
This remarkable book is effectively two. In one guise it is a collection of Istvan Hont’s seminal articles on political economy and political thought in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a lengthy introduction to draw out their unifying preoccupations. In another, the same contents are shaped by the analytical terms of the introduction into a bold, breathtakingly intelligent revision of the history of political thought between Hobbes and the French Revolution—and a demonstration of the extent to which the eighteenth-century debate over “jealousy of trade” anticipated the concerns of the post-1989 global economic order.

Simply in its first, conventional guise as a collection of Hont’s previously published articles, Jealousy of Trade is immensely valuable. The first to appear were two contributions to Wealth and Virtue (1983), a volume on the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment that Hont edited with Michael Ignatieff. Until then, the economic thinking of Hume, Smith, and other Scots had been expounded and analyzed with greater or less acuity in modern economists’ terms only. Hont transformed the field of scholarship by identifying the historical problems the Scots were addressing and the terms of the debates to which they contributed. Very broadly, “The ‘Rich Country–Poor Country’ Debate in the Scottish Enlightenment” revealed the extent to which economic prospects of poor and rich countries were studied in a classical, civic humanist, or neo-Machiavellian perspective of cyclical rise and decline, while “Needs and Justice in the Wealth of Nations” (coauthored with Ignatieff) analyzed Smith’s case for free trade in grain as a contribution to the long debate in natural law since Aquinas over the respective claims of justice and charity. From these two studies Hont moved on in the later 1980s to deepen his analysis of Smith’s debt to the natural jurisprudence tradition in particular, in articles on the relation between Smith’s and Pufendorf’s accounts of commercial sociability and on Smith’s anti-Physiocrat history of the development of European commerce. Overlapping with these in their genesis, but published in the 1990s, were further studies of the neo-Machiavellian preoccupations of eighteenth-century political economy, “Free Trade and the Economic Limits to National Politics,” perhaps the most original of all these articles, with its brilliant analysis of Andrew Fletcher’s critique of modern commerce, and “The Rhapsody of Public Debt,” an essay explaining Hume’s growing concern at Britain’s reliance on public credit. A simplistic reading of these inquiries would see them as pursuing the “two paradigms” of natural law and civic humanism that John Pocock identified in Wealth and Virtue, but Hont’s historical insights transcended rigid compartmentalization. Confirming that his interest is in conceptual problems rather than paradigms, the last of the studies to be reproduced here addresses a quite different issue: the ways in which the ideas of “nation” and “state” were understood before, during, and after the French Revolution. Several of these studies could have been monographs in themselves; in depth of content and richness of insight they are worth monographs. Hont’s knowledge of the texts he studies is formidable, and he is generous in his references to fellow scholars, his footnotes often constituting a bibliography of their topic.

Composed of the same varied elements, the second book within this volume nonetheless achieves something quite new: in the course of the 150-page introduction and seven chapters (now placed in a different order from that in which they were originally published), the reader is offered a comprehensive reconstruction of the trajectory followed by political thought after Hobbes, as it confronted first the demands of commerce and then the forces unleashed in the French Revolution. For Hont, Hobbes was Janus-faced: both the innovative theorist of representative popular sovereignty as the basis of the modern state and the late
humanist who refused “to count the economy and commercial sociability as major determining factors of politics” (21). The makings of a theory of commercial sociability were there in Hobbes’s acknowledgment that “utility,” the satisfaction of bodily pleasure, was a cause of human society. But his insistence that an even higher pleasure was that of “honour” ensured that society could exist only as a result of political union in the state. At the same time, the primacy of honor over utility meant that while relations between states were characterized by mutual suspicion, Hobbes did not anticipate that they would be driven by commercial competition.

Where Hobbes refused to go, others advanced in his stead. On the one hand, Pufendorf constructed the theory of commercial sociability on Hobbesian foundations, positing sociability on the basis of mutual need rather than innate benevolence. On the other, the neo-Machiavellian economic thinkers of post-Revolution Britain realized that in a commercial world the natural “jealousy of states” toward each other was hugely reinforced by “jealousy of trade,” making wars of empire and conquest almost inevitable. Eighteenth-century political economy then sought to make sense of the consequences. Two panaceas were widely canvassed. One was *doux commerce*, the idea that the sociability of mutual need would translate seamlessly onto the international plane, making commerce the agent of global peace. The other was the assumption that commercial success was self-canceling: the advantage of lower labor costs would pass to another country, ad infinitum. But tougher minds saw through these solutions. Jean-François Melon argued that a well-endowed country (such as France) could maintain competitiveness through efficient use of technology. Both David Hume and Adam Smith identified reasons why rich countries could expect to maintain their advantage over poorer ones: in Hume’s case by flexible specialization and product innovation, in Smith’s by constantly increasing industrial productivity through the division of labor and the free market allocation of labor. If commerce made national “emulation” unavoidable, however, it did not entail war, conquest, and empire—or the reliance on public credit that accompanied them. “Jealousy of trade” was expressly denounced by Hume in his essay of that title, while the *Wealth of Nations*, Hont writes, “was completely focussed on the achievement of economic superiority over others, without malice” (123).

Political economy met the challenge of international rivalry, however, only for the French Revolution to renew it with a vengeance. As Sieyès recognized, the overthrow of the monarchy offered France the opportunity to realize the Hobbesian concept of representative popular sovereignty in a commercial society. But the Jacobins rejected representation in favor of an ideal of direct democracy as the expression of an exclusive prepolinical nationhood—and then propelled this nation into wars of aggression, conquest, and empire with shameless neo-Roman fervor.

The argument of what I have characterized as the second of the two books within this volume was framed in two Cambridges, in Massachusetts and in the United Kingdom. The presence of both may be detected in Hont’s method and preoccupations. The influence of Harvard may, perhaps, preponderate in the book’s analytical objectives. To justify his claim that the globalization debate of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries lacks the conceptual novelty of its eighteenth-century predecessor, Hont is not afraid to present eighteenth-century arguments in modern analytical terms (more than once facing down the charge of anachronism). This is very much a contribution to understanding our contemporary world order. At the same time, the book is by implication also a historical alternative to the account of “liberty before liberalism” offered by his Cambridge, UK, colleague, Quentin Skinner. Hont agrees with Skinner that Hobbes offered the most searching political critique of the neo-Roman concept of liberty as justifying external aggression as well as internal disorder. Still more powerful, however, was the critique mounted by the eighteenth-century political economists, when they identified the neo-Roman, neo-Machiavellian approach to commerce with wars of con-
quest and empire. Properly understood, Hume and Smith argued, liberty of commerce entailed competition, but this was not the “jealousy of trade” advocated by the neo-Machiavellians. Even worse was the Jacobin marriage of neo-Roman aggression with the exclusive idea of the ethnic “nation”: on that historical trajectory, Hont implies, neo-Roman “liberty” was hardly a desirable alternative to modern “liberalism.” Better by far to stick with the tough-minded, skeptical understanding of political and commercial liberty offered by Hobbes and the Scottish economists.

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Central to the popular understanding of the British experience in the First World War is the idea that the civilian identities of the young men who served in the British Army on the Western Front were all but obliterated by their exposure to, on the one hand, the anachronistically alien society and culture of the British Army and, on the other, the hellishly alien world of the trenches. Thus the dislocation and disillusion that supposedly characterized the survivors among the Great War’s “Lost Generation,” and their commonly assumed difficulties reassimilating into civilian life once they left the military. In *Citizen Soldiers*, Helen B. McCartney focuses on the First World War experience of the 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King’s Liverpool Regiment to make a compelling case that British soldiers’ prewar civilian identities, far from being effaced by their time in the army and in the trenches, were fundamentally inseparable from their identities and experiences as soldiers and may actually have helped to substantially mitigate the potentially alienating effects of war and military life. Furthermore, McCartney argues, there seems to be little evidence that the majority of the soldiers in her study who survived the war returned home as the bitter, dysfunctional veterans of popular imagination. Most that were physically able seem to have reintegrated relatively easily into the civilian world, which remained central to their sense of who they truly were.

McCartney explains that she chose these two particular battalions—popularly known as the Liverpool Rifles and the Liverpool Scottish—largely because their social composition, even among the rank and file, was predominantly middle class, and thus they produced an abundance of personal sources. Using letters, diaries, memoirs, and official documents related to the battalions, she is able to present an admirably detailed and comprehensive social history of the two units. Significantly, the Liverpool Rifles and the Liverpool Scottish were Territorial battalions, which prior to the First World War comprised the reserve forces of Britain’s regular army. As such, their character, in terms of traditions, culture, and social composition, was often distinc from that of the two other types of infantry battalion, those of the professional regular army and those, known as Service or New Army battalions, that were created after 1914 to handle the wartime flood of volunteers to the colors. However, as McCartney points out, there were more Territorial battalions in the British Army during the First World War than any other type of battalion, a fact that makes their relative neglect by historians an oversight that she contributes extensively and commendably toward correcting.

The book is divided into three sections, the first of which establishes that the social identities of these men as civilians and as soldiers were often inextricably intertwined, particularly in terms of class, ethnicity, and regional identification. In fact, the members of the Liverpool battalions struggled mightily to retain and continued to emphasize the predom-