

# Smith and Rousseau, after Hume and Mandeville

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## The author:

Paul Sagar is Junior Research Fellow in Politics at King's College, Cambridge. In 2014 he completed a PhD thesis on David Hume's moral and political philosophy, also at Cambridge, under the supervision of Istvan Hont and John Robertson. Prior to this he took an MA from the University of London, and a BA from the University of Oxford.

His primary research interests are in the history of political thought, especially in the eighteenth century. To that end he is working on a monograph provisionally entitled *The Opinion of Mankind: Sociability and the Theory of the State in Enlightenment Political Thought*, which examines early-modern debates from Hobbes to Adam Smith. In addition to this he has also published research papers on contemporary moral and political theory, with an emphasis on the work of Bernard Williams.

## The paper:

This paper re-examines Adam Smith's encounter with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Against the grain of the present scholarship, it contends that when Smith read and reviewed Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, he neither registered it as a particularly important challenge, nor was especially influenced by, or subsequently preoccupied with responding to, Rousseau. The case for this is made by examining the British context of Smith's own intervention in his 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where a proper appreciation of the roles of David Hume and Bernard Mandeville in the formation of Smith's thought pushes Rousseau firmly into the background. Realising this, however, forces us to re-consider our evaluations of Rousseau's and Smith's very different political visions. Given that questions of individual recognition, economic inequality, and political stability remain at the heart of today's social challenges, the implications of this are not just historical, but also of direct contemporary import.

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