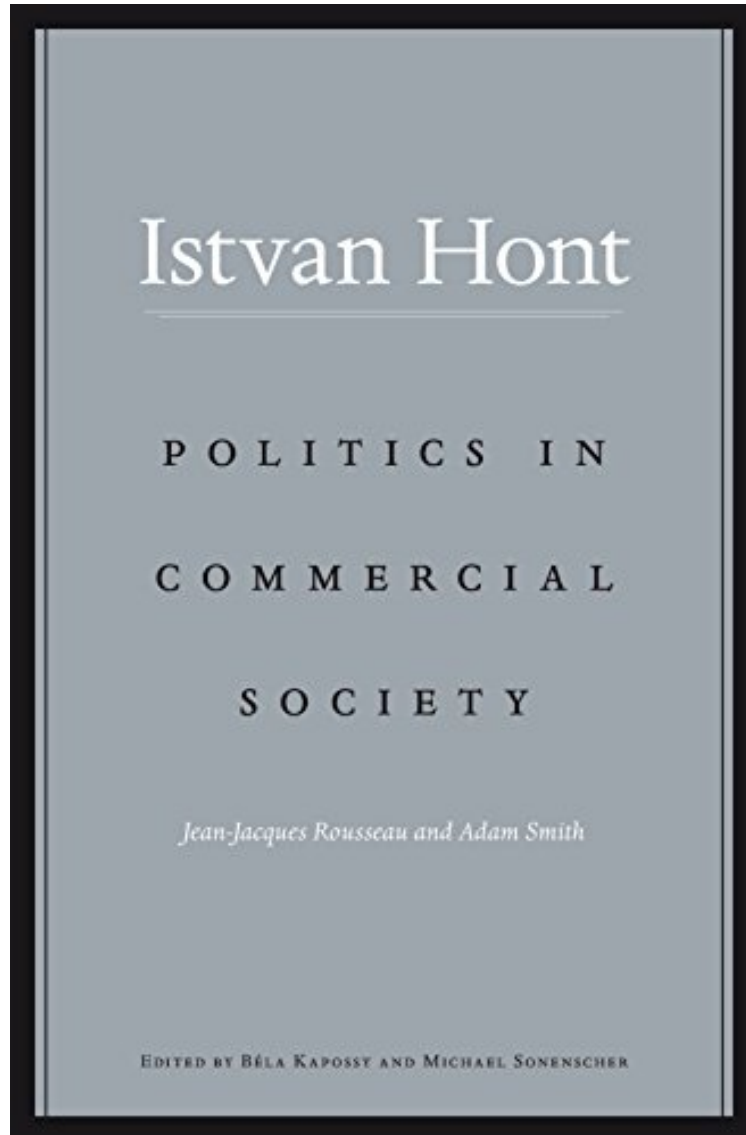


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Politics in Commercial Society

Istvan Hont

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Istvan Hont : Politics in Commercial Society before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Politics in Commercial Society:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By H. T. Price Fascinating
0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Useful thoughts for our times By J. Myers This is not a review, and I have not read the book. I have, however, read this review by Rudi Verburg in Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics: <http://ejpe.org/pdf/9-1-br-3.pdf>, and I encourage potential readers of this book to read this review. The review is quite positive. The book discusses inequality questions that are currently being discussed in our society. The review

summarizes the argument in the book and explains the sketchy support for some of the conclusions in this major work because the author did not get a chance to finish it -- the editors listed above compiled the book from a series of lectures that presented the author's work in progress. The reviewer's contributions will make the book more comprehensible to me. The discussions of inequality I hear today could benefit very much from the deeper understanding that would come from reading the works of Kant, Smith, and other early thinkers who had the time and concentration to think these things through. Today we expect to "solve problems" with a few bullet points. I got a much deeper understanding of what constitutes the economic and inequality world of mankind from the review I noted above, which only briefly summarizes the thought that is contained in this book and others. Although I am interested in this topic, I don't believe I am quite ready for this book. I will first struggle a bit more to read Adam Smith (not because the books are hard to read, but because they are so extensive and nuanced).

1 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Hont, Girard, Smith, Rousseau and modernity. By James DillI have not read Hont's Carlyle Lectures which constitutes the contents of this book. However, I have read with interest the review by Richard Tuck, Harvard, of this publication. I am ordering it right now."The theme of this book is the resemblance between two theorists who have often been thought of as radically different: Adam Smith and Jean-Jacques Rousseau."For many years it has been clear that Smith had a single project, at the heart of which was the idea that social relations depend on the human capacity to compare ourselves with other people and the desire to stand well in their eyes. Comparison can be benign, in the sense that it sometimes takes the form of standing back from our immediate or self-regarding desires and measuring them impartially alongside the desires of other people (or of ourselves in the future), but it can also be malign, in that it gives us the motive for emulation and domination. But, Smith argued, even this malign form will, in the appropriate structures, lead to a benign result, through (for example) competitive behaviour in a market. The desire for greater status leads the rich to crave the production of luxurious but useless commodities, and in return to give to the makers of those commodities all the things that are really useful for human life, and thereby (as Smith famously put it in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*) ensure "nearly the same distribution of the necessities of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants."So for Hont, both Smith and Rousseau were essentially Hobbesians who (unlike Hobbes himself) turned vainglory and emulation into positive moral and social forces. He proposes, in a particularly subtle part of these lectures, that Rousseau would not have been wholly critical of Smith's hidden hand mechanism for the equal distribution of the necessities of life, observing that Rousseau certainly shared Smith's belief that fundamental human needs are relatively sparse and the same for everyone -- though Rousseau believed that it is primarily states and their sovereigns that must inevitably embark on endless and pointless consumption, rather than individual citizens. Moreover, Hont argues, Rousseau and Smith shared essentially the same theory of European historical development, and the same concern to find a strategy for growth that would not be overwhelmed either by the claims of agriculture or the claims of industry -- the "balanced growth" Hont takes to be the goal of all eighteenth-century writers on the economy. "Hont's lectures are exhilarating, and contain a quite extraordinary density of argument and reference. Hont was convinced that the eighteenth-century thinkers had exhausted the possibilities available to us for understanding modernity, and the deep seriousness with which he approached the subject comes through on every page; it was this seriousness that transfixed his students, for he made them feel that in these 200-year-old texts they had the key to understanding their own time, in quite precise detail"[...]The review by Tuck reminded me of another recently deceased historian and critic, René Girard and his theory of mimetic desire. Surely they are referring to the same phenomena.[...]For Girard see: www..com/Girard-Reader-Crossroad-Herder-Book/dp/0824516346/ www..com/Girards-Mimetic-Studies-Violence-Mimesis/dp/1611860776/ www..com/Things-Hidden-Since-Foundation-World/dp/0804722153/[...]There is much to contemplate here, and much that explains the world we live in.

Scholars normally emphasize the contrast between the two great eighteenth-century thinkers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith. Rousseau is seen as a critic of modernity; Smith as an apologist. However, Istvan Hont finds significant commonalities in their work, arguing that both were theorists of commercial society but from different perspectives.

Istvan Hont [was] a terrifically gifted historian of political and economic thought; Politics in Commercial Society outlines in capsule form his reconstruction of [Rousseau and Adam Smith], showing not only what they have in common but also how little modern political theory has advanced beyond their concerns; Eighteenth-century political theory, as Hont's iconoclastic work shows, still has much to teach us. (Duncan Kelly Financial Times 2015-08-01) David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Adam Smith probed deeply into the moral and political dimensions of what has come to be known as capitalism. Istvan Hont's beautifully executed lectures reaffirm why it is worthwhile to know and interpret Enlightenment thought and, in particular, grapple with the timeless question of the trade-off between economic growth and political stability. (Margaret Schabas, University of British Columbia) In exploring Smith's and Rousseau's thought to find lines of influence and points of agreement, Hont hopes to correct what he believes to be misinterpretations of these two thinkers. He certainly succeeds in forcing

readers to rethink the relations between Smith and Rousseau and in deepening understanding of them. (J. H. Spence Choice 2015-12-01)Hont's lectures are exhilarating, and contain a quite extraordinary density of argument and reference. Hont was convinced that the eighteenth-century thinkers had exhausted the possibilities available to us for understanding modernity, and the deep seriousness with which he approached the subject comes through on every page. (Richard Tuck Times Literary Supplement 2016-02-04)About the AuthorIstvan Hont was a Reader in the History of Political Thought at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of King's College. Beáta Kapossy is Professor in the Department of History at the University of Lausanne. Michael Sonenscher is a Fellow of King's College, University of Cambridge.