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Smith, Adam. [1776] 1976. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (WN)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Istvan Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith*, Edited by Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 160, \$35. ISBN 978-0-674-96770-0.

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The Adam Smith–Jean-Jacques Rousseau connection is attracting more and more attention.¹ Istvan Hont's essay follows this trend, providing a comparative reading of their politics. Hont passed away in 2013, leaving unpublished works. The present book is based on revised versions of notes of lectures that he gave at Oxford University in 2009, edited and introduced by Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher. The issue of this essay is to study the unfinished project of Smith and Rousseau: identifying which politics best suits commercial societies. They are traditionally seen as antithetical figures of the Enlightenment. Hont promises to offer new parallels between them in order to show that they have more in common than expected (p. 2).

In chapter 1 Hont begins with explaining that his book is about identifying the type of State that best fits commercial society for Smith and Rousseau, who both had the project to answer this question in specific works but who failed to do so. It is important to recall that this question was common in the eighteenth century.² The Baron de Montesquieu, Jean-François Melon, and David Hume argued that monarchical and republican governments went closer due to the rise of commerce. Hont shows that the idea of commercial society was aimed at restoring the importance of mutual needs for society in which the stabilizing factor was the interaction between utility and pride. Hont studies the “Jean Jacques Rousseau Problem,” or the discrepancy between his morality and his politics, something Smith was the first to underline in his paper for the *Edinburgh Review*. Rousseau has built a republicanism on epicurean rather than stoical foundations: that is, on the rejection of a natural sociability of man. For Hont, Smith depicted Rousseau as an improved Mandevillian and approved of the progress that the Genevan had made with regards to the Dutch. The foundation of Smith's moral system was an insight from Rousseau by which he surpassed Bernard Mandeville: the generalization of pity to every form of morality. The conclusion of this chapter is that

¹See Rasmussen (2008, 2013); Hanley (2009); Griswold (2010); and the first Smith–Rousseau conference in 2015.

²See Cheney (2008).

Smith and Rousseau shared much about morality but strongly disagreed about politics. Smith specifically rejected his ideas about the origins of justice and government. For Hont, Smith and Rousseau should be seen as presenting two different forms of republicanism that he tries to identify in the following chapters.

In chapter 2 Hont focuses on the influence of Rousseau on Smith's moral theory. As he notices, Smith's letter to the *Edinburgh Review* included three passages from Rousseau's *Second Discourse* that he paraphrased in *TMS*, especially when dealing with the role of utility in the formation of a commercial economy. And the opening of *TMS* clearly shows the influence of Rousseau, when he makes of sympathy a fellow feeling with every passion. Interestingly, Hont notes that Rousseau and Smith were seen by their contemporaries as providing epicurean, amoral discourses. Smith's critics were disturbed by his view that virtue is not the *telos* of man, as it was for stoics. Virtue is, along epicurean lines, the instrument of a good and happy life. For Hont, Smith would not have seen himself as a stoic, but as someone trying to develop the egoistic system to term. Hont recalls Smith's intention in *TMS* to correct Hume's theory of justice, in which justice emerged by trial and errors from the uncoordinated social collaboration of people and from their discovery of the utility of such principles. Smith was impressed by this idea and applied it to explain the development of sympathy and moral rules. Smith not only generalized pity; he also historicized it. His natural history of sympathy in *TMS* paralleled Rousseau's natural history of self-love in the *Second Discourse*. Hont then lists possible parallels between Rousseau and Smith. He notes Smith's interest for rhetoric and his praise of Rousseau's style, but he doesn't go farther. Smith's deep interest for rhetoric hasn't been unnoticed in Smith's scholarship,³ and a comparison with Rousseau would be interesting. Another way to link Rousseau and Smith would be to highlight that self-esteem is for Rousseau the "glue" of society and that *TMS* is the book he could have written. Hont notes that there are morphological similarities between *TMS*'s natural history of sympathy and the *Second Discourse*'s natural history of self-esteem. Unfortunately, these ideas are also just sketched.

Hont then focuses in chapters 3 and 4 on their political theories. He first remarks that while Rousseau and Smith both denied the natural sociability and morality of man, they disagreed on the origin of justice and government. For Rousseau, there were first human laws and then the need to create a legal authority—judges—to enforce them. Smith had the opposite point of view. Our two philosophers differed in their apprehension of how liberty and political society were created. The origin of their disagreement on politics lies in their divergence on the understanding of the concept of social contract. Smith followed Hume in his critic of contractualism. Hume's idea was to replace the contract by a convention, a tacit agreement expressed by cooperative practices emerging over time by trial and errors (p. 52). This type of reasoning founded the idea according to which judges emerged before the law. There was first someone whose superior authority was used to put an end to a conflict. This person, by repetitive solicitation as an arbitrator, became a judge. And then there was a need to codify judging practices, creating general principles of justice. For Rousseau, private

³See, for example, Bevilacqua (1968); Bryce (1983); Brown (1994); Herzog (2013); Walraevens (2010); McKenna (2005); Peaucelle (2011); Salber Philips (2006); and Kellow (2011).

property as a legal system was born out of a manipulation of trust in which the poor were fooled by the rich. For him, the inequality of private property had a tendency to grow and to disturb every political arrangement founded upon it. Smith, by contrast, thought that commercial society was creating more equality and material benefits for most (p. 54). Hont then provides an insightful comparative reading of Smith's and Rousseau's stages theory of history. For Rousseau, the history of humanity began in Africa, in which society was not born out of the need to satisfy physical needs in cooperation but rather out of self-esteem. Language originated as a gesture for recognition. The sociability of language was the child of cultural rather than economic need, structured by a quest for love and order (p. 60). These ideas, Hont claims, Smith deeply shared (*ibid.*). Yet, he provides no textual support for this. Smith's vision might be closer to Rousseau's description of life in Europe, in which history was moved by necessity and need. Humankind's indigence there compelled them to make efforts to overcome it, resulting in the development of their dormant intellectual capacities. Necessity was the mother of invention for humankind. A similar idea is found in Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, Hont could have added. He underlines that Rousseau linked the emergence of government to the third stage of agriculture. Smith went further, identifying the emergence of the lawful state in ancient Greece not only with the appearance of agriculture there, but also with the foundation of the city, in Athens, seen as a nascent commercial society. And he used Roma to fully illustrate the emergence of law in ancient commercial societies. According to Hont, Rousseau's and Smith's divergence about political theory is due to the fact that the former was a Genevan whose social contract was primarily addressed to city-republics like Geneva, as if the politics of ancient city-states could be continued. For Smith, by contrast, there is a huge gap between ancient and modern Europe. Modern liberty could not be seen as a continuation of the liberty of ancient city-states because between the two there was the fall of the Roman Empire. Smith could not agree with Rousseau because the latter followed John Locke in his way to link private property and the history of government. Smith answered to Locke, and thus indirectly to Rousseau, showing that economic progress didn't corrupt government. Rather, it created modern liberty and law.

Chapter 4 begins with highlighting that Rousseau borrowed Locke's theory of property, allowing him to claim that property appeared first, and then government, by contract. It was the sequence of natural rights theoreticians, with which Smith broke. Hont claims that what Rousseau and Smith had in common in politics was to be theoreticians of the *res publica*. "Republic" meant, for them, every kind of government, provided it is a government of laws rather than a government of men. Montesquieu had made of monarchy a form of republic founded on inequality. Rousseau wanted to destroy this notion of *res publica*, trying to show that states based on inequality would necessarily fall into despotism. He thought that socio-economic inequality would inevitably destabilize the authority of the republic. For him, the creation of government by the social contract was a "contract of fools," by which the rich have protected and then perpetuated their domination over the poor. Rousseau saw in patriotism the principle of republics, demanding a partial suppression of the egoistic self. Republican culture should produce a collective force to control individual selves inside a kind a collective self, people as a common self rather than a multitude. Smith replaced Rousseau's theoretical discourse on government by a conjectural history of government (p. 76). He provided, for Hont, a tripartite history of government: the first

part was devoted to the first stages of humanity, and then he offered a history of republic, both ancient and modern. Following Montesquieu, Smith refuses to see in modern Europe a continuation of, or return to, ancient liberty. Against Rousseau, he argued that judges existed first, before the law. These first judges were figures of authority, often military leaders. For Hont, Smith argued that the possession of authority was the origin of superior wealth, what is not obvious. What *is*, though, is the fact that Smith didn't see the origin of rising inequality and government in the property of land (agricultural stage), but in the property of animals (shepherding stage). The fusion of authority and power was, for Smith, the origin of government at the shepherding stage. Against Rousseau, Smith thought that property would be distributed more equally with the progress of history. The main feature of Smith's political thought, Hont convincingly shows, is to offer a new modern republican discourse in which the natural jurisprudence and the (classical) republican discourse reinforce each other (p. 86). For Smith, the city-republics of the Renaissance are not the key to understanding the emergence of modern liberty (p. 87). They fell, like ancient republics, because of military weakness. Feudal states also perished from the rise of luxury, like Roma before them. Yet, it is what brought back liberty in Europe.

In chapter 5 Hont explores first their viewpoints on economics. He seems to overestimate their proximity on luxury when he claims that both adopted a middle position between the rejection of luxury from ancient cynics and their contemporary apologists. Rousseau was certainly much closer to Dyogen than Smith, who argued neither that luxury was morally bad in itself nor that it was a threat for political stability. Their major point of disagreement on political economy is their vision of the market, or (dis)belief in the Invisible Hand. Smith used it for defending private property in *TMS* and for showing that Rousseau's egalitarian solution would not work better than the unequalitarian solution. The luxury of the rich provides the poor with the necessities of life. However, Hont asserts that Rousseau was not against private property *per se*, or advocating a planned economy. He aspired to a form of balanced growth with agricultural and industrial works being fairly exchanged and valued. Smith also pleaded for a balanced growth, though of a different kind. He showed that modern liberty in Europe was due to the rise of commerce and luxury. It should not be seen as a threat for a healthy economic growth or for political stability. Contrary to what Rousseau believed, luxury should not be destroyed; it just had to be tamed.

Chapter 6 closes the book on a discussion of the link between commerce and war. Both Rousseau and Smith observe that the rise of commerce in Europe coincided with an increase rather than a diminution of military conflicts. Hont asserts that, today, both would be seen as "realists" rather than "utopian" in international relationships theory. Yet, there is a significant difference between Smith and Rousseau here that Hont did not notice: Smith thought that commerce "ought naturally to be, among nations as among individuals, a bond of union and friendship"⁴ (*WN*, IV.iii.c.9, p. 493). It is the mercantile system that has perverted the relationships between nations, making of international commerce a state of war. Commerce, for Smith, is mutually advantageous; it is not so for Rousseau. Yet, in chapter 5, Hont noticed that in a fragment of his

⁴Another difference between the two is that Smith did not seem to be afraid of the possible hegemony of one country over all Europe (the issue of universal monarchy), as Rousseau and Montesquieu were.

Political Institutions, Rousseau described the relationship between nations as a natural state of war against all because they are moved by self-esteem. Nationalism is self-esteem applied to nations that compare themselves to each other and aspire to domination. And, the best way for a country to preserve its greatness is to impoverish its neighbors by putting obstacles to their growth (pp. 97–98). Smith insisted on the dramatic economic and political consequences of the “jealousy of trade.” He wanted nations to see in foreign trade a source of emulation rather than envy. Smith advocated for international emulation rather than international competition: that is, a competition without national animosity, founded on the love of humanity. Emulation is the mother of ambition, but, as Hont remarks, the love of humanity, on which it should be based, is a much weaker sentiment than patriotism. However weak this solution might appear, nonetheless, there is a gap between Smith’s plea for international commerce and Rousseau’s defence of a closed commercial state.

To conclude, it is clear that this book should be of interest to everyone interested in Smith and Rousseau, and in eighteenth-century political thought. It provides new insights on them and reveals unexplored territory for future research. That being said, Hont sometimes exaggerates the proximity of Smith and Rousseau, be that on luxury, international relationships, or on the refusal of a natural sociability of man. Moreover, there is a lack of engagement with the huge secondary literature on both thinkers. On politics, the works of Donald Winch (1978), Knud Haakonssen (1981), or Athol Fitzgibbons (1997) are well known to historians of economic thought, but surprisingly absent. The same criticism applies to Hont’s analysis of Smith’s and Rousseau’s morality and economics.⁵ Lastly, the book extensively deals with the unfinished project of Smith and Rousseau of defining political institutions best suited for commercial societies. Yet, it never tries to answer why both thinkers did not complete their “politics of commercial society.”⁶ That said, Hont’s book is still a welcome addition to the burgeoning Smith–Rousseau literature.

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⁵On Smith and Rousseau’s moral theories, see Force (2003) and Griswold (2010). On Rousseau’s economic thought, see Hurtado (2010), Spector (2007), and Pignol (2007, 2012).

⁶Concerning Smith, some attention has been given to his failure to realize his project. It is easy to argue that Smith lacked time for finishing it because of its slow writing, or that he was absorbed by other activities at the end of his life. Yet, some commentators, in particular Griswold (2006), have tried to identify philosophical reasons for Smith’s inability to complete his system of thought. He argued that Smith could not write his history of natural jurisprudence because there was a contradiction between the normative character of this projected system of natural jurisprudence and other principles of his system, especially his mainly descriptive, empirically based approach of morality in *TMS*.

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Recently, studies on Adam Smith as a moral philosopher have been moved forward. Scholars of Smith's moral philosophy (e.g., Charles Griswold 1999; Ryan Patrick Hanley 2009; Samuel Fleischacker 2004) seem to focus more on *TMS* rather than *WN*.