Adam Smith in Immanuel Kant’s Moral Philosophy

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Abstract

In The Theory of Moral Sentiments Adam Smith develops a moral philosophy that uses a psychological idiom to describe morality as a social practice. This description of morality goes entirely against the moral metaphysics Immanuel Kant develops in works like his Groundwork and the second Critique, which describe morality as a ‘fact of reason’ and the categorical imperatives of an ahistorical moral will. Despite this stark contrast, in 1771 Kant was recorded praising Smith’s work. This thesis explains Kant’s praise by developing an original interpretation of the relationship between the two thinkers. First, the two thinkers are situated as representing two divergent streams of Western thought to illustrate the scope of their philosophical antagonism. Second, the existing interpretations of the Kant-Smith relationship are critiqued for ignoring or downplaying this antagonism. Third, an original study of Kant’s intellectual development is presented that shows how Smith’s descriptions of morality and politics may have influenced Kant’s moral and political philosophy.

While developing its new interpretation of the Kant-Smith relationship this thesis raises some new exegetical questions and problems that are intended be of interest not only for Kant scholars but political philosophers in general. Drawing upon my interpretation of Kant’s transcendental project, John Rawls’ use of Kant’s theory of moral reason to justify his own theory’s claims to universality is critiqued. Similarly, in light of Smith’s possible influence upon Kant, the idea that Kant’s political cosmopolitanism is grounded on rationally justifiable rights is called into question. Finally, this thesis challenges Kant’s traditional classification as a pillar of explicitly normative and prescriptive political and moral philosophy. The thesis seeks to do this by showing how Kant ultimately naturalises morality and politics into historical practices that are describable without reference to first principles.
Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Date: Signature:
Note on Sources


In keeping with convention, all references to Kant’s work refer to the original Academy Edition (AK) pagination with the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which maintains its own pagination system referring to the first (A) and second (B) editions of the work published in 1781 and 1787 respectively.

The following abbreviations are used when citing Kant’s works:

*Announcement* – Announcement of the Programme for the Lectures of the Winter Semester 1765-1766

*Anthropology* – Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View

*Blomberg* – Blomberg Logic Lecture Notes

*CJ* – Critique of Judgement

*Collins Morality* – Collins II Moral Philosophy Lecture Notes

*Conflict* – Conflict of the Faculties

*Conjectural Beginning* – Conjectural Beginning of Human History

*Correspondence* – Correspondence I, II, II

*CPR* – Critique of Pure Reason

*CPrR* – Critique of Practical Reason

*Different Races* – On the Different Races of Human Beings

*Dreams* – Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics

*Enlightenment* – What is Enlightenment?

*Friedländer Anthropology* – Friedländer IV.iii Anthropology Lecture Notes
Groundwork – Groundwork to a Metaphysics of Morals
Herder Morality – Herder V Moral Philosophy Lecture Notes
Inquiry – Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principle of Natural Theology and Morality
Living Forces – Thoughts of the True Estimation of Living Forces
MM – Metaphysics of Morals
Mrongovius Anthropology – Mrongovius I Anthropology Lecture Notes
Mrongovius Morality – Mrongivius II Morality Lecture Notes
Nachlass – Volumes 14-23 of the Academy Edition
Natural Science – Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science
New Elucidation – New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition
Observations – Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime
Perpetual Peace – Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch
Pillau Anthropology – Pillau I Anthropology Lecture Notes
Prolegomena – Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics That Will be Able to Present Itself as a Science
Religion – Religion with the Boundaries of Mere Reason
Right to Lie – On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives
Rotation of the Earth – Examination of the Question Whether the Rotation of the Earth on its Axis, by Which it Brings About the Alternation of Day and Night, has Undergone any Change Since its Origin, and How One Can be Certain of This, Which was set by the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin as the Prize Question for the Current Year
Theory & Practice - On the Common Saying: ‘This may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice
Theory of the Heavens – Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens, or Essay on the Constitution and Mechanical Origin of the Entire Universe, treated in accordance with Newtonian Principles
Universal History – Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose
Vigilantius Morality – Vigilantius IV Moral Philosophy Lecture Notes

The following abbreviations are used when citing Smith’s works:

*Ancient Logics – The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Inquiries; as Illustrated by the Ancient Logics and Metaphysics*
*Astronomy – The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Inquiries; as Illustrated by the History of Astronomy*
*Languages – Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages*
*Letter – Letter to the Edinburgh Review*
*LRBL – Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*
*TMS – The Theory of Moral Sentiments*
*WN – An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*
Acknowledgements

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