

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### *HOPE Special Issue*

### *The Wealth of Nations at 250*

From the year of its publication to the present day, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* has never ceased to arouse passion and interest among its many readers, admirers, and detractors. This book has provoked intense controversy, as well as the most antithetical interpretations and intellectual appropriations. While the debates surrounding Smith's thought have been continuous, their content has evolved with the great stakes of each era, as well as with the gradual discovery of new primary material. So much so that each generation has, in a way, made its own Adam Smith. Celebrations for the centenary of *The Wealth of Nations* revealed the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Smith as the forerunner of both deductive and inductive economic science, in the midst of the methodological dispute between the classical and historical school.<sup>1</sup> In response to the challenge posed by the well-known 'Adam Smith problem', *The Wealth of Nations'* sesquicentennial and bicentennial have shaped the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Smith invoked by some in defense of purely rational self-interested agents, and by others as a portraitist of individuals moved primarily by emotions and feelings.<sup>2</sup> On the occasion of the upcoming 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The Wealth of Nations*, this special issue aims to shed new light on this book by giving us a glimpse of what the controversial Smith of the 21<sup>st</sup> century might look like.

The publication of the critical and complete edition of Smith's works, initiated in 1976 for the bicentenary of *The Wealth of Nations*, has revived studies that place his economic thought within the rich framework of the debates of his time.<sup>3</sup> After these studies, the last few decades have seen an exponential growth in scholarly literature that has expanded Smith's image beyond that of a champion of free trade.<sup>4</sup> He now appears more clearly as a Scottish Enlightenment thinker who engaged in multidisciplinary debates such

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<sup>1</sup> See Political Economy Club of London, 1876. *Revised Report of the Proceedings at the Dinner of 31st May, 1876: Held in Celebration of the Hundredth Year of the Publication of the "Wealth of Nations": Right Hon. WE Gladstone, MP, in the Chair*, London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer. See also Terence W. Hutchison, 1976. "Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations", *The Journal of Law and Economics* 19(3): 507-528.

<sup>2</sup> See John Maurice Clark et al., 1928. *Adam Smith, 1776-1926: Lectures to Commemorate the Sesquicentennial of the Publication of "The Wealth of Nations"*; Andrew S. Skinner and Thomas Wilson (eds), 1975. *Essays on Adam Smith*, London: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press. See also Keith Tribe, 2015. "Das Adam Smith Problem and the Origins of Smith Scholarship", In: Tribe, Keith. *The Economy of the Word. Language, History, and Economics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 139-162, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> See, among others, Albert O. Hirschman, 1977. *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; Donald Winch, 1978. *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Knud Haakonssen, 1981. *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), 1983. *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>4</sup> See Vivienne Brown, 1997. 'Mere Inventions of the Imagination': A Survey of Recent Literature on Adam Smith, *Economics and Philosophy* 13(2): 281-312; Keith Tribe, 1999. "Adam Smith: Critical Theorist?", *Journal of Economic Literature* 37 (2): 609-32; Maria Pia Paganelli, 2015. "Recent Engagements with Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment", *History of Political Economy* 47(3): 363-394.

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as those on the origins of sociability and language, commerce and civilization, luxury and the arts. But while studies exploring the interdisciplinary nature of his thought have proliferated (ranging from literature to political thought, from aesthetics to neuroscience), this broadening of horizons has only partially led to a deeper analysis of his economic thought. The 250th anniversary of *The Wealth of Nations* provides an opportunity to take stock of these studies and to understand whether and to what extent they can help us better understand Smith's economic ideas. It is also a question of whether these new approaches can bring unity and harmony to his work, or further highlight its ambivalence and ambiguity.

The current proposal for a 250th anniversary special issue aims to explore open questions, not only about *The Wealth of Nations* itself, but also about economic issues that remain sensitive for us today. Some of these questions might be: What precisely is the role of feelings, speech, and persuasion in economic exchange? Under what conditions can exchange be regarded as a communicative and non-violent interaction? Does Smith's conjectural history of exchange in the "rude state of society" allow a new understanding of his theory of value? What is the relationship between the progressive state described in the WN and what we now call economic growth? Does social inequality play a role in Smith's thinking about diversity in society? Is it enough to compensate with education for the degradation caused by the excessive division of labor? Is there only a moral or political matrix to fanaticism, or also an economic one? What is the relationship between the wealth of nations and the wars they wage?

The aim of this special issue is not only to find answers to the problems raised by Smith's work, but also to welcome bold and provocative contributions that open up new problems and debates. After all, as T. W. Hutchison hoped on the bicentenary of *The Wealth of Nations*, however great the impetus that the complete edition of Smith's works would give to their study, a considerable degree of "fascinating elusiveness, ambiguity, and even mystery, seems likely (perhaps fortunately) always to remain with regard to Smith and his work".<sup>5</sup>

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Anyone interested can send their full paper (including a short abstract) **no later than 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025** to the Guest Editor: [michele.bee@unisalento.it](mailto:michele.bee@unisalento.it)

After a pre-selection process, submitted papers will be peer-reviewed by anonymous referees in accordance with the regular procedures of *History of Political Economy* (HOPE).

The issue is scheduled for publication as the 5th regular issue of HOPE in 2026.

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<sup>5</sup> Terence W. Hutchison, 1976. "The Bicentenary of Adam Smith", *The Economic Journal* 86(343): 481-492, p. 483.