International Workshop

### *Unsocial Sociability:*
### *The German Enlightenment at the Intersection of European Discourses*

### *Ungesellige Geselligkeit.*
### *Die deutsche Aufklärung am Schnittpunkt der europäischen Diskurse*

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In Immanuel Kant's renowned definition, "unsocial sociability" is the human "propensity to enter into society, bound together with a mutual opposition which constantly threatens to break up society". This "antagonism", as Kant calls it in the fourth thesis of his *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Viewpoint* (1784), is nature's means to realise all human capacities over the long course of history. Yet renowned as Kant's definition has become, it was written at the end of a vigorous cross-European debate that had been conceptualised in different ways since the beginning of the eighteenth century.

This protean discussion concerned initially the urgent post-Hobbesian question of whether human beings were naturally sociable or needed to become socialised and "civilised"– a topic that kept preoccupying authors all across Europe throughout the eighteenth century. At times it was more narrowly focussed on a particular issue or domain: the psychological nature of pity (or sympathy) in relation to self-regarding drives; the use of pity in the theatre and the plastic arts; the role of these notions in the evolution and history of mankind; self-interest versus sympathy and fraternity in the economic realm and more generally in politics. Some Enlightenment philosophers concentrated on one aspect of "unsocial sociability" at the expense of others, as in Bernard Mandeville's thesis that all our feelings and inclinations could be traced back to self-interest. Most authors, however, recognised the inevitable tension between self-interest and sociability in human society and history. Even thinkers who considered this so-called antagonism lamentable tended to acknowledge its productive and powerful role in human society and history.

The workshop aims to bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars in order to discuss these themes in their European context, with a special focus on the German Enlightenment.