poor man's son is forced to debase himself: 'he makes his court to all mankind; he serves those whom he hates, and is obsequious to those whom he despises' (TMS IV.1.8: 181). Similarly, in one of the passages from Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* that Smith translated for the *Edinburgh Review*, Rousseau declared that all too frequently the civilised individual 'makes his court to the great whom he hates, and to the rich whom he despises' (this is Smith's translation; see Letter: 253). The parallels here are too clear to miss.

The best-known of Smith's paraphrases of Rousseau – which is noted by the editors of the Glasgow Edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* – comes just a few pages later, in the same paragraph as the only mention of the 'invisible hand' in that work. After dilating on the fact that people spend much of their lives striving for ever-more wealth and material goods, even though

these things cannot guarantee true happiness and may even jeopardise it, Smith writes:

And it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind. It is this which first prompted them to cultivate the ground, to build houses, to found cities and commonwealths, and to invent and improve all the sciences and arts, which ennoble and embellish human life; which have entirely changed the whole face of the globe, have turned the rude forests of nature into agreeable and fertile plains ... (TMS IV.I.IO: 183)

The last phrase of this quotation resembles another part of Rousseau's *Discourse* that Smith translated for the *Edinburgh Review*, in which Rousseau said that through the rise of civilisation 'the vast forests of nature were changed into agreeable plains' (Smith's translation; Letter: 252). As Michael Ignatieff (1986: 191) notes, this 'choice of words is so close to those of Rousseau ... that it cannot be mere coincidence'.

Still another parallel with Rousseau can be found in the famous 'butcher, brewer and baker' passage of *The Wealth of Nations*. Immediately before giving the example of the butcher, brewer and baker to prove his point, Smith remarks that it makes little sense for an individual in a commercial society to appeal to the benevolence of others in order to procure his needs. Instead, 'he will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them' (WN I.ii.2: 26). In another passage from Rousseau's *Discourse* that Smith translated, Rousseau claimed that the rise of dependence in the modern world requires each individual to 'endeavour to interest [others] in his situation, and to make them find, either in reality or appearance, their advantage in labouring for his' (Smith's translation; Letter: 252). Smith did not duplicate Rousseau's language here to quite the extent that he did in the two passages from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, but some of the wording and much of the sentiment echo Rousseau's.

In these passages, and indeed throughout his corpus, Smith seemed to absorb some elements of Rousseau's views while simultaneously reacting against others. This complex blend of influence and reaction is part of what makes the Smith–Rousseau connection a subject ripe for further exploration.

### Recent Scholarship on Rousseau and Smith

The scholarly literatures on Rousseau and Smith, taken individually, have long been, in the apt phrase of Frederick Neuhouser, ‘unsurveyably vast’ (2014: 15). Until fairly recently, however, these literatures developed on parallel tracks, in almost complete isolation from one another. Before the boom in Smith studies that was set off by the bicentennial of *The Wealth of Nations* and the publication of the Glasgow Edition of Smith’s works in 1976, sustained examinations of Smith and Rousseau were very few and far between (though see West 1971; Colletti 1972). A handful of essays on the two appeared in the 1980s and 1990s (see Ignatieff 1986; France 1989; Berry 1990; Barry 1995; Winch 1996), but the past decade and a half has seen an explosion of scholarship on various aspects of this connection, including studies on (inter alia) their assessments of commercial society, Smith’s ‘sympathy’ and Rousseau’s ‘pity’, how they each envisioned the ‘science of the legislator’, and their respective views of autonomy, civic republicanism, the division of labour, economics, equality/inequality, human nature, morality/virtue, philosophy, politics, poverty, progress, self-love and the theatre (see Pack 2000; Larrère 2002; Force 2003; Hurtado 2003; 2004; Berry 2004; Hanley 2006; 2008a; 2008b; 2009: 26–31, 36–42, 95–7, 102–9, 116–22, 137–40, 146, 157, 205; Rasmussen 2006; 2013; Schliesser 2006; Neuhouser 2008: 230–2, 241–8, 262–3; Spector 2009; Vaughan 2009; Griswold 2010; Phillipson 2010: 145–57; Kukathas 2014; Rathbone 2015; Stimson 2015; Niimura 2016; Nazar forthcoming; Potkay 2017; Sagar forthcoming; Schwarze and Scott working paper). There are also three book-length treatments of Smith and Rousseau. Those by Dennis C. Rasmussen (2008) and Istvan Hont (2015) offer rather different interpretations of these thinkers’ views of human nature and the virtues and shortcomings of commercial society, while Charles Griswold (2017) constructs a series of dialogues between Rousseau and Smith on the human self and the problems that it faces, particularly in the modern world.

To this point much of the literature on the Smith–Rousseau connection has been authored by scholars who are primarily experts on Smith, and they have tended to use Rousseau as something of a foil with which to highlight or expose particular aspects of Smith’s outlook. The present volume includes a number of contributions

from scholars whose work focuses primarily on Rousseau and who therefore approach the relationship from the opposite direction. More broadly, the growing scholarly interest in the Smith–Rousseau connection makes this volume a timely one, particularly insofar as many of the contributions engage with – and occasionally challenge – the most recent developments in the field. As Hont notes,

This is a good time to start . . . reconsidering the apparently opposite systems of Rousseau and Smith. We cannot but learn from the comparison. *Amour-propre*, the nation-state, and commerce are still the bread and butter of modern political theory, while *The Wealth of Nations* and *The Social Contract* are still among the most frequently mentioned books of modernity. (2015: 132)

### The Present Volume

This volume brings together an international group of scholars working across the disciplines of philosophy, economics, political theory, literature and history. Each chapter explores an element of the moral and/or political philosophy of Rousseau and Smith.

The first section develops the themes of this Introduction with two essays engaging the latest scholarship on Rousseau and Smith. Ryan Patrick Hanley provides a critical engagement with one of the most important recent contributions to the topic, Istvan Hont's posthumously published *Politics in Commercial Society* (2015). Hanley considers the acute, and at times counter-intuitive, arguments that Hont develops in reaction to both the primary texts and the developing literature on the two thinkers. This is followed by a chapter from Mark Hulliung who offers a critical and cautionary note in light of the existing work on Rousseau and Smith. We should, Hulliung argues, be cautious when we compare and contrast two thinkers that we are not reading a conversation between them that may not, in reality, have taken place. This allows us to distinguish actual interlocutors from those who are made into interlocutors when their writings are compared and contrasted. This task of comparative Enlightenment studies provides another arena in which to consider Smith and Rousseau.

The remaining sections of the book are arranged thematically around key concepts that emerge from the work of Smith and Rousseau. In the second section, 'Self-interest and Sympathy', the

essays explore the central tension between self-interest and sentimental sociability that marks such a significant shared concern of Rousseau and Smith. Christel Fricke continues the engagement with recent work by considering Ryan Hanley's and Frederick Neuhouser's apparently contrasting attempts to bring Smith and Rousseau together via their views on social comparison and its place in moral education. The apparent tension between the ideas of *amour-propre* and the danger of corruption from paying too much attention to the views of others creates a space in which to examine the idea of morality emerging from interpersonal comparison. Mark Hill follows with a chapter which discusses Rousseau and Smith in the context of a wider eighteenth-century debate. As noted above, Smith's first mention of Rousseau came in a review of the *Discourse on Inequality*, in which Smith compares Rousseau to Mandeville and situates him within a wider debate about the possibility of virtuous self-interest and its tension with the idea of socially directed morality. Hill examines Smith's reading of Rousseau and suggests an alternative account of Rousseau's place in the debate on self-interest and morality. In the final chapter in this section John McHugh continues the examination of Smith's analysis of Rousseau in the *Letter to the Edinburgh Review*. McHugh takes seriously the link between Rousseau and Mandeville that Smith makes in the letter. With it, he examines Smith's criticism of Mandeville in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and reconstructs a Smithian response to Rousseau around the key issue of the corrupting or morally enhancing role of the desire for social approval.

The third section, 'Moral Sentiments and Spectatorship', continues the theme of interpersonal comparison but shifts the focus to the cultivation of the moral sentiments and the Smithian idea of an impartial spectator. Michael Schleeter examines the relationship between sympathy and virtue in Smith and Rousseau and questions the extent to which each thinker believed that commerce was in a position to erode sympathy and diminish virtue. He shifts the Rousseauian focus from the *Discourse* to *Emile* to explore the proposals for moral education that develop from the respective analyses of moral psychology. Tabitha Baker then expands the discussion to Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Heloïse*, arguing that it is through Rousseau's fiction that the complicated relationship between the two thinkers' ideas can be most evidently sourced. By examining Smithian themes in Rousseau's depiction of society and social interaction, Baker shows how Smithian concerns help

us to understand the problems addressed by Rousseau and how these can be most acutely seen in the motif of the eighteenth-century English landscape garden developed in the novel. Adam Schoene then draws on the complex autobiographical approach of *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues* to examine the notion of the divided self and self-spectatorship that links Rousseau's search for self-awareness to Smith's notion of conscience as a voice within us that is produced by the socially evolved impartial spectator. By reading the *Dialogues* protagonist 'Rousseau's' plea to 'the Frenchman' for an unprejudiced witness in discourse with Smith's conception of the impartial spectator, in which satisfaction is derived from sympathy with the pleasure or pain of another, we come to see a shared conviction that justice is crucially dependent on the fair observation of others.

The fourth section, 'Commercial Society and Justice', continues the discussion of partiality, impartiality and justice in commercial society. Charles Griswold explores the intense concern with appearances and estrangement from one's true self that are often seen as characteristic of commercial society. He offers thoughts about what a dialogue between Rousseau and Smith about these issues might look like and how they shed light on contemporary notions of self-deception and authenticity. The chapter explores the social and political implications of this issue as each thinker seeks to deal with the idea of the role of self-deception in social life. Jimena Hurtado's chapter moves the discussion to the central social and political virtue of justice. She seeks to better understand Rousseau's and Smith's views of justice by placing them in dialogue with the traditional typology of justice – commutative, distributive and estimative – that we have inherited from Aristotle. Using Aristotle's framework, she furthers our understanding of the differences and coincidences between Smith and Rousseau, particularly as regards their view of justice in a commercial society and its relationship to the concept of equality.

In the final section, 'Politics and Freedom', Dennis C. Rasmussen reconsiders his earlier reading of Smith's reference to Rousseau as embodying 'the true spirit of a republican carried a little too far' (Letter: 251). Rasmussen explores the various senses in which someone could be understood as a republican in the eighteenth century and engages with those who have taken Smith's comment to refer to Rousseau's 'positive' or republican conception of liberty. He then uses Smith's reference as a way to reconsider Smith's and

Rousseau's respective conceptions of liberty. Jason Neidleman continues the focus on politics as he examines the role of the state in the formation of public opinion in the works of Smith and Rousseau. Both thinkers recognise the necessity of this endeavour, but both are troubled by its seeming incompatibility with the principles of personal liberty and popular sovereignty. Neidleman explores both thinkers' recognition of a legislator's paradox which leaves them with the task of reconciling political influence on public opinion with a desire to allow individual liberty. The crucial role of education and civic virtue for Rousseau sets his strategy for dealing with the paradox apart from Smith's more constrained understanding of the need for education and the rule of law. The volume concludes with a chapter by Neil Saccamano that investigates the problematic status of international relations in Rousseau and Smith. In particular it considers the implications for cosmopolitan politics that arise from the thinking of two writers who are so concerned about the social dimension of moral experience. Is an extended polity possible? Or does the constraint of particular sympathy or pity preclude so extensive a social order? Saccamano explores ideas of patriotism and belonging as they emerge from the accounts of sociability in Rousseau and Smith.

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