Self-Interest before Adam Smith inquires into the foundations of economic theory. It is generally assumed that the birth of modern economic science, marked by the publication of *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, was the triumph of the “selfish hypothesis” (the idea that self-interest is the motive of human action). Yet, as a neo-Epicurean idea, this hypothesis had been a matter of controversy for over a century and Smith opposed it from a neo-Stoic point of view. But how can the Epicurean principles of orthodox economic theory be reconciled with the Stoic principles of Adam Smith’s philosophy? Pierre Force shows how Smith’s theory refutes the “selfish hypothesis” and integrates it at the same time. He also explains how Smith appropriated Rousseau’s “republican” critique of modern commercial society, and makes the case that the autonomy of economic science is an unintended consequence of Smith’s “republican” principles. This book sheds light on some classic puzzles of economic theory and is a major work from an outstanding scholar.

The books in this series will discuss the emergence of intellectual traditions and of related new disciplines. The procedures, aims and vocabularies that were generated will be set in the context of the alternatives available within the contemporary frameworks of ideas and institutions. Through detailed studies of the evolution of such traditions, and their modification by different audiences, it is hoped that a new picture will form of the development of ideas in their concrete contexts. By this means, artificial distinctions between the history of philosophy, of the various sciences, of society and politics, and of literature may be seen to dissolve.

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