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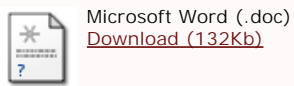
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From Adam Smith to Darwin; some neglected evidence

Schliesser, Eric (2009) *From Adam Smith to Darwin; some neglected evidence*. [Preprint]



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Abstract

In this paper I call attention to Adam Smith's "Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages" in order to facilitate understanding Adam Smith from a Darwinian perspective. By 'Darwinian' I mean a position that explains differential selection over time through natural mechanisms. First, I argue that right near the start of *Wealth of Nations* Smith signals that human nature has probably evolved over a very long amount of time. Second, I connect this evidence with an infamous passage on infanticide in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in order to argue that Smith is committed to group selection. Third, I argue that in *Dissertation on Languages* one can find building blocks for the claim that mind and language co-develop over time. More controversially I claim that in *TMS* there is a distinction between natural sentiments and moral sentiments. Natural sentiments are evolved (presumably through cultural selection) and moral sentiments are developed (through acculturation within society). Along the way, I argue that this distinction would have improved Darwin's *Descent of Man* by blocking a move toward eugenics.

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Keywords: Adam Smith, Darwin, Descent of Man, Eugenics, Moral Sentiments, Languages
Subjects: [General Issues > History of Philosophy of Science](#)
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Depositing User: [Eric Schliesser](#)
Date Deposited: 27 Jul 2009
Last Modified: 07 Oct 2010 11:18
Item ID: 4779
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