CHAPTER ONE

The Patriotic Dreams of a Friend of Mankind

1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss Iselin's first major publication, the *Filosofische und Patriotische Träume eines Menschenfreundes,* the *Philosophical and Patriotic Dreams of a Friend of Mankind.* The *Patriotic Dreams* (as the work will be called from now on) contains many of the themes that were to preoccupy him to the end of his intellectual life: the relationship between politics and the economy, the need for men to be reconciled with nature, and the idea of a Christian theory of patriotism.[1] Many of his subsequent writings can be seen as commentaries on, and adaptations of, the arguments presented in the *Patriotic Dreams*. This applies especially to the *Geschichte der Menschheit,* which is why it is vital to reconstruct Iselin's position of 1755 as fully as possible.

Published by the well-known Basel editor Emanuel Thurneysen in April 1755, the *Patriotic Dreams* was immediately hailed as a major contribution to the reform discourse of the German-speaking Enlightenment. Iselin's work was also read as a positive, Christian alternative to Rousseau's *Discourse on the origins of inequality,* which appeared a few months later.[2]

1 The chapter headings of the 1755 edition read as follows: Eingang; Die Menschheit; Die Menschen; Die Afterpolitik; Der Trieb zur Vollkommenheit; Die Triebfedern der bürgerlichen Gesellschaften; Die Verderbnis; Das Elend; Die Ungleichheit der Städte; Die Freiheit; Der Ehrgeiz; Der Adel oder die Patricien; Die Handelschaft; Die Städte; Die Gelehrtheit; Das Frauenzimmer; Die Wünsche; Die Hofnung; Der Besitz; Die Gesellschaftlichkeit und die Ergötzlichkeiten; Die Auferziehung; Die Ordnung; Die Religion; Der gute König; Die glükselige Republik.

2 While the work met with very moderate interest in Basel itself (Thurneysen managed to sell a mere six copies in his hometown) and, apart from a few angry reactions from Iselin's own relatives, elicited little response, the *Patriotic Dreams* sold

Both authors were citizens of democratic, commercial republics, and both had enjoyed Protestant upbringing. The affinities between their thinking were indeed as pronounced as their differences.

Like Rousseau, Iselin aimed his scorn at the politics of 'reason of state' of Europe's post-Renaissance monarchies. Notwithstanding their own self-description as the harbingers of civilisation, general affluence and peace, Iselin maintained that modern rulers had shed nothing of their Machiavellian heritage and were as firmly committed to the pursuit of personal aggrandisement as the petty princes whom Machiavelli had advised two centuries earlier. What distinguished late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century politics from the sceptical politics of late humanism was not that it had overcome Machiavellian 'reason of state', but that 'reason of state' now appeared in the guise of a language of natural rights. Nowhere, Iselin argued, was this more visible than within the field of international trade and commerce. The conflict between modern states over the capture of foreign markets and advantages in trade, he maintained, was as fierce as the battles that had previously been fought over territory. Nor were the consequences of modern commercial wars any less catastrophic for the common population than those resulting from actual armed conflict. In fact, Iselin believed that modern wars were far more oppressive and destructive because the enormous costs of modern warfare meant that the economic consequences of war continued to be felt long after peace had been restored. The imposition of new taxes to cover the constant increase in military expenditure effectively perpetuated the conditions of war and strongly limited the potential for economic recovery during periods of peace. But the commercial rivalry between modern nations not only affected the living standards of the common people and eroded the moral texture of society. The most worrying aspect of modern politics was the degree to which it had succumbed to the logic of international economic competition. As a result, in some modern monarchies kings were no more than powerful entrepreneurs using political authority to maintain a competitive edge over both their domestic and foreign rivals. In the *Patriotic Dreams* Iselin described the politics of modern

very well in other Swiss republics and abroad – so much so that Iselin was able to report to his friend Frey that Thurneysen after, six months, had already sold almost the entire stock.

commercial nations as the outcome of an unholy alliance between Machiavelli, Hobbes and Colbert – between humanist reason of state, sceptical natural rights theories and aggressive commercial expansionism – and he made it clear that Europe was unlikely to savour the advantages of peace, justice, and stable affluence until an entirely new form of politics had been established.

Iselin's assessment of the deadly dynamics of modern politics was largely shared by Rousseau. In his *Patriotic Dreams,* however, Iselin not only attacked the commercial politics of modern nations; he also attacked his fellow citizens who claimed that the only way to escape the consequences of modern European politics was to break radically with modernity and revive the austere, strongly military, form of political culture practiced by the Spartans, the Romans and the early Swiss. Iselin was strongly opposed to the idea that the only way to inculcate the virtues was through a forced return to the simplicity of their halbard-swinging ancestors. He also attacked the radical *Kulturkritik* of certain Swiss Protestant writers who argued that modern men should abstain from all involvement in politics, give up private property, and retreat to the countryside in order to establish small, autarchic communities of fellow believers. While agreeing that the introduction of the community of goods could help to bring about inner peace and generate a spirit of fraternity, Iselin argued that such a measure would only increase the potential for external conflict. If there was to be a solution to the present crisis, it had to be one which dealt not only with the problems within the republic but also with the problematic relationship between a republic and its neighbours.

Iselin's foreign readers immediately noticed and applauded his openly critical stand towards any Swiss revival of austere republican enthusiasm. They well understood that these were the *Dreams* not just of a *Patriot* but also of a *Friend of Mankind* and that Iselin's call for patriotism was less a call to arms than a call for international peace. Indeed, Iselin's notion of 'patriotism' described not so much the *état d'âme* of heroic self-sacrifice and republican self-denial but the mental courage needed if modern nations were to live peacefully side by side, each under the rule of law. It was also radically anti-sceptical. For many of his readers, it was precisely this anti-sceptical position which distinguished the *Patriotic Dreams* from Rousseau's second *Discourse*. Iselin made it very clear that 'true virtue'

was not the privilege of small, highly motivated political entities, but that virtue could, and should, become the driving principle of large states as well. Every political society, he claimed, irrespective of its size, economy, or geographic location, should be founded on virtue and real patriotism. The actual form of government was therefore a matter of secondary importance. What mattered was not whether political authority was invested in the single person of a monarch or in a group of magistrates, because neither monarchical nor traditional republican rule were in themselves guarantees for 'good' politics.[3] What mattered instead was whether the sovereign ruled according to the common good rather than for personal advantage. According to Iselin, international peace could become a feasible option only if a politics of virtue was adopted by all states. It was only then that men would be able to be patriots *and* friends of mankind at the same time.

When looking for alternatives to the politics of both Machiavelli and Hobbes, Iselin turned to the works of Fénelon and other Christian critics of Louis XIV's failed attempts at European hegemony. Fénelon's philosophical novel, *Les Aventures de Télémaque,* and his vision of a 'pacific king' with its curious blend of cosmopolitanism and patriotism, had a tremendous impact on eighteenth-century Christian reform thinking, within both royal as well as republican settings.[4] It was also of central importance to Iselin who, up to the end of his intellectual career, regarded Fénelon as one of his all-time favourite authors. Iselin used the *Télémaque* as the basic text for the education of his children, and in his private letters never tired of praising

3 In his review of the second edition of *Patriotic Dreams* in the *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*, A.v. Haller claimed that Iselin's rejection of the traditional view associating liberty with republican politics was one of the main points of the work. "Der Mangel der ausser sich selbst ausbreitenden Liebe macht ihm alle Staatsverfassungen gleichgültig und unwerth, da in der That die Freyheit selbst, so bald sie nur eigennützigen Leuten in die Hände frey macht, zum Glücke der Einwohner und Bürger wenig beyträgt." J. G. Heinzmann (ed.), *Albrecht von Haller. Tagebuch seiner Beobachtungen über Schriftsteller und über sich selbst*, Bern 1787, vol. 1, p. 174.

4 See above all Michael Sonenscher's article, "Republicanism, State Finances and the Emergence of Commercial Society in Eighteenth-century France – from Royal to Ancient Republicanism and Back", in *Republicanism. A shared European Heritage*, Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds.), vol. 2, p. 275-292; see also, Albert Chével, *Fénelon au XVIII^e siècle en France (1715-1820)*, Paris 1918.

the book as the starting point for thinking about the prospects of a morally more rewarding world. With the *Patriotic Dreams of a Friend of Mankind,* Iselin, as its title indicated, self-consciously placed himself in the camp of the eighteenth-century followers of Fénelon.[5] His perspective, like that of Victor Riquetti, Marquis de Mirabeau, whose work he greatly admired, was that of an *ami des hommes,* a *Menschenfreund*; a perspective that contrasted in every possible respect from that of a *Menschenfeind,* a 'hater of mankind' and of which he took Hobbes, Mandeville, and later Rousseau, as representatives.[6]

Iselin's commitment to a Fénelonean position of Christian patriotism was clearly noticed by his readers. As reviewers such as Moses Mendelssohn suggested, one of the most appealing aspects of Iselin's work was that despite its scathing critique of modern society, the *Patriotic Dreams* confirmed the possibility of a positive alternative to the present state of corruption. In contrast to Rousseau, who held that modern society was incapable of carrying the weight of 'good' politics, Mendelssohn claimed that Iselin showed that the path to a virtuous Enlightenment was, at least in theory, still open, and that mankind could still find a way back to its natural order – but only if it managed to mobilise and focus its remaining moral and intellectual energies.[7]

5 For Iselin's reading of Fénelon and Fleury, see Ulrich Imhof, *Isaak Iselin. Sein Leben und die Entwicklung seines Denkens bis zur Abfassung der "Geschichte der Menschheit" von 1764*, 2 vols, Basel 1947, passim; and his *Isaak Iselin und die Spätaufklärung*, Bern und München 1967, passim.

6 On Iselin's proximity to Mirabeau, see again Haller's review of the *Patriotic Dreams*, in *Albrecht von Haller. Tagebuch seiner Beobachtungen über Schriftsteller und über sich selbst*, p. 175-176.

7 In his *Sendschreiben an den Herrn Magister Lessing in Leipzig*, Mendelssohn directly contrasted the overly pessimistic and sceptical account of Rousseau to Iselin's own positive critique of modern politics. "Hätte Rousseau, statt einer allgemeinen Verurtheilung aller menschlichen Gesellschaften, nur wider gewisse verderbliche Staatsverfassungen geeifert: hätte er, mit dem Verfasser der philosophischen und patriotischen Träume die Schande der Verstellung, der Arglist, der Schmeicheley, der Unterdrückung und noch unzähliger andrer Laster aufgedecket, die mit diesen Staatsverfassungen verbunden sind: So würden alle rechtschaffenen Gemüther seine Ausführungen mit eben so viel Lob krönen, als seinen Vortrag." Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe*, vol. 2, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1972, p. 93.

This chapter is organised into three sections, each of which deals with a central aspect of Iselin's argument in the *Patriotic Dreams*. In the first section, I will discuss Iselin's analysis of modern politics, of its history and of its theoretical and practical shortcomings. Iselin maintained that modern politics was profoundly corrupt and ultimately self-defeating. In the second section I will thus discuss the various options which Iselin believed were open to those who wanted to escape corruption and construct a morally more rewarding form of society. I will thereby focus on Iselin's close analysis of two very different but equally radical solutions to such a problem. The first is that of the Bernese millenarian Pietist, Beat Ludwig von Muralt. The other is that of Rousseau in the first *Discourse*. During the years leading up to the publication of the *Patriotic Dreams,* Iselin was deeply attracted to both Muralt's and Rousseau's respective positions. In the *Patriotic Dreams,* however, he clearly distanced himself from their ideas. It is thus crucial to understand why he suddenly no longer considered them viable options for reform. In the third section, I shall outline Iselin's own positive solution and the historical and theoretical models which he used as the basis of his anti-sceptical strategy. The chapter will end with a discussion of Iselin's concrete suggestions for reform, as well as his own assessment of the likelihood of his plans being realised.

2. *The failings of modern commercial politics*

2.1. *The Hobbesian foundations of 'Afterpolitik'*

Iselin's critique of modern politics and society is at its most virulent in the chapter entitled *Die Afterpolitik*.[8] Part of the critique is couched in the traditional humanist terminology of political corruption. *Afterpolitik* was the

[8] The preposition *after*, meaning behind, under, or lower is rarely used in eighteenth-century German writing. The term *Afterpolitik* itself is thus quite probably an invention of Iselin, with which he hoped to underline the special nature of modern corruption. The most appropriate translation would be the 'politics of corruption'. In his introductory article, the editor of the Basel journal, *Der Eidgenoss*, published in 1749, for example, uses *Afterschweizer* as a general term describing the various types of 'false patriots' whom he accuses of having corrupted Swiss society, such as the petit-maîtres (Kleinmeister), coquettish women (eitele Puppen), the miser (Geizgespenste), and hypocritical Zinzendorfians (herrenhutische Schleicher). *Der Eidgenoss, eine moralische Wochenschrift*, Basel 1749, p. 6.

nemesis of virtue; it undermined good government and encouraged civic strife. At the same time, the notion of *Afterpolitik* described not just the kind of politics characteristic of the zenith of a *civitas'* life cycle, leading to its certain demise. Nor did *Afterpolitik* simply stand for the kind of corrupt politics that historically minded sceptics argued could be found in all stages of human history. *Afterpolitik,* Iselin argued, was a particularly vicious and *novel* form of tyranny, unknown to either antiquity or to the Middle Ages.

In the past, Iselin wrote, tyranny was a purely personal matter, caused by the tyrant himself: "tyranny was like a storm, which for the period of a few days at most devastated the countryside and destroyed the seasonal crops. The tyrant died. With him also vanished the evil he had caused. Calm, peace, security returned once again and a country's happiness and wealth was restored." *Afterpolitik* in contrast was a non-personal form of tyranny. It did not rely on the tyrant's physical presence. It was *systematic tyranny*.

> Our politics is far worse [than the personal tyrannical politics of the past]. It *has turned into a system,* and by a thousand means has established its duration for many centuries to come.[9]

It was precisely because the duration and functioning of modern tyranny had been detached from the personal fate of the tyrant himself, Iselin suggested, that it had managed to acquire its 'systematic' character and establish such a firm grip on modern men.

Afterpolitik, Iselin claimed, sought to derive its legitimacy from two different, although interlocking, sets of arguments: security and civilisation. The first set of arguments took its cue from the work of Hobbes and was based upon the latter's premise that men, left to their own devices, were

[9] *Patriotic Dreams* (1755), p. 33: "Die Tirannei war wie ein Ungewitter, das auf das höchste einige Tage ein armes Land verheerte, und die Früchte eines Jahres zernichtete. Der Tirann hörete auf zu sein. Mit ihm verschwanden die Uebel, die er verursachet hatte. Ruhe, Fride, Sicherheit und Ueberfluss erschienen alsobald wider, und mit ihnen die Glükseligkeit und der Wolstand des ganzen Landes. Allein unsre Politik ist weit abscheulicher. Sie hat die Tirannei *in ein System gebracht*". My italics.

incapable of forming a consensus. It is from Hobbes' work, Iselin claimed, that the "teachers of the new politics" had derived their ideas; it was on these

> beautiful principles that a law of nations, a theory of politics, and a civil jurisprudence have been erected, and which have then gradually undermined the entire system of humanity, utterly suffocated love, and dissolved the most noble and strongest bonds of society.[10]

The attack on Hobbes was a recurrent theme in much of the eighteenth-century literature Iselin had encountered as a student of jurisprudence at Basel and Göttingen. Judging from the legal dissertations submitted to the Basel Law Faculty during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, it was common practice to single out Hobbes as the main representative of a position of strict moral pessimism and the idea that man's selfishness, even bestiality, should be the premise for any further reflection on man's social and political organisation.[11]

In the *Patriotic Dreams* Iselin faithfully summarised many of the commonplaces of early eighteenth-century Christian anti-Hobbesian polemics. There is some doubt about whether he actually ever studied the works of Hobbes in any detail. His depiction of Hobbes as proto-Mandevillian advocate of luxury suggests that he did not.[12] Yet Iselin's critique of Hobbes is not without interest. Hobbes' sceptical natural rights theory, Iselin seemed

10 Ibid., p. 32: "Auf dise schönen Grundsäzze hat man ein Völkerrecht, eine Staatskunst, und eine bürgerliche Rechtsgelehrtheit gebauet, die nach und nach das ganze System der Menschheit untergraben, die Liebe völlig erstikken, und die edelsten und stärksten Bande der Gesellschaft auflösen."

11 See Karl Mommsen, *Katalog der Basler juristischen Disputationen 1558-1818*, Aus dem Nachlass herausgegeben von Werner Kundert, Frankfurt a. M. 1978; also his *Auf dem Wege zur Staatssouveränität. Staatliche Grundbegriffe in Basler juristischen Doktordisputationen des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, Bern 1970.

12 Iselin was probably familiar with Hobbes' idea of the state of nature through the teaching of J. J. Schmauss, whose lectures on natural law and 'universal civil law' he attended while studying at the University of Göttingen. See Im Hof, *Isaak Iselin*, vol. 1, p. 57-79 and p. 307-313. For the relevance of Hobbes for Vattel, Rousseau and Kant, see the study by Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace. Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant*, Oxford 1999. Some useful material regarding the reception of Hobbes in eighteenth-century France can be found in Yves Glaziou, *Hobbes en France au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 1993.

to be arguing, should be seen as a direct continuation of late-Renaissance reason of state thinking. On a most general level, he claimed, the history of the theory of *Afterpolitik* perfected by Hobbes could be traced all the way back to Aristotle's infamous distinction between the figure of the wise and the figure of the learned.

> [Aristotle], born to be a chancellor or a minister of finance, for he was too corrupt to be a hero, accidentally became a philosopher and for some unfortunate reason ended up at court. Here he discovered his true calling, and in order not to have to give up the pleasure he derived from studying, he, as the Sophists had done before him, separated the wise from the learned. The learned he took with him to the court, while the wise man was sent off on meditative walks. [13]

In so doing, Aristotle had drawn a diving line that marked the way in which many subsequent thinkers came to think about politics. From Aristotle onwards political thinkers had to chose whether they wanted either to belong to the camp of Plato and Moses or to that of Aristotle and Machiavelli[14], the idealists or the realists; those who saw politics as an integral part of man's striving for universal moral goals or those who considered politics to be a tool for achieving purely worldly objectives. Nowhere, Iselin argued, was

13 *Patriotische Träume* (1755), p. 28: "Geboren für ein Canzler oder für ein Aufseher der Finanzen zu sein, denn für einen Helden war er zu niderträchtig, wurd er zufälliger Weise ein Filosofe, und kam unglükseliger Weise an den Hof. Hier lernte er kennen wofür er geschaffen wäre, und damit er doch das Vergnügen, das er an der Erkänntniss fand, nicht verlöhre, sonderte er, wie vor ihm die Sofisten, den Weisen von dem Gelehrten ab. Den Gelehrten nam er mit sich nach Hofe, und den Weisen lies er auf seinen Spaziergängen."

14 See the opening paragraphs of the *Patriotic Dreams* where Iselin writes. "Machiavell und Aristoteles würden mich weit eher auf die Bahn der Ehren geführet haben, als Plato und Moses." p. 4. A similar categorisation (this time opposing Machiavelli and Hobbes to Plato, Cicero and Fénelon) can already be found in Andrew Ramsey's *Discours de la Poësie Épique, et de l'Excellence du Poëme de Télémaque,* which was added to most eighteenth-century editions of Fénelon's *Télémaque*. "On sait les systêmes de Machiavel, d'Hobbes, & de deux auteurs plus modérés, Puffendorf et Grotius. Les deux premiers établissent pour seules maxims dans l'art de gouverner, la finesse, les artifices, les stratagems, le despotisme, l'injustice et l'irréligion: les deux derniers auteurs ne fondent leur politique que sur des maximes de gouvernement, qui même n'égalent ni celles de la république de Platon, ni celles des offices de Cicéron." Fénelon, *Les Aventures de Télémaque,* London 1805, vol. 1, xx.

this opposition to Plato's idealism more visible than in the early-modern literature on reason of state. Here "one hears of nothing but riches, power, coups d'état, [and] trade. Here anything praised is only what might make men love their chains." The late-humanist sceptics and those who followed them "defend luxury and splendour even more vigorously than [their predecessors] used to praise moderation and modesty."[15] Their work was more eclectic than systematic and resembled the occasional commentaries of political advisors, chancellors, and secretaries of state, rather than being the fruit of careful philosophical investigation.

> [They] collected truths that accidentally had escaped from cabinet offices and chambers of commerce, places ruled by imagination and where envy guards the doors in order to keep out truth and its followers. From such [arbitrary] principles [they] created a splendid edifice which rests on two pillars; one of them is made of air, the other is made of clay. The first is called ambition, the second selfishness. [...] They stand on watery and slippery grounds that belong to voluptuousness and which are dangerous to enter.[16]

15 *Patriotische Träume* (1755), p. 29: "Da höret man nichts als von Reichtümmern, Macht, Staatsstreichen, Handelschaft. Da wird alles gepriesen und als treflich dargestellet, was den Menschen ihre Ketten wert machet. Pracht und Ueppigkeit werden nun in unsern Schulen eifriger verteidigt als ehmals Mässigkeit und Bescheidenheit."

16 Ibid., p. 27: "Die erhabne Weisheit unserer aufgeklärten Zeiten [...] hat die Wahrheiten gesammelt, die zufälliger Weise aus den Cabinettern und aus den Contoren entwischet sein, wo die Einbildung throhnet, und die ungerechte Habsucht an der Tühre wachet, damit sich nicht die Wahrheit oder ihre Priester hineinschleichen. Aus disen Säzzen hat sie ein prächtiges Gebäude aufgeführet, das auf zweenen Pfeilern ruhet, deren der eine von Luft, und der andre von Tone ist. Ehrgeiz ist der eine, und der andre heist Eigennuz. [...] Sie stehen in einem wässerichten und niemals satten Boden, welcher der Wollust zugehöret, und sehr gefährlich zu betreten ist." Iselin developed his critique of sceptical humanism in his various satires of 'bad patriots' or 'Anti-Patriots', which he wrote at around the same time as the *Patriotic Dreams* and where he neatly summarises all the themes that eighteenth-century Protestant reformists commonly associated with the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century reason of state literature. These included the admiration for Tacitus, the distrust of the people as political agents (the *Anti-Patriot* tellingly calls 'das gemeine Beste', the common good, the 'gemeine Bestie', meaning the 'common beast'), the importance of deceit and ambition for politics, the ridicule of the classical virtues, and the idea that the strive for greatness justified all means.

Despite his hostility towards late-humanist political thought, Iselin seemed to suggest that there was something admirable about the frankness with which these writers advised their princes to pursue their own personal interests. They never pretended to be anything else but intellectual mercenaries. Hobbes' strategy was very different for, while faithfully accepting the premises of the humanists, he hid them behind a language of virtue and the common good. The peculiar feature of Hobbes' thought, Iselin seemed to suggest, was to have integrated the various disparate themes of sceptical humanism, especially its insistence on human selfishness, into a 'system' and to have presented the latter as the core of a fundamentally anti-sceptical, even republican, strategy.[17] "The wise [meaning Hobbes] here takes the present state of society as the natural state of man. What corruption and prejudice have introduced he sees as being natural to man; and from these murky sources he derives the corrupting teachings *which he then paints over with the colours of virtue and wisdom*." Hobbes had debased "man, this noble and worthy creature, this image of the Deity" of all "his nobility and placed him amongst the beasts".[18] Like many of his contemporaries, Iselin emphasised that Hobbes' negative view of natural society was less a result of his own wickedness than a reflection of the specific historical circumstances, the endless military conflicts, that marked the political landscape of early modern Europe. When Hobbes developed his political theory, "[t]here was not a single state that did not find itself in a situation where it was not forced – in order to meet the continuous increase in expenditure – to prevent others from procuring their own necessities. There was not a single one that was not forced, because of the expenses that overstretched its limits, to procure what it needed through injustice, cunning and treason."[19] Given the general

17 This interpretation of Hobbes is developed at length in Richard Tuck's, *Philosophy and Government. 1572-1651*, Cambridge 1993.

18 *Patriotische Träume* (1755), p. 29: "Da nimmt der Weise die izzige Beschaffenheit der menschlichen Gesellschaft zum Grunde. Was Verderbnis und Vorurteile eingeführet macht er zur Natur, und aus diesen trüben Quellen schöpfet er seine verderblichen Lehren, die er mit der Farbe der Tugend und der Weisheit ansteichet." See also p. 33: "Der Mensch, dises so erhabene, dises so würdige Geschöpfe, dises Bild der Gottheit, wird von ihnen [i.e. the followers of Hobbes] ernidrigt, entadelt, und unter die Tiere selbst gesezzet."

19 Ibid., p. 65-66: "Kein Stand ist der nicht die Nothwendigkeit gesezzet wird grössern Aufwand zu machen, und dem andern die Mittel dazu abzudrängen. Keiner ist den

lawlessness and the continuous strife between states, it was understandable, although not excusable, for Hobbes to have mistaken the state of corruption of early modern Europe for man's natural state. Hence,

> it is not nature but a corrupted science [Afterweisheit] that Hobbes has to thank for his horrendous system. Nature has created man good. His prime instincts are nothing but love and righteousness [Billigkeit], without which he cannot persist in the state of nature. But the false applications that we are forced to make of these instincts, renders most of us utterly despicable, and perhaps even more horrible than we are made to appear in Hobbes' painting, and what the teachers of modern politics imagine us to be.[20]

Hobbes' claim that the relationship between individual states was marked by endemic lawlessness, Iselin argued, had become the central credo of modern politics. Modern monarchies "breathe nothing but war and unrest; peace itself becomes a burden if there is no reason to engage in foreign warfare."[21] Hobbes' fingerprints could also be found in the attempt of modern political theorists to provide a ruler with an almost God-like status by portraying him as "the terror of his neighbours, the wonder of all times, the God and idol of his people". Modern monarchs, Iselin claimed, had acquired a position that allowed them to define not only what was just and unjust but also what was useful and useless, what was fashionable and what was tasteless. To Iselin the archetypal Hobbesian king-god had been Louis XIV, whom "our grandfathers admired". More recently, it was Frederick II who had adopted the posture of a quasi-republican demiurge; across Europe, people "admire him and detect in him the highest degree of true greatness."[22]

nicht Ausgaben, die seine Kräfte übersteigen, nöhtigen durch Ungerechtigkeit, List und Betrug was ihm abgehet zu ersezzen."

20 Ibid., p. 32: "Nicht der Natur, sondern der Afterweisheit und den schlimmen Einrichtungen der Staaten hat Hobbes sein abscheuliches System zu verdanken. Die Natur hat den Menschen gut geschaffen. Sein Grundtriebe sind nichts als Liebe und Billigkeit, ohne welche er in dem Stande der Natur nicht bestehen kan. Aber die falschen Anwendungen, die wir gleichsam gezwungen werden von disen Trieben zu machen, machet die meisten unter uns zu so abscheulichen, villeicht noch zu abscheulichern Menschen als uns Hobbes mahlet, und als sich uns die Lehrer der neuen Staatskunst vorstellen."

21 Ibid., p. 53.

22 Ibid., p. 187.

2.2. *Luxury and civility*

If its apologists were to be believed, *Afterpolitik* provided not only peace and security, but also an unprecedented level of prosperity and civilisation. Modern societies, as Iselin was ready to admit, had indeed succeeded in producing more wealth than any other society in the past. They had also achieved a high level of civility. None of this, Iselin claimed, could be denied.[23] What he objected to was the claim that the arts and the sciences had initiated a simultaneous process of moral improvement. Iselin insisted on drawing a sharp distinction between the 'softening of moeurs' that came with the spread of commerce and genuine moral improvement. *Politesse, civilité,* and *savoir vivre* were all manifestations of civility; they described a process of self-discipline and the controlling of one's passions, rather than the formation of one's soul or the improvement of man's relationship with God. Civility primarily concerned man's exterior; it polished his rough edges and allowed him to participate in ever denser and more complex forms of social interaction. What civility did not do was to touch man's heart. At the same time, civility had become vital for overcoming the more antagonising forces of modern society; it allowed men who did not share the same beliefs and ideals to life together peacefully. What he objected to was the attempt to elevate politeness and civility to the status of a moral ideal and to consider a mere act of politeness, such as the exchanging of compliments over dinner, as genuine moral acts comparable to those prescribed by Christianity. This trend, Iselin maintained, was particularly noticeable amongst "our foolish youth": the young urban Swiss patricians who, in their attempt to disassociate themselves from Switzerland's image as a refuge of ignorance and rusticity, had come to imitate even the most outlandish French courtly manners and who seemed to have made it their aim in life to spend as much of their time as possible in newly formed societies and literary circles.

> The main principle of this system is, that men are born to live in society, that is to say, to pass the time in each other's company; and that the more pleasant moments

23 See especially the opening paragraphs of the chapter, 'Die Handelschaft', ibid., p. 104-105.

> one has enjoyed, the more rewarding a life one has lead. From this one deduces: That the more one man contributes to both the heightening and the enjoyment of delights, the more valuable his existence becomes to society [...].[24]

The most effective way to counter his fellow citizens' self-deluding attempt to pass off their purely pleasure-based exercise in civility as a moral life, Iselin believed, was to reveal the profoundly pessimistic tenets that underlay the idea of 'modern civilisation'. Especially in the chapters *Die Gelehrsamkeit, Die Gesellschaftlichkeit und die Ergezlichkeiten,* and *Die Religion,* he set out to unmask civility and politeness as a mere *Ersatz* morality based on luxury. Just as true, inner religion was distinct from historical, institutionalised religion, true morality was distinct from the codes of practice that defined the behaviour of modern civilised men. Both institutionalised religion, and the code of civilised behaviour, had developed under specific historical circumstances and served a clear purpose, namely to discipline potentially unruly men. Both, moreover, used similar measures to keep the latter in line. In the case of the church this was achieved through the threat of excommunication, the fear of a punitive Deity and eternal damnation, while in civilised society it was achieved through the fear of losing one's honour, the fear of ridicule and of being excluded from the social circles men wanted most to be associated with. Men who followed the rules of the official church and civility did so out of fear of punishment, rather than out of any deeply felt, inner conviction.

24 *Patriotische Träume* (1758), p. 260: "Der Hauptgrundsaz dieses Systems ist, dass die Menschen gebohren sind gesellschaftlich zu leben, das ist, einander beständig die Zeit zu vertreiben; und dass je mehr Lustbarkeiten man genossen, desto besser habe man auch das Leben zugebracht. Daraus ziehet man die Folgen: Dass je mehr ein Mensch zu der Erhöhung und zum Genusse der Ergezlichkeiten beytrage, sein Daseyn auch für die Gesellschaft von einem desto grössern Werthe sey [...]." Here, Iselin essentially takes over a passage from the first of Beat Ludwig de Muralt's *Lettres sur les Français* where he writes: "Un homme de bien ne rend pas plus scrupuleusement un dépôt qu'on lui a confié, qu'un François rend une visite qu'on lui a faite. En faire & en recevoir est une de leurs grandes occupations, & c'est à cela qu'ils croient le tems bien employé; la vie qu'on passe en compagnie leur paroît une vie bien passée, une vie passée dans l'ordre. L'homme est fait, disent-ils, pour vivre en société; & cette société chaque jour ils la forment, et la font consister dans des compagnies grandes ou petites, où reciproquement ils se donnent lieu de vivre & d'être hommes. Hors de-là on ne l'est point." *Lettres sur les François et les Anglois,* Paris 1747, vol. 1, p. 155.

It was important, therefore, to understand the historical origins of modern civility. Civility, Iselin explained, was an integral part of early-modern state building, a device propagated by monarchs in order to turn an independently-minded nobility into a homogenous group of clients. The origins of modern civility could be located in the dynamics that were set free when the warring Germanic tribes, which had overrun the Roman Empire, came into contact with the riches of the remaining cities. The process that ultimately lead to the perfection of *Afterpolitik,* Iselin believed, could be divided into roughly three phases, each of which marked a further intrusion of commerce into the realm of politics. The first phase described the assimilation of the mercantile values of the cities into the quasi-republican warrior culture of the conquering nobles. First, the feudal lords began plundering the cities' coffers; then they succumbed to the delights of city life, so that "the gentleness and agreeable lifestyle, which they much adored, helped to soften their raw characters." With wealth came luxury and the desire for further riches; the nobles "soon discovered other pleasures alongside those of armed combat and for this they willingly sacrificed elements of their old liberty".[25] The second phase saw the centre of the arts and sciences shift from the cities to the courts. It involved the attempt by the king and his ministers to homogenise the strongly fragmented political landscape and to unite the numerous factions under his own personal leadership. Having realised that the nobles could never be pacified by force alone, the king resorted to the same tactics that the cities had used to tame the savageness of their feudal oppressors. He exposed them to the ever-more advanced forms of luxury that could now be found only at the royal court and, most significantly perhaps, Iselin claimed, forced them to live in the constant company of women. 'Old honour' was thus replaced by 'new honour' based on the lowly desire for riches.

25 *Patriotische Träume* (1755), p. 54: "Der Edelmann, der die Vorteile davon [i.e. Reichtum und Bequemlichkeit] sah, fing auch an mehr von seinen Untertahnen zu ziehen, und die Waichlichkeit und angeneme Lebensart, die ihm allzuwol gefielen, milderten seinen rohen Charakter. Nach und nach wurden der Fleiss und der Ueberfluss, hiemit auch die Bequemlichkeit und die Annemlichkeiten des Lebens grösser, die Bedürfnisse vermehreten sich, die Menschen wurden zahmer, sie fanden nun andre Vergnügen neben dem die Waffen zu führen, und opferten denselben gerne eine Theil ihrer Freiheit auf."

> Hence, greed, lust and vain desires replaced honour and became the dominant spring of the actions of the citizens.[26]

The steep rise of the costs of court entertainment, which provided the setting for this 'new honour', initiated in turn a drastic change in politics. "The great principle of politics now became, to multiply the sources of income, and to make the citizens, that is to say, the nobles and the people, by one way or another, become soft and submissive."[27] The consolidation of *Afterpolitik* was achieved during the third phase, when the riches amassed by foreign trade lead to the introduction of large standing armies and the distribution of generous pensions.[28] As a result, what had so far been a "military and political government now became an entirely commercial one." There were even states, Iselin concluded, where the king had simply become the "greatest merchant of the realm".[29] Modern civility, in this sense, was the political culture of modern commercial monarchies. It appealed to men's passions, their ambition, vanity, desire for recognition, and *Ehrgeiz,* meaning their lust for honours.

Like many other Swiss writers from the late seventeenth century onwards, Iselin warned that by adopting the principles of modern civility the young Swiss patricians were unwittingly supporting the French regime's cultural and economic hegemony.[30] By importing French furniture, cloths,

26 Ibid., p. 56-57: "Also wurden Habsucht, Wollust, und eitle Begihrden mächtigere Triebräder der Handlungen der Bürger als die Ehre; und die Reichtümmer erwarben sich mehr Recht zu der allgemeinen Bewunderung und Hochachtung als die Tapferkeit."

27 Ibid., p. 56: "Der grosse Grundsaz der Regierungskunst ward: "Die Quellen der Reichtümer zu vermehren, und die Bürger, das ist den Adel, und das Volk das ihm anhangen könnte, durch dieselben so wol als durch andre Mittel waichlich und unterwirfig zu machen.""

28 Ibid., p. 56: "Man ward durch die Reichtümmer in den Stand gesezzet grosse Kriegsheere von einheimischen und fremden Völkern auf den Beinen zu halten. Man konnte dadurch dem Adel und andern angesehnen Bürgern, in Aemtern und sonst zur Belohnung ihrer Unterwirfigkeit, schöne Gnadengelder und Belohnungen ausmachen, ohne die sie nun nicht mehr leben konnten."

29 Ibid., p. 57: "Dises änderte das System des Staates bei nahe vollkommen, und aus einer militärischen und politischen Regierung wurd eine kaufmännische. Ja es gibt Staaten darinne der König der vornemste Kaufmann des Reiches ist."

30 This was also the general theme of the Basel weekly, *Der Eidgenoss, Eine moralische Wochenschrift,* published in 1749. In articles like "Brief von Tugenholdin" (p. 177f.), "Die läre Höflichkeit" (p. 11f.), "Neidsucht, warum sich ihr Gift sonderlich in freyen Städten auslasse" (p. 286f.), "Stutzer, Abschilderung desselben" (p. 76f.), and "Der Eidgenoss", (p. 1f.) the editors contrasted the shallowness of French politeness with the rustic honesty and righteousness of the genuine Swiss. The real 'Eidgenoss', as described on the frontispiece, "[e]ntrüstet [...] sich leicht, und macht ein saur gesicht, Und schicket er sich ja zu heutgen spöttern nicht; Begaffet ihn und lacht ein gold-bebrämter narr, Ob ihm, ob seinem bart und schlecht geschornen Haar; Hängt schlampicht Hut u: rok, sind strümpf und schuh zu weit; Sein werth kommt nicht vom kleid: Nein von der redlichkeit. Und dass die tugenden in ihme sich vereint, Mehr, als in keinem sonst. Er ist dein bester freund; Den ungezierten leib beseelt ein grosser Geist, Der ist, was er *nicht scheint* und *nicht ist* was er *heist*."

tapestries, porcelain, and other luxury goods they were not only depriving local artisans of their livelihood, they were also directly encouraging parts of the rural population to seek employment as servants in one of the city's big households, weakening Swiss agriculture and making Switzerland even more dependent on the import of French primary goods. Already at the end of the seventeenth century the Bernese Beat Ludwig von Muralt had emphasised the strongly political, aggressive features of modern civility. In his *Lettres sur les François,* written during the mid 1690s, then widely circulated in manuscript form and finally published in Geneva in 1725, Muralt described the French fashion empire as an attempt to establish a universal monarchy by non-military means. The countless novels and philosophical treatises that were stored in the warehouses of French publishers stood on the shelves "as if prepared for battle, ready to invade the neighbouring peoples". In this they resembled the "formidable armies which in former times ravaged Europe and which after having destroyed the beautiful ornaments replaced them with Gothic works."[31] Thanks to their fashion industry, "les François ne sont pas éloignés de la monarchie universelle."[32]

In the *Patriotic Dreams,* Iselin closely followed Muralt's political analysis of French fashion. The aggressive dissemination of the values of modern

31 Beat Ludwig von Muralt, *Lettres sur les François et les Anglois,* Paris 1747, vol. 1, p. 264: "[J]e dirai qu'en voyant tant de ces livres comme rangés en bataille & prêts d'envahir les peuples voisins, ils font souvenir de ces armées formidables qui autrefois ravagerent l'Europe, & qui après en avoir détruits les plus beaux ornemens, les remplirent d'ouvrages Gothiques."

32 Ibid., p. 252.

civility, he maintained, was simply the cultural and economic side of French reason of state, a continuation of Louis XIV's militaristic politics by other means. It had already infected the whole of Europe, even the allegedly puritanical Swiss republics. Not content with making the European nations tributaries to the French, luxury also eroded the underlying moral texture of society. It turned men's natural self love into a pathologically enhanced selfishness; it encouraged men to "transgress the boundaries that nature has set them, and maintained humans in a state of constant diversion which keeps them from returning into themselves and from reflecting on the fact that they are human beings after all."[33] It tore families apart, "even parents and children become a burden to one another, and those who should naturally make up but one single self now have conflicting interests." Princes, meanwhile, "become merchants while subjects become the victims of the meanness of tenants and tax collectors." There was not a single layer of society that was not affected by the deadly dynamics of luxury. It destroyed agriculture, first by enticing the nobles to sell their lands to "selfish and incapable owners" and subsequently by encouraging the common labourer to exchange the hardship of rural life for a more comfortable existence in the pay of the rich.[34] Just as luxury corrupted whole nations, by turning individual citizens against one another, it destroyed any prospect of international peace by transforming states into predators ready to seize the first opportunity to deprive their neighbours of their livelihood.[35] The price of

33 *Patriotische Träume* (1755), p. 64: "Sie weichen aus denen Schranken, die ihnen die Natur vorschreibt, und unterhalten die Menschen in einer beständigen Zerstreuung, die sie abhält in sich selbst zu kehren, und zu gedenken dass sie Menschen sind."

34 Ibid., p. 67: "Die Felder kommen aus den Händen emsiger Landleute, in die Gewalt eigennüzziger und ungeschikter Besizzer, und tragen also lange nicht mehr so vil als Fleiss und Freiheit daraus würden gezogen haben. Der Landmann suchet andre Zuflüchte, und findet in der Ueppigkeit der Reichen eine die ihm Bequemlichkeit und gute Tage gibet. Alleine sie machet ihn durch ein liederliches Leben nicht nur dem Staate unnüzze, sondern zu einer wirklichen Last und zu einem Schandflekke desselben. Nichts ist dem Staate nachtheiliger als die grosse Mänge von Bedienten."

35 Ibid., p. 66: "Durch die sich immer vermehrenden Bedürfnisse warden die Mittel dieselben sich zu verschaffen immer nohtwendiger, und immer geschwächet, so dass sie neue Zusäzze nöhtig haben. Kein Stand ist der nicht in der Nohtwendigkeit gesezzet wird grössern Aufwand zu machen, und dem andern die Mittel dazu abzudrängen. Keiner ist den nicht Ausgaben, die seine Kräfte übersteigen, nöhtigen durch Ungerechtigkeit, List und Betrug was ihm abgehet zu ersezzen."

a civilised and luxurious life of the few was the corruption of the whole of mankind.

The gladiatorial posturing of modern states was vividly described in a remarkable article published in the above mentioned journal, *Der Helvetische Patriot,* which depicts the realm of international politics as a continuous conflict between enormous colossi, each of them filled with large numbers of selfish individuals. Judging from its style and argument, it is likely that the article was written by Iselin himself. Contemporary readers would have immediately recognised the highly graphic depiction of modern states as artificial persons, or machine-men, as a direct allusion to the famous frontispiece of Hobbes' *Leviathan*. In his nightmarish dream the author, who takes the posture of a good Christian patriot, is confronted with ugly world of *Afterpolitik*.

> My door opened, and it seemed to me that I could see a stage representing our globe. I saw open cages filled with prisoners. I saw wheels, gallows, and instruments of torture. I saw great cities filled with unrest and motion. Their inhabitants seemed to be doing nothing else but cheat on one another. [...] Several large warships and commercial vessels sailed across a large ocean, and on the other side, I could see a beach filled with thousands of slaves who were continuously being beaten by those arriving [on the shores]. In the foreground there were many small and large states all trying to takes each others' territory away; most of the subjects looked famished and miserable, while their masters and their followers occasionally lived in splendour. [...] My bedroom resembled an infinitely large temple, illuminated by large torches. [...] [I] could see clearly that it was filled with great colossi, all different and each more horrid-looking then the other. Each of them had many small humanlike followers who, like their masters, tried to overpower one another. They all struck such forceful blows at one another that it frightened me. At times they seemed to be friends and stuck together. I was astonished at the sight of these dreadful creatures and so frightened that I almost did not dare to ask who they were. [...] Suddenly, from inside these huge colossi there emerged a great number of images [Bilder]. They did not look horrible, but almost like us. I had not noticed them at first, for they had all been hiding inside the colossus. [...] Soon afterwards, these images hid once again inside the colossus to which they belonged. As soon as they were inside, one colossus stepped forward. He looked particularly bad tempered. He brandished various images of all kinds of power. With a heavy breath he climbed onto a steep height. In order to do so, he trampled wherever he could on the others' hands, feet, and heads. Those who happened to be in his way, he pushed to the ground so that some of them fainted, others even died. He forced himself with all his might, and once he stood on top of the mountain, there unexpectedly, arose in front of him an even higher mountain which he tried to climb

as well, all the while while screaming: "With Right or without Right, as long as I can climb higher".[36]

3. The radical critique of modern society: Beat Ludwig von Muralt and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Given the evident failure of modern politics to establish a synthesis between security and civilisation, between politics and the economy, the obvious question that arose was how to escape the deadly dynamics of *Afterpolitik*.

36 *Der Helvetische Patriot,* Basel 1755, p. 73-77: "Meine Thüre öffnete sich, und es schien mir, ich sehe eine Schaubühne, die unsern Erdboden vorstellte. Ich sah offne Kärker voll Gefangener. Ich sah Räder, Hochgerichte und Foltergerüste. Ich sah grosse Städte, voller Unruhe und Bewegung. Die Leute darinn schienen mir, einer den andern, hinter das Licht zu führen, und zu plagen. [...] Etliche grosse Kriegs- und Kauffardenschiffe, fuhren über ein unermessliches Meer, und jenseits desselben, ward ich auf dem Strande, bey tausend Sclaven gewahr, auf welche Unglücksälige, viele Dränger, immer zuschlugen. In dem Vorgrunde, lagen viel grosse und kleine Staaten, da einer dem andern sein Land wegnahm; die Unterthanen sahen grossen Theils, ausgemägert und ellend, allweil ihre Beherrscher, samt ihrem Anhange, hin und wieder, in vollem Pompe und Vollauf lebten. [...] Meine Schlafkammer, schien mir ein ungläublich grosser Tempel. Grosse Fackeln sollten ihn beleuchten. [...] Doch konnte ich deutlich erkennen, dass er voll grosser Colossen war, die, einer anderst als der andere, und, einer grässlicher als der andere, aussahen. Es hatte ein jeder, eine Menge kleiner Anhänger in menschlicher Gestalt, welche, so wohl als ihre Herren, immer einer den andern übermeistern wollten. Wenigstens gaben sie zuweilen einander solche Streiche, dass mir davor schauerte. Oefters schienen sie Freunde, und hielten zusammen. Ich erstaunte über diesen abscheulichen Figuren, und dorfte vast vor Furcht nicht nachdenken, wer sie wären. [...] Auf einmal sprangen, aus jedem dieser ungeheuren Colossen, zimlich beträchtliche Bilder. Sie sahen eben nicht scheusslich aus, vast wie wir. Allein ich hatte sie zuerst nicht wahrgenommen, dann sie waren in dem Innersten der Colossen versteckt. [...] Und dannn versteckten sich die Bilder, ein jedes wieder in seinen Colos. Kaum waren sie drinnen, so trat einer derselben hervor. Er sah erhitzt aus. Er hatte Gemählde vor sich, von allerhand Hoheiten. Er kletterte, an einer Höhe, steil hinauf, und sich, vast aus dem Othem. Er trat, wo es kam, den andern auf die Hände, Füsse, Köpfe, um hinauf zu kommen. Er drückte sie zu Boden, theils davon in eine Ohnmacht, oder gar zu tode, wann sie ihm im Wege waren. Er ermüdete sich entsetzlich, und wann er eine Höhe erstiegen hatte, so wuchs vor ihm, unvermuthet, eine noch höhere, die wollte er auch ersteigen, und im Fortsteigen, schrie er immer: *Mit Recht oder mit Unrecht, wo immer ich nur empor komme.*"

Could there be a new realignment of politics and the economy? Could Switzerland engage in European commerce without changing its politics into something completely different? Or should Switzerland, on the contrary, cut all of its existing commercial ties to its neighbours and become a self-sufficient state? Were there any features at all of modern life that should be maintained? What hope was there for realising a morally more rewarding society? If so, how should the transition from *Afterpolitik* to a moral politics be organised? And, once the new society had been established, how could the latter be protected from the threat of renewed corruption through luxury? These questions had been at the centre of Swiss Protestant reform discourse since the late seventeenth-century. The answers varied considerably, and did so according to the authors' personal preferences, their theological position, and the specific political and economic circumstances of their hometowns. While there were some voices who spoke out in favour of adopting French moeurs and French economic policies, the vast majority of authors remained hostile to any such proposals. Having said that, it is important to notice that within the camp of the critics of luxury and commercial society itself there existed some important differences. Especially in French-speaking Switzerland, the Pays de Vaud and Geneva, there existed a broad current of reform thinking within moderate Protestant circles which was keen to establish a cohabitation between modern notions of civility and Protestant Christianity. One reason for this has to do with the fact that the political culture of French Switzerland was quite different from the German speaking parts. The Pays de Vaud, in particular, did not have any noticeable republican culture. Geneva, of course, did. But here the political culture was much more informed by the city's militant Protestantism, rather than by any strong military tradition. From 1700 onwards, moderate Protestant theologians such as Jean Alphonse Turrettini, Jean Frédéric Ostervald and the Basel minister Samuel Werenfels, were busy formulating a new Protestant moral theory which, they hoped, would be more suited to the modern world than the rigorous Calvinism which seemed to drive people out of the churches and into the arms of one of the various Pietist groupings that had mushroomed all over Switzerland.[37] Moving away from the strict Calvinist

37 For an introduction to the the moral and theological debates of early 18th-century Swiss Protestantism, see M. C. Pitassi, *De l'orthodoxie aux lumières. Genève 1670-*

position on the issue of predetermination and its claim that *sola fide,* faith alone, presented the path to salvation, these moderate Protestants instead defended the idea of general grace and emphasised the importance of the *praxis pietatis*. In their writings they insisted that man's sinful condition was largely caused by external circumstances, such as corrupt politics and insufficient programs of education. While men could never become angels, Ostervald argued in his pathbreaking *Traité des sources de la corruption* of 1700, they had a natural capacity to achieve a higher moral life. Attacking the morally defeatist claim of the neo-Augustinians, "que la Terre est le lieu de la Corruption, que cette vie est le temps du peché", Ostervald held that "la Terre est le lieu de la Practique des Vertus Chrêtiennes; que c'est maintenant le temps de travailler, de marcher, de combattre".[38] The fact that human societies might never be perfect did not dispense Christians from their duty to live an exemplary life and to fight corruption wherever they encountered it. Modern Christians could not escape the condition of modern inequality, but they could soften its consequences by engaging in acts of charity and by setting up institutions for the promotion of Christian values.[39] By his upbringing, Iselin was closely aligned with this French Swiss, moderate Protestant reform movement. The French Church in Basel, of which Iselin was a member, had close personal ties with the main reformers from

1737 (Histoire et Société, No. 24), Genève 1992; also Paul Wernle, *Der schweizerische Protestantismus im 18. Jahrhundert*, 3 vols, Tübingen 1923-1925; more specifically, M. Heyd, *Between Orthodoxy and Enlightenment: Jean-Robert Chouet and the Introduction of Cartesian Science in the Academy of Geneva*, The Hague 1982. Much useful information can also be found in Henri Vuilleumier, *Histoire de l'église réformée du Pays de Vaud sous le régime bernois*, 4 vols, Lausanne 1927-1933.

38 J.-F. Ostervald, *Traité des sources de la corruption qui rège aujourd'hui parmi les Chrêtiens*, s.l. 1700, vol. 1, p. 81. On Ostervald see the recent study by Pierre Barthel, *Jean-Frédéric Ostervald l'Européen, 1663-1747*, Geneva 2001.

39 Close ties existed between Swiss French reformers and the English 'Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge'. There remains no proper study of the Swiss part of this movement. Some information can be gathered from Paul Nordmann, *Gabriel Seigneux de Correvon. Ein schweizerischer Kosmopolit 1695-1775*, Florence 1947; for the English part, see M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement. A Study of Eighteenth Century Puritanism in Action*, Cambridge 1938.

Geneva, Neuchâtel and the Pays de Vaud.[40] During Iselin's childhood, J. F. Ostervald's son, Jean Rodolphe, played the role of father figure to the young Isaak. Iselin was thus fully emersed in this culture. During his student years, however, Iselin was also deeply attracted to much more radical forms of Protestant *Kulturkritk,* which ridiculed the moderate Protestants' hope for a Christian Enlightenment and called for far more drastic measures to be taken. Although Iselin found his way back to the moderate Protestant cause in the *Patriotic Dreams,* he did so only after an intense engagement and subsequent disillusionment with the ideas of the radicals.

In the following section, I will accordingly focus on two extreme positions within the spectrum of Swiss reform discourse. Both are crucial for understanding the kind of problems Iselin was trying to deal with in the *Patrotic Dreams*. The first is that of the Bernese Pietist, Beat Ludwig von Muralt. The second that of the Genevan, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Both positions share some strong common ground, namely their categorical rejection of commercial society as a motor for moral improvement. Yet, the solutions they offered for overcoming the tensions within modern commercial politics could not have been more different. According to Muralt, the only way for the Swiss to realise their moral potential was to abstain from political life, to leave the cities behind and to live in small, quasi-anarchic communities in immediate communication with God. Rousseau on the contrary favoured a radically political solution. Rather than trying to take politics out of the equation and bet on man's natural ability to establish truly Christian, non-political societies, the Swiss should instead seek inspiration from the pure politics of Sparta. While, Rousseau argued, individual, extraordinarily gifted, members of modern society could escape the morally corrosive effects of a system of needs, whole societies could not. Commercial societies were incapable of producing a culture of consensus on their own. Consen-

40 On the French Church in Basel, see L. Junod, *Histoire de l'église française de Bâle*, Lausanne 1868; more specifically Karl Barth, "Samuel Werenfels (1657-1740) und die Theologie seiner Zeit", in *Evangelische Theologie*, 3 (1936), p. 180ff., and J. van den Berg, "Le Vray Piétisme: Die aufgeklärte Frömmigkeit des Basler Pfarrers Pierre Rocques", in *Zwingliana*, Bd. XVI (1983-1985), p. 35ff. For Iselin's contacts to various Reform Protestants in Basel, see Ulrich Im Hof, *Isaak Iselin. Sein Leben und die Entwicklung seines Denkens bis zur Abfassung der "Geschichte der Menschheit" von 1764*, 2 vols, Basel 1947, p. 513ff.

sus had to be established artificially, through an act of political will. Iselin considered, and then rejected, both of these positions.

3.1. Beat Ludwig von Muralt's radical Pietism

Little is known about Muralt's early years except that, during the 1680s, he served as an officer in one of the Swiss regiments in France, and that in the 1690s he undertook several lengthy trips to England, Holland and France where wrote his *Lettres sur les Anglois et les François* (1725).[41] Although by 1725 criticism of French civility could no longer be considered a novelty[42] Muralt was widely credited for having been the first Swiss to do so at such length and in a style which set him above even the harshest of France's critics. To Muralt, the most striking feature of French society was the way in which fashion had come to dominate even the smallest aspects of life.[43] Fashion in France was what in other countries was called custom; but while customs usually described a set of deeply engrained, stable principles of behaviour, the custom of the French "has nothing stable; it is like a torrent that changes its course every time it overflows and by so doing inundates the entire country." Fashion had established its authority over every single member of society, it "regulates their conduct and way of life, as well as their exterior and manners: it is fashion that dictates whether someone wants to be an atheist or a believer, learned or ignorant; whether he either likes wines or women, his own or that of others."[44] The French, Muralt claimed,

41 *Lettres sur les Anglois et les François et sur les voyages*, s.l. 1725; The edition I am using is the Paris edition of 1747, which also includes the 'Lettre sur l'Esprit fort' and the 'L'instinct divin'. On Muralt, see Otto von Greyerz, *Beat Ludwig v. Muralt (1665-1749)*, Frauenfeld 1888; Gian Carlo Roscioni, *Beat Ludwig von Muralt e la ricerca dell'umano*, Roma 1961.

42 Very similar arguments had been presented in various Swiss moral journals, notably Bodmer's *Diskurse der Mahler* (Zürich 1722-1723) and Johann Georg Altmann's *Freitags Blättlein* (Bern 1721-1722).

43 *Lettres*, vol. 1, p. 251: "[L]a mode conduit & remue tout en France, & en toutes choses les François se soumettent à elle d'une soumission parfaite."

44 Ibid., p. 237: "En France [...] la coûtume n'y a rien de fixe; c'est un torrent qui change de cours à chaque fois qu'il se déborde, & qui en se débordant innonde tout le pays."; p. 246: "[E]lle domine sur les hommes mêmes, dont elle régle la conduite

were fashion slaves whose liberty "resembles that of prisoners who are given each and every day new chains and new prisons and who for this reason think of themselves as free."[45]

Muralt was also familiar with the standard arguments made in favour of luxury. Its apologists claimed that luxury imitated the effects of charity by linking the various members of society into a tight net of mutual dependencies. By encouraging men to spend luxury directly contributed to social distribution. Hard working artisans who had taste, talent and knew how to cater to the needs of the rich, could gradually work their way up the social ladder. Luxury and the fashion industry provided occupations for a large number of people, the "*gens d'esprit, de jolis gens* who would otherwise be in a delicate situation and have difficulty in supporting themselves."[46] Because of its role as the undisputed leader of the European market for luxury goods, France was able to sell its trinkets to the rest of the world at exorbitant prices.[47] Luxury on this account not only generated national unity, it also presented the cornerstone in France's economic strategy of protecting its own industry against any low cost producing rival.

When the *Lettres* were published in 1725, they were immediately associated with Fénelon's *Télémaque*. Both works were written at more or less the same time (around 1697) and dealt with the politics of Louis XIV.

& le genre de vie, aussi-bien que l'extérieur & les manieres: c'est selon qu'elle ordonne que tel veut être Athée ou dévot, sçavant ou ignorant; qu'il s'attache au vin ou aux femmes, à la sienne ou à celle d'un autre".

45 Ibid., p. 238: "Cet exercice à quoi ils prennent plaisir, leur paroît une liberté: semblables à des prisonniers, à qui tous les jours on changeroit les chaînes & les prisons, & qui à cause de cela se croiroient libres."

46 Ibid., p. 254-255: "Par tous les changemens que la mode introduit successivement, par ceux-là mêmes qui ruinent les uns, elle fait du bien aux autres, aux ouvriers & aux marchands qui s'enrichissent par-là, & à bien d'autres encore que ceux-ci font subsister. Il arrive même qu'elle fait faire des fortunes subites aux ouvriers qui la servent bien, qui par des inventions heureuses sçavent la mettre dans son lustre, & réjoüir ceux qui la suivent. Ajoûtez à tout cela que la mode fournit à la conversation d'un nombre infini de gens d'esprit, de joli gens, qui se trouveroient embarassés sans elle, & auroient de la peine à se soutenir."

47 Ibid., p. 241: "[C]eux d'entre les François qui entreprennent de justifier leur Nation au sujet de la mode, alléguent le profit qui lui en revient, en ce qu'elle vend chérement ses babioles au reste du monde."

Muralt must have been aware of this similarity for, when reworking the manuscript for publication, he added a passage in which he directly pointed to the *Télémaque* as the work he most admired.[48] Muralt's gesture towards Fénelon's genius was more than just lip service. In a further letter, added to the *Lettres sur les Anglois et les François,* called the *Lettre sur les voyages,* written between 1698 and 1700, he sketched out a program of reform for Switzerland along Fénelonian lines. "Our country", Muralt insisted, "does not agree with luxury". In fact, there was "not a single nation to which luxury is more foreign than our own".[49] Luxury, of course, was "always a great folly", but while it could be argued that in rich nations luxury merely skimmed off superfluous wealth, in the case of small landlocked republics like Switzerland it directly undermined the country's capacity for survival. Because Switzerland did not produce its own luxury goods but relied entirely on imports, luxury could not even be credited with enhancing circulation or developing a local market. It destroyed the ties of friendship between ruler and ruled, it forced citizens into bankruptcy and lead them to seek office for no other reason but their own personal gain.[50]

Switzerland's republican constitution and lack of natural resources meant that it had to return to an economy of real needs, based on continuous hard

48 Ibid., p. 355-356. In the *Télémaque*, "les idées les plus saines, pour bien gouverner les hommes, s'y trouvent dévéloppées; tout ce qui fait le bonheur de l'homme dans la société, & qui est comme perdu sur la terre, se présente ici agréablement à lui. La crainte de la Divinité anime la morale qui y est répandue par-tout, elle ennoblit tout l'ouvrage, & les vérités de la religion les plus importantes s'y reconnoissent sous l'heureuse fiction. Cet ouvrage est peut-être pour nos tems ce que ceux du Poëte Grec étoient pour les tems où ils parurent, je veux dire, excellens par-dessus tous les autres."

49 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 60: "Le luxe [...] nous convient moins qu'à quelque Nation que ce soit. Il nous est si peu propre qu'il nous rend ridicules aux yeux de tout homme raisonnable, de celui même qui est homme du monde, & qui aime le luxe losqu'il est en sa place. Car celui que l'on voit chez d'autres Nations est proportionné à leur richesses, & le nôtre est entiérement disproportionné à notre pauvreté, ou, si l'on veut, à nos richesses qui s'écoulent d'abord par le partage qui s'en fait."

50 Ibid., p. 62: "Mais sur-tout le luxe est mauvais pour nous, en ce qu'il nous met dans la nécessité d'amasser le bien qui nous manque pour y fournir. De-là on s'en fait une d'entrer dans les employs qui peuvent enrichir; on les envisage comme créés pour cela principalement, & on en exerce les fonctions dans cette vûe."

work and good housekeeping.[51] In his *Lettre* Muralt envisaged two ways in which Switzerland might be brought back to an economy of real needs. The first was to abolish all existing sumptuary laws and import tariffs, and to actively encourage the spread of luxury in the hope that, once Switzerland had been depleted of its remaining riches, the great families driven into ruin, and the common citizens sufficiently disgusted at their own behaviour, the nation would finally come to its senses and desire a return to a state of virtuous simplicity.[52] Muralt rejected this solution out of hand. While exposing Switzerland to the torrents of luxury might reduce it to a state of poverty, and thus in principle establish the conditions for a needs driven economy, it was unlikely to trigger a process of moral introspection. Once men had fully entered the realm of luxury, they had lost any capacity for moral orientation: "Luxury blinds and corrupts men to a point where they become insane".[53]

The only way to combat luxury effectively was to instigate a far-reaching programme of moral education, with the specific aim of liberating men from the influence that the opinion of others had on their ability to evaluate their own actions. Only if men stopped comparing themselves to others, and stopped seeking the approval of their fellow beings (and neighbouring nations), could the spell of luxury and fashion be broken. For this to happen men had to return into themselves; they had to become part of the natural order once again (Muralt calls this *rentrer dans l'ordre*).

51 Unlike France, Switzerland "ne produit que ce qui sert aux simples besoins de la vie, ne nous donne lieu de nous écarter d'un genre de vie simple." Ibid., p. 61.

52 The same argument had been put forward in an article, "Vom Lob der Unwissenheit" published in 1722 in the Bernese weekly, *Bernisches Freitagsblättlein*, "Die Arbeitsamkeit ist eine Tochter der Armuth, diese nun auch gleichfahls in den Stand zu setzen, so müsste man schauen, dass unsere grosse und überflüssige Reichthum auss dem Land geschaffet wurde, es seye nun gleich auff was Weis es immer seye, und solte man so gar unser Silber und Gold an zerbrüchliche Possen und fremdes Naschwerk vertauschen. Zu diesem End solte allen fremden Kauf-Leuthen, so unser Nation auff allerhand Weis das Gelt abnehmen können, freyer Zutritt gestattet werden. Alle fremde Waaren, so nur wegen ihrer Köstlichkeit grosse Summen auss dem Land ziehen, müsste in grosser Menge in unsere Stadt geworffen, und theur genug verkaufft werden." (p. 339-340)

53 *Lettres*, vol. 2, p. 63: "[L]e luxe ébloüit & corompt les hommes à un point qu'ils ne deviennent commes insensés".

According to Muralt, it was impossible for men to be reunited with nature whilst actively participating in modern life and modern forms of education.[54] Muralt's scorn was directed especially at the Grand Tour which he dismissed as an exercise in vanity.[55] Nor did Muralt believe that the arts and sciences could provide adequate foundations for a genuine moral education. Reasoning [*les raisonnemens*] and the sciences were the product of leisure and hence of luxury, unknown to man in his natural state.[56] If men really wanted to *rentrer dans l'ordre* and form a new society based on love, they had to follow their *instinct divin*. Just as common animals were equipped with an instinct "which never leads them astray", so men had also received an inner guide, their conscience. Men's *instinct divin* or conscience was the only part of human nature which had not been corrupted by the Fall: it was the voice through which "the Deity makes itself known to us and speaks to us."[57] The purpose of a moral education was to make this inner voice become audible

54 See ibid., p. 15: "[F]aute de cette connoissance [de l'homme], nous sommes incertains sur ce qu'il convient de faire pour l'éducation des jeunes gens. Nous ne sçavons ni ce que nous devons principalement leur enseigner, ni à quoi nous devons les occuper, pour les empêcher de se jetter dans l'excès où l'oisivité & la jeunesse les portent. Les peres, qui eux-mêmes ne sont pas dans l'humanité, mais seulement occupés des états qui s'y rapportent, n'ont en vûe pour leurs enfans que ces mêmes états, & ils les y vouent dans les mêmes motifs, sans que l'humanité considérée en elle-même y entre, sans leur inspirer ou faire connoître les principes qui font l'homme."

55 Ibid., p. 48: "C'est pour le public que l'on voyage, & c'est le public qui recompense de la peine de voyager." Muralt complained that the young patricians, rather than following the example of the ancient legislators who only travelled in order to study the legal practices, constitutional arrangements and moeurs of foreign nations, wasted their time with such trivialities as assisting the *lever du roi,* or attending courtly processions.

56 Ibid., p. 28: "Les raisonnemens, [...] c'est d'un goût corrompu qu'ils proviennent, ils nous corrompent le goût de plus en plus, & nous éloignent de la simplicité où la vérité se trouve; ils nous sortent de nous-même, & nous font errer hors de nous. L'homme simple ignore l'art de raisonner, & celui qui a sa veritable occupation le negligee. Il ne convient qu'au loisir, à l'état oisif qui nous jette hors de l'humanité, & à une fausse curiosité que le loisir engendre."

57 Ibid., p. 14-15: "Comme l'ordre seul peut nous donner cette connoissance [de l'homme], je pense qu'il y a un seul moyen de rentrer dans l'ordre: c'est de suivre l'instinct qui est en nous, l'instinct divin qui est peut-être tout ce qui nous reste du premier état de l'homme, & qui nous est laissé pour nous y ramener. Tout les êtres vivans que nous connoissons ont le leur qui ne les trompe point. L'homme, qui est de tous ces êtres le plus excellent, n'auroit-il point le sien ...? Il l'a sans doute, & cet instinct est la voix de la conscience, où la divinité se fait connoître à nous, & nous parle."

again by neutralising the various distorting elements that had silenced it during the process of civilisation. Muralt believed that this could be done only if men physically removed themselves from the urban culture of modern cities and settled in the countryside.[58] Muralt was adamant in his insistence that his advocacy of rural life was not meant as a call for men to live the solitary existence of hermits. Men were naturally good and sociable. By retiring to the countryside, and learning to live in harmony with nature, men laid the foundations for an entirely new and genuinely moral society based on love.[59]

Muralt's position in the *Lettres sur les voyages* was a realist one. The return to the countryside, he claimed, would also enhance Switzerland's capacity for self-defence. Hard labour and constant exposure to the elements were the ideal training for a powerful militia, which he believed remained the best resource for discouraging potential foreign aggressors from waging war against the Confederation. This had been the key to the success of the old Swiss. By constantly exercising the population in the practice of arms whilst at the same time openly renouncing any interest in further territorial expansion, the old Swiss had managed to gain the respect of all the European nations. Compared to present-day Switzerland "with its politeness and the splendour by which it tries to distinguish itself", the old republic might

58 Ibid., p. 2-3: "[L]a campagne seule nous met dans notre situation naturelle. Elle nous place agréablement entre la retraite & la société, aussi-bien qu'entre le repos & le travail; que nous y pouvons faire succéder l'un à l'autre; elle nous tire de la dépendance, & nous met en liberté, sans quoi nous ne sçaurions vivre heureux. [...] Ici nos moeurs s'adoucissent, & nos passions se calment; nos desseins diminuent, & notre maniere de vivre devient simple."

59 Ibid., p. 4: "Je pense même que c'est ici, que c'est dans la vie retirée dont on joüit à la campagne, que nous nous formons pour la société. C'est où nous devenons tranquilles, & où nous parvenons à nous connoître; c'est le moyen de rentrer dans l'ordre, si nous avons quelque disposition à y rentrer, puisqu'il n'y a que l'homme dans l'ordre qui soit véritablement sociable, d'accord avec les autres, comme il l'est avec soi-même. En choisissant ce genre de vie, je ne me sépare donc pas de la société, comme vous m'en accusiez; au contraire, comme je m'étois rapproché de ma patrie, en quittant tout ce qui m'est étranger, & qui m'empêche d'être homme, de m'acquitter de ce que je dois aux autres aussi-bien qu'à moi-même."

seem crude [*grossière*], yet it "resembled the image of a building made out of rocks that is as grand as it is solid".[60]

This was the Muralt of the first years of the eighteenth century, and it was on this basis that he was hailed as a Swiss Fénelon. By 1725, at the very latest by 1728, Muralt's position, however, had changed drastically. In his *L'instinct divin* from 1728, the *Lettres fanatiques* of 1739, and the *Invitation aux hommes à rentrer en eux-mêmes* (which was printed in together with the *Instinct divin* in 1727 and which was either written by Muralt himself or by someone close to him), Muralt propagated a radically isolationist, millenarian vision of a largely non-political Switzerland. The Swiss, whom he now openly described as the new Israel, should abstain from any earthly activities, not just politics but even marriage, and seek instead to establish a new covenant with God.[61] In doing so Muralt squarely placed himself within the camp of the Bernese separatist Pietists and their millenarian discourse about the imminence of the Second Coming of Christ. Muralt's association with Pietism was in fact nothing new, and can be traced back at least as far as 1700, when he was expelled from Berne for sympathising with local Pietist leaders and for refusing to attend church service. Pietist leanings, as Iselin later commented, can also be found in the *Lettres sur les voyages*.[62]

60 Ibid., p. 59: "La grossière république d'alors donne l'idée d'un bâtiment fait de piéces de roche, qui a du grand autant que du solide; celle d'aujourd'hui, notre Nation avec la politesse & l'éclat dont elle cherche à se parer, ne présente à l'imagination que plâtre & vernis."

61 For Muralt's position on marriage in the face of the second coming, see the recently discovered letters to his brother in law, the Bernese Albrecht von Wattenwyl, from March 1717. Rudolf Dellsperger, "Eine "missratene" Heirat. Beobachtungen zu zwei Briefen Beat Ludwig von Muralts vom März 1717", *Histoire et herméneutique. Mélanges pour Gottfried Hammann,* ed. Martin Rose (Histoire et Société, No. 45), p. 117-126.

62 See for example *Lettres*, vol. 2, p. 74-75, where Muralt alluded to the providential role of Switzerland. "Il semble que la Providence qui gouverne le monde, ait voulu que parmi les Nations il y en eut une droite & simple, qui manquant de grandes richesses, aussi-bien que d'occasions à de grands plaisirs, ne fut pas dans la tentation de se laisser aller au luxe. Une heureuse obscurité, un genre de vie éloigné de toute ostentation, autant que de toute mollesse, devoit nous attacher à nos montagnes, & le contentement inséparable de ce genre de vie, devoit nous y affermir. Dans cette situation la Providence nous vouloit conserver exempts des troubles & des agitations qui travaillent le reste du monde, & nous proposer pour exemple aux peuples égarés. Elle vouloit récompenser en nous un reste d'ordre, conservé à la vue de toute la terre, un caractère perdu parmi les Nations opulentes & voluptueuses."

Yet it was only in his writings after 1725 that his adherence to a radically separatist form of Pietism came to the fore.[63]

The differences between his earlier and later works are indeed remarkable. For one, Muralt now seemed to have abandoned any hope for a possible reform of the existing political and economic order by means of moral education alone. The only model that might save the Swiss was that of the ancient Hebrew republic where the citizens had lived under the direct commandment of God.[64] Muralt also dropped his earlier discussion of the need to reorganise the militia. Given that God had already started to assemble his flock, national security was no longer a topic the Swiss should be concerned with. Where eternal salvation was at stake, (rather than mere physical destruction by an invading army) the only sensible strategy to adopt was that of trying to live an exemplary Christian life of innocence, charity, and brotherly love. Nor should men engage in politics. The institutionalisation of authority necessarily lead to abuse, oppression and distorted the peaceful organisation of a needs driven economy. The only authority that men should accept, Muralt argued, was the direct authority of God.[65]

63 See Rousseau's comment in the *Nouvelle Héloïse,* where he describes Muralt as a *Fénelon manqué*: "Je n'ai jamais blamé votre gout pour les écrits du bon Fénelon: mais que faites-vous de ceux de sa disciple? Vous lisez Muralt, je le lis aussi; mais je choisis ses lettres, et vous choisissez son instinct divin. Voyez comment il a fini, déplorez les égaremens de cet homme sage, et songez à vous." *Œuvres Complètes,* vol. 2, p. 685.

64 *Invitations aux hommes,* p. 19: "[V]ous vous trompez si vous croiez de parvenir à la Possession du souverain Bien par des Connoissances de Spéculation & par de beaux Raisonnemens sur l'Ecriture Sainte ou sur vos Devoirs; ce n'est point à cela que Dieu vous apelle; il vous apelle à vivre dans la simplicité, dans la Droiture envers les autres Hommes avec qui vous communiquez, & dans une *Obéïssance réelle à tous ses Commandemens*." [my italics] The reception of the early seventeenth-century debate on the Hebrew republic within late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Swiss Protestant circles has so far been entirely neglected and would make a fascinating study. The model of the 'theocratic' Hebrew republic seems to have been of particular significance to Bernese Pietist circles who used it as a way to think about a Christian alternative to Berne's *caesaropapism.*

65 This was also the central message of Muralt's 'Fable of the bees' which he wrote sometime during the late 1720s or early 1730s. When a younger bee suggests that

An equally drastic change in Muralt's position was the development of his theory of man's divine instinct. In the *Observations* published in 1726, the Abbé Desfontaines, Muralt's most outspoken French critic, had ridiculed his overly moralising critique of luxury and French civility as the product of a morose Pietist who clung to false ideals of man's original virtuous simplicity.[66] In contrast to what Muralt seemed to believe, Desfontaines maintained, there was no way in which men could penetrate behind the mask of modern social beings. Any understanding of human nature and morality had to follow from a study of man's exterior and appearance; moral understanding was the product of social interaction corrected by reason.[67] Muralt's idea of man possessing a divine instinct which provided him with immediate moral understanding, Desfontaines claimed, was a chimera that opened the gates to the worst kind of fanaticism.

In his *L'instinct divin* Muralt directly addressed these accusations. Turning against those who claimed that the divine instinct was unreliable, and that "the conscience through which it talks to us needs to be enlightened",

all bees should stop producing honey for humans because the latter regarded them as common insects and destroyed their dwellings, a wise bee convinces the assembly that it was their duty to continue their natural activity, irrespective of the costs and hardship which it might entail: "Il vaut mieux, fut-il dit, en suivant l'Instinct que la Nature a mis en nous, vivre & mourir en Abeilles, à qui les Hommes doivent ce qu'ils ont de plus doux, que de renier nôtre Espèce. Si nous ne vivions que pour nous-même, nous ne serions pour eux que des Mouches armées d'un Aiguillon, c'est à dire des Insectes en effet, & nous devons nous souvenir que c'est pour les Hommes, pour leur service, que nôtre Espèce est crée." *Fables nouvelles*, Berlin 1753, p. 28. A German version of the 'Les Abeilles' in verse form was later published by Gottfried Konrad Pfeffel in his *Fabeln der helvetischen Gesellschaft gewidmet* (Basel 1783).

66 *Apologie du charactère des Anglois et des François; ou Observations sur le livre ...*, reprinted in Volume two of the 1747 Paris edition of the *Lettres*.

67 Ibid., p. 374: "*La science du monde* [est une] science inutile, répond notre Suisse; "Il vaux mieux, dit-il, connoître l'homme que son masque; les ressorts qui le font parler et agir, plûtôt que son exterieur & la comédie qu'il joue." Oui, mais nous sommes obligés de vivre & de représenter au milieu de ces gens masqués. Il nous faut donc connoître les masques, il faut jouer notre role comme eux. Voilà la science du monde; science absolument nécessaire pour se conduire & vivre heureusement. Elle méne un esprit sensé & pénétrant à la science du cœur humain, parce que nous connoissons le cœur des hommes par leurs actions."

he insisted that any alleged inconsistencies in the utterances of man's conscience were less the result of the latter's inadequacy and imprecision than of various external factors, such as bad education, customs and luxury, which prevented conscience from functioning properly.[68] Man's divine instinct and conscience did not require any adaptation through socialisation and reflection; it was the undiluted "source of everything that is good in man", it was man's 'good will' which, when allowed to act freely, fully corresponded to the will of God.[69]

More troubling still, to people like Iselin, was Muralt's new intransigent stand regarding man's ability to *rentrer dans l'ordre*. In the *Lettres sur les voyages,* the retreat to the countryside had been described as merely the first phase of a lengthy process of moral renewal, leaving open the possibility of the future development of an increasingly complex but nevertheless 'natural' or 'ordered' society. In the *Instinct divin* Muralt clearly ruled out this option. Neither human nature nor the history of mankind, he claimed, provided any ground for assuming that any future, complex society could lead to man being reconciled with God and nature. Nor did he place much trust in the redeeming capacities of rural life. The only image of moral life, guided by man's *instinct divin* was to be found amongst the savages who lived naked, without scripture, the division of labour, or artificial needs.[70]

68 *Instinct divin*, in *Lettres*, vol. 2, p. 135: "Mais cet instinct, nous dit-on, n'est pas toujours tel que l'on puisse se fier à lui, & la conscience par la voix de laquelle il nous parle a besoin de même d'être éclairée: à moins de cela elle varie, & produit toutes sortes de bisarreries & d'extravagances; elle a son faux qui est à craindre, & qui fait bien plus d'effet que ce qu'elle a de reel; le fanatisme avec tous les troubles qu'il cause vient de-là. Ces variations n'ont pas leur source dans la conscience même; des causes étrangères y donnent lieu, & que les jugemens de la conscience doivent détruire.".

69 Ibid., p. 119: L'instinct divin est la source de tout ce qu'il a de bon dans l'homme. See also p. 120-121: "Pour le tirer de l'état où il est, [la Divinité] lui parle d'abord dans sa conscience, où elle tient son tribunal pour juger en lui tout ce qu'il y a de mauvais, tout de qui empêche son retour vers elle, & ensuite elle lui parle par l'instinct divin qu'elle lui a donné pour guide, & qui le conduit dans le bien, dans le chemin que la conscience lui a ouvert. Ce n'est que par-là, ce n'est qu'autant que la Divinité parle à l'homme qu'il est nourri de la vérité qui produit la vie, & les enseignemens qui lui viennent du dehors ne sont efficaces pour lui qu'autant que la parole intérieure les adopte & les fait valoir."

70 See, for example, ibid., p. 217: "Les peuples barbares n'ont pas encore renoncé à

3.2. *Iselin's critique of Muralt: from 'instinct divin' to moral sense*

Muralt's later work left many questions unanswered. For one, he failed to give a clear definition of his *Instinct divin* and how it differed from the instincts of common animals. Nor did he specify the point up to which men could still be seen to have lived 'naturally', according to the precepts of 'order'. Despite such shortcomings, his writings exerted a tremendous influence on the younger Swiss of Iselin's generation, and several major works by Swiss authors from the 1750s and 1760s were directly inspired by the arguments developed in the *Lettres sur les voyages*. J. G. Zimmermann's *Von der Einsamkeit,* first published in Zurich in 1756, is only one particularly striking example. Zimmermann's treatise, which essentially deals with the effects of continuous alienation within modern society, also indicates what many of Muralt's younger readers, including Iselin, believed his real argument to be: namely that a moral society was possible only within a small group of fellow believers who were prepared to abandon politics and live from what they managed to produce.[71] During the late 1740s Iselin was firmly convinced that the path indicated by Muralt was the right one. In June 1748, after reading Muralt's *Lettres sur les François* and the *Lettres sur les voyages,* Iselin informed his mother of his decision to exchange his prospective careers in either academia or politics for a meditative life of rural retreat. "The mere idea" he wrote "of being promoted [to a public

l'humanité jusques-là; on ne s'y orne pas d'infamie, & dans leur nudité ils ont plus de pudeur qu'il n'y en a chez ces peuples revêtus, qui sous une belle apparance ne cachent le plus souvent que de l'ordure."

71 A recent intellectual biography of Zimmermann is still missing. See, Rudolf Ischer, *Johann Georg Zimmermanns Leben und Werke*, Diss. Bern 1893; Auguste Bouvier, *Johann Georg Zimmermann 1728-1795: Un représentant suisse du cosmopolitisme littéraire au XVIII^e siècle*, Genève 1925; also, *Johann Georg Zimmermann – 1728-1795: Eine Reihe von Abhandlungen anlässlich der 200. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages*, Basel 1929; On Zimmermann's *Von der Einsamkeit*, see the recent study by Mark-Georg Dehrmann, *Produktive Einsamkeit – Studien zu Gottfried Arnold, Shaftesbury, Johann Georg Zimmermann, Jacob Hermann Obereit, Christoph Martin Wieland*, Hannover 2002. More generally, Andreas Langenbacher (ed.), *Johann Georg Zimmermann: mit Skalpell und Federkiel – ein Lesebuch*, Bern 1995; and Hans-Peter Schramm (ed.), *Johann Georg Zimmermann: königlich grossbritannischer Leibarzt (1728-1795)*, Wiesbaden 1998.

office] unjustly – and who ever gets promoted on the grounds of merit alone? – fills me with horror as great as anything in this world." Obtaining honours, riches, and fame "have lost all attractiveness since I found the heart to look at them with steady eyes [...] Considering my tendencies and circumstances, a peaceful private life, especially if it was mostly spent in the countryside, would be most agreeable. There I could concentrate all my forces in order to improve my heart and to eradicate all those faults which I sense are still very much in place."[72] Even before his mother was able to draft a reply Iselin sent a second letter where he explained that this sudden disgust for all worldly matters was merely a passing depression aggravated by his recent study of Muralt.

> Before writing the last letter, I had been in a strange mood for a number of days; I had had enough of this world, and everything I observed only gave rise to sad thoughts. In order to fight off this moroseness I wanted to read a spirited and beautiful work, and it was this book which then plunged me into this unbearable and sombre mood. The book I was reading was Herr von Muralt's Letter on the rich. It is well known that this Gentleman is of a somewhat melancholic disposition and that his moral theory reflects more his heavy blood than actual human nature. This morality, which fully corresponded with my mood, soon took over my entire soul. [...] In this state of mind I no longer knew my place in this world and only wanted to go to the countryside and become a hermit like Muralt. [73]

72 Cited in Ferdinand Schwarz, "Isaak Iselin als Student in Göttingen (1747/48)", in *Basler Jahrbuch 1916*, Basel 1916, p. 172: "Die einzige Idee, auf eine ungerechte Art befördert zu werden – und wer wird bei uns leicht aus rechtmässigen Absichten befördert? – kommt mir so schrecklich vor als etwas in der Welt". p. 173: "Ehre, Reichtümer, ein weitläufiger Ruhm, viele Clienten und Verehrer, das Bewundertwerden haben bei mir ihren Glanz verloren, seitdem ich das Herz gehabt, dieselben mit steifen Augen anzusehen. [...] Ein ruhiges Privatleben hingegen, insbesonderheit moistens auf dem Lande, ware für meine Gemütsbeschaffenheit und meine Glücksumstände das angemehmste. Ich könnte da meine ganze Bemühung darauf wenden, mein Herze zu bessern und diejenigen Fehler daraus auszumerzen, die ich noch häufig darinnen finde."

73 Ibid., p. 177-178: "Ich war einige Tage ehe ich den letzten Brief schrieb, in einer ganz wunderlichen Gemütsverfassung; die ganze Welt war mir verleidet und alles, was ich sah, gab mir Anlass zu traurigen Betrachtungen. Ich wollte mich nun, um mich dieser Verdriesslichkeit zu erwehren, der Lektüre einer geistreichen und schönen Schrift bedienen, und eben dieses Mittel hat mich in eine unerträgliche Laune gesetzet. Die Schrift, die ich las, war des Herrn von Muralt sein Brief über die Reichen. Es ist bekannt, dass dieser Mann ein wenig schwerblütig ist und

Iselin concluded his letter with the assurance that "my reason started to come back and I now have, thanks to God, fully recovered." With his critical faculties restored he now understood that it was his duty as both a Christian and a patriot to fight corruption from *within* society. "I have now once again clearly realised that, given my age and condition, I have no other duty but to make myself useful, to serve my fatherland and to leave the rest to providence."[74]

Muralt's influence on the young Iselin was obviously stronger than he believed for when in the summer of 1749 his fatherly friend, Johann Wernhard Huber, quit his various posts in the Basel administration and retired to Muttenz to become a gentleman farmer, Iselin was once again ready to implement his earlier project. In an essay entitled, *Von der Einsamkeit,* which appeared in the December issue of *Der Eidgenoss,* Iselin insisted that his longing for solitude and desire to abandon politics, to "escape the presence of the plebs [grosse Haufen] and the noisy sounds of the city dwellers" was in no way caused by a misanthropic or melancholy disposition. Throughout the ages great thinkers had always sought to distance themselves from the hustle and bustle of "large societies" to meditate in calm surroundings. But life in the countryside not only encouraged concentrated reflection and study, it also helped men to become virtuous.[75] Large societies were always harmful from a moral point of view. The bigger the crowd, the greater was also the chance of encountering enemies of virtue. And since "[o]ur minds accept vice as easily as our bodies the infectious diseases of other people",

dass er eine Moral aushecket, die mehr seinem schweren Geblüt als der Natur des Menschen angemessen zu sein scheint. Diese Moral, weil sie ganz genau mit seiner damaligen Laune übereins kam, bemächtigte sich alsobald meiner ganzen Seele. [...] Ich wusste bei solcher Gemütsverfassung nun nichts mehr in der Welt zu tun als auf das Land zu gehen und ein Einsiedler zu werden wie Muralt."

74 Ibid., p. 178: "Ich sehe nun wieder ganz klar ein, dass dem Alter und den Umständen, in denen ich bin, mir keine andere Pflicht oblieget, als mich geschickt zu machen, meinem Vaterlande zu dienen, das Uebrige aber der Vorsehung zu überlassen."

75 *Der Eidgenoss,* 1749, p. 402: "Man glaubt gemeiniglich, dass man durch den Umgang mit andern Menschen, witzig und tugendhaft werden könne. Man preiset die Gesellschaften als eines der besten Mittel, den Verstand aufzuheitern, oder die Sitten zu bessern. Man bedienet sich dieses Mittels, aber man verfehlet des letzten Endzwecks, welcher die Tugend ist."

it was best to avoid any contact with the frivolous and corrupt. Like Muralt in his *Lettres sur les voyages,* Iselin was keen to defend himself from any accusation of being a bad patriot. If he preferred the countryside to the city it was only because he was convinced that he could be of greater use to the state whilst leading a life of retreat and meditation than by being just another participant in Basel's Vanity Fair. Even in the midst of solitude, a virtuous man "will do his best to contribute to the well-being of his fellow-citizens. [...] He will converse with only a few people, he will, however, not become a hater of mankind or flee any social gatherings on principle."[76] In the end, Iselin decided, once more, against a life of solitude and instead to dedicate himself entirely to improving the architecture of the present regime.

It is tempting to see these two episodes of 1748 and 1749 as mere manifestations of youthful idealism. There is of course some truth in this. But this would mean underestimating the real significance of Muralt's pietism for Iselin's intellectual formation. Even though he distanced himself from Muralt's enthusiasm, many of the themes of the *Lettres,* such as man's natural goodness, or the importance for man to regain his original position within the natural order, reverberated throughout Iselin's works, right up to the *History of Mankind* of 1764. Throughout his life Iselin remained sympathetic towards the Pietist cause and maintained, at least during the 1750s, close personal ties with some of the leading Basel Pietists, like Hieronymus Annoni, and with members of the Herrenhuter community.[77] He never renounced the ideal of the small, tightly knit, moral community living, under the direct command of God, whose life was structured according to the rhythm of nature and the seasonal cycles of work and leisure. In the *Patriotic Dreams* Iselin invoked this ideal of the ancient Hebrew republic in the concluding paragraph of his chapter on religion: "There is no more important political truth, even though the present world considers it of minor significance, then the principle of our great reformer Zwingli: That state is the best and most solid which is ruled exclusively by God, and that one the worst and most unstable which rules according to its own whim."[78] As we

76 Ibid., p. 404.

77 Iselin's contacts to Swiss Pietist circles is described in Im Hof, *Isaak Iselin,* p. 543ff.

78 *Patriotische Träume* (1758), p. 296.

shall see, the ideal of early patriarchal society became also the foundation stone of his attempt to deal with the problems raised by Rousseau's first *Discourse*.

In 1750 and 1751 Iselin reread Muralt several times with the explicit aim of trying to disentangle his reform theory from its more radical elements.[79] Iselin believed that Muralt's complete rejection of any institutionalised authority, both religious and political, as well as his refusal to address questions of national security, was unrealistic. While Muralt's vision of a non-political Switzerland made perfect sense within a strictly millenarian framework (because the people of God would inevitably triumph over the forces of darkness), it made much less sense to those who did not share his conviction in the immediate second coming of Christ. Iselin was not a millenarian and he firmly believed that even a Christian society had to be able to defend itself.

From Iselin's perspective, perhaps the most problematic aspect of Muralt's work was his claim that the *instinct divin* remained strictly inaccessible to members of modern societies. If Muralt was right in arguing that men could act upon their *instinct divin* only if they radically broke with modern society, it followed that a genuinely moral life was indeed possible only under the conditions of strict simplicity of primitive agrarian communities. One possible solution to Muralt's dilemma, Iselin suggested in a letter to Frey from June 1751, was to see his *instinct divin* less as the human equivalent to the instinct of common animals but rather as a kind of moral sense that registered the order in God's creation wherever it occurred. "It seems to me that he came very close to detecting an infallible feature of the divine instinct. Since he places so much emphasis on order, he could have taken the latter for its [main feature]; and even if he did not want to say: "wherever I detect order, I can see something divine", because it would have

79 In a letter to Frey from 26 June 1751, Iselin described his new position towards Muralt as follows: "Ich kan disen grossen Geist nicht genug bewundern. Ich traue ihm doch nicht in allen Stükken. Die Schwärmereien, die er, nachdem er die Briefe geschrieben, begangen und davon schon einige Saamen in dem ersten Briefe über die Reisen zu finden sein, machen mich behutsam. Ich trachte alles Gute das mir nun gewiss scheinet für mich daraus zu ziehen, das übrige lasse ich gerne beseite." Cited in Im Hof, *Isaak Iselin*, p. 545.

invited a whole string of objections, he could at least have said, "wherever order is missing, whatever goes against order, is not divine"; by this, he could have prevented the negative consequences of his system."[80] While this reinterpretation of Muralt's *instinct divin,* as Iselin admitted, did not amount to a moral theory, he nevertheless believed that it provided an opening for thinking about new ways of coordinating the moral and spiritual requirements of Protestant Christianity with the realities of modern society.

Iselin's opportunity to test the compatibility of Protestantism and modern society came in 1752 when he embarked on a Grand Tour that was meant to take him to France, the United Provinces of the Netherlands, to England and to the German cities. Armed with Muralt's *Lettres sur les voyages,* several recommendations from Swiss professors and a new set of clothes which, he acknowledged, betokened "a vanity not suitable for a republican", Iselin arrived in Paris on 5 March 1752.[81] Being a good Protestant, Iselin was well aware that by coming to Paris he was entering enemy territory. In his diary he repeatedly voiced his fear that exposure to metropolitan life might stir passions that should best be left dormant. After each visit to the opera, theatre, or encounter with the opposite sex, Iselin would sit down and write obsessively detailed accounts of his emotional state, how he had acted in public, how people had reacted to him, and how this newly acquired knowledge might help him to better control his passions.

First observations seemed to confirm Muralt's analysis of modern society. Modern men, Iselin noted, lived through the eyes of other men, wishing to please and to be loved. Iselin left no doubt that the motivational force behind this voluntary subjection to the strict codes of modern social conduct was mere self-interest. And yet, Iselin insisted that there were some advantages attached to this system of artificial, acquired virtues, at least for large monarchies. Even if acting generously for reasons of vanity alone might not qualify as true moral behaviour, the results (at least from the point of view of the poor) were almost the same as in a Christian society: "It is very advantageous for the poor when luxury and conspicuous consumption adopts

80 Ibid., p. 546.

81 Isaak Iselin, *Pariser Tagebuch 1752*, ed. Ferdinand Schwarz, Basel 1919, XIX.

the form of charity, or when piety still occupies some hearts which, for real or false reasons, fulfil such a noble duty worthy of man."[82]

There was a darker side to this system of politeness and false generosity as well. Modern men's obsession with praise often enticed them to push their conspicuous consumption and acts of generosity too far, which then lead to financial ruin, bankruptcy, and social exclusion. Yet, as Iselin explained in his diary, there was no immediate reason why, in large monarchies, the system of vanity should necessarily be self-destructive. The majority of Parisians seemed to have realised that it was in their long-term interest to regulate their passions, simply because social integration depended on their ability to act generously in the future. More often than not, the desire for approval and fear of ridicule proved a sufficiently strong barrier against the self-defeating tendencies of vanity and other passions. Here, Iselin could speak from first hand experience. On 26 May after an encounter with a prostitute, Iselin noted that what allowed him to keep control over his passions was simply "the fear of the thousand consequences" that such an act might have, not just for his health and financial situation but also, and more importantly, for his reputation as a well-behaved and trustworthy good Swiss citizen within the leading Parisian circles.[83]

Iselin's episode with the prostitute proved instructive in more than one way. For besides the fear of ill health, financial difficulties, and social embarrassment, Iselin listed a fourth reason which prevented him from having sex with the prostitute. This was a feeling of genuine disapproval, not just of prostitution itself, but also of his own role in furthering this activity. Iselin described this feeling as a sentiment of "abhorrence of disorder", of "moral

82 Ibid., p. 101: "Die Ausgaben haben hier keine Schranken; sie gehen bei den meisten Leüten allezeit so weit, als ihr Einkommen reichet und noch weiter. Dise Wirkung der Üppigkeit ist allgemein, und wir bemerken dieselbe in Basel genug. Es ist noch für die Armen ein grosses Glückke, wenn es an einem Orte eine Art des Prachtes, der Üppigkeit und des Grostuhns ist, denselben zu geben oder wenn die Andacht noch einige Herzen besizzet, die aus wahren oder falschen Grundsäzzen eine so edle und den Menschen so würdige Pflicht ausüben."

83 Ibid., p. 110-111: "Ich weis nicht, dise Menscher hier versuchen mich ofte, alleine die Furcht vor tausend Folgen, die desgleichen Sachen haben, schrekt mich ab. Meine Gesundheit ist mir erstlich sehr lieb, zweitens ist es mir mein Beütel nicht minder, drittens hasse ich die närrischen Händel, darein man kommen kan."

corruption"; to this was joined a sentiment of pity for the prostitute herself who had to be seen as a victim of unfavourable circumstances, a deceitful lover, greedy parents or simply bad luck.[84] Iselin believed these sentiments of disapproval and of pity were quite distinct from his prior, openly utilitarian and calculating reflections about the possible unwanted consequences of his action. This was not an expression of his self-interest and vanity but a natural moral sentiment which genuinely disapproved of prostitution because it had no place in the harmonious order of the moral world as it had been willed by an almighty and benevolent Deity. In an entry to his diary, dated 30 May, Iselin elaborated on his ideas on the workings of this moral sentiment. He speculated about the possibility of a 'beautiful', truly moral human society, the very opposite of the morally corrupt and 'ugly' world of vice and prostitution: "I imagined how it would look if mankind, and each individual, were in order. I soon saw true pleasure, true peace, and true happiness emerging; and an admirable harmony between all parts of the moral world provided my mind with pleasurable sentiments and bathed it in an indescribable philosophical joy." Men no longer saw each other as opponents; families were reunited; sexual desires were limited to one's husband or wife, while ambition spurred men to excel in good deeds.[85] Iselin

84 Ibid., p. 111: "[V]iertens habe ich dennoch allezeit einen Abscheü wegen der Unordnung, der Verwirrung, dem Verderbnisse, dem Untergange ganzer Familien, dem Verfalle der Sitten und andrer betrübter Folgen, die solche unordentliche Begihrden in die Gesellschaft einführet, und die ich mir allezeit lebhaft vorstelle."

85 Ibid., p. 117-119: "Ich stellte mir die Menschen, einen jeden insbesondere, und die ganze Gesellschaft in der Ordnung vor. Ich sah alsobald das wahre Vergnügen, den wahren Friden, die wahre Glükseligkeit enstehn, und eine bewunderungswürdige Harmonie aller Teile der moralischen Welt entzükte meinen Geist und setzte ihn in einer filosofischen Wollust ausser mir selbst. Ich stellte mir den Friden in einer jeden Familie vor; ich sahe die Ehemänner mit ihren Weibern, die Eltern und die Kinder, die Brüder und Schwestern mit einander auf das äusserste vergnüget. … Die Menschen überhaupt sehn einander nicht mehr als natürliche Hindernisse ihrer besondern Glükkes an, welches ein ieder in des andern seinem fand. Die drei Hauptleidenschaften, die das ganze Feld der Menschheit mit einer ungezähmten Fluht überströmet, traten in ihre Betten zurükke und anstatt alles zu verderben und zu brechen, wie sie vorher tahten, befeüchteten sie das Herze, das Feld der Tugend, durch ihre sanften Wasser, dass die Samen der Tugenden darinne keimeten … Der Ehrgeiz erwekte hinfür keine andern Triebe als die andre glükselig machten und die Begihrde nach Gütern keine andern als nach solchen Gütern, die sie ohne Reüe und

later copied this passage almost *verbatim* into the chapter 'Die Ordnung' of the *Patriotic Dreams*. He maintained that this image of a society where individuals acted on the grounds of love alone, where prostitutes were suddenly transformed into good housewives and corrupt parents turned into loving fathers and mothers, was a description of a truly natural, moral and 'ordered' society. And because it was a truly ordered and natural society it was also the most pleasing one, both for the observer as well as for those who participated in it. The reason why it was pleasing, Iselin suggested, was that moral actions possessed an intrinsic aesthetic quality which men could appreciate because of their sense of beauty.

Iselin was convinced that man's sense of beauty held the key to replacing Muralt's overly restrictive theory of the *instinct divin*. He was no less convinced that men's sense of beauty had to be nurtured and refined through the arts and sciences. This, he claimed, was also the basic message of Levesque de Pouilly's *Théorie des sentimens agréables* and Charles Gabriel Batteux's *Principes des beaux arts,* which he had started to read in tandem a few weeks earlier.[86] Both these writers had unearthed the sources of the

ohne den andern Abbruch zu tuhn, geniessen konnte. Die Wollust schränkte sich in einen Zirkel natürlicher und erlaubter Empfindungen, die aber lebhafter, süsser und entzükkender wurden als alle dise unordentlichen Empfindungen, die vorher die Quelle der grössten Unordnung waren und keine andern als unglükseligen Folgen hatten. In disem Stükke stellte ich mir insbesonderheit die in der Gesellschaft wider hergestellte Ordnung lebhaft und mit einem ausdrüklichen Vergnügen vor. Ich sahe die unglükkseligen Opfer der Wollust, dise ihren Eltern entzogne oder von denselben selbst verkaufte Kinder, die villeichte ohne Zweifel gebohren waren, tugendhaft zu sein und das Vergnügen einer tugendhaften Familie zu machen, die zuerst die bedauernswürdigen Gegenstände der Verführung und hernach die verächtlichen Werkzeüge derselben gewesen: ich sahe, sage ich, dieselben in den Schoos ihrer Familien zurückkehren. Ihre Schande ward zernichtet, das Andenken davon ward ausgetilget, und sie wurden nach und nach gehorsame und wohlerzogne Kinder, tugendhafte Eheweiber, gute Müter, und der Gegenstad der öffentlichen Verachtung verwandelte sich in den Gegenstand der Verwunderung und der Verehrung. Welch eine Welt! Welch eine Gesellschaft! Welch ein Leben! In disen menschenfreündschaftlichen Träumen brachte ich die Zeit auf das allervergnügteste zu."

86 Ibid., p. 59-60: "In den 'Principes des beaux arts' fortgefahren. Dises Werkgen ist sehr schön; man mus die 'Theorie des sentimens agreables' damit vereinigen. Jenes lehret uns, dass wir der Natur folgen, dass wir das Schöne in der Natur aussuchen und dasselbe nachahmen müssen, wenn wir durch die Kunst angenehme Empfin-

Good and the Beautiful by showing not just how the external world had been created according to a pre-established harmonious order which reflected the qualities of an omniscient and benevolent Divine creator, but equally that it was in man's nature to seek true happiness by trying to understand the underlying beauty in nature.[87] The history of morality could accordingly be understood as the history of men's understanding and appreciation of the objects of beauty. Special attention had to be given, therefore, to the causes leading to changes in men's perception of beauty and the reasons that prevented men from forming a better understanding of how those perceptions were related to the external order. Given the malleability of men's sense of beauty, Iselin argued, there was no strong reason why modern society could not contribute to the refinement of men's sense of beauty and provide them with more accurate principles of moral action.

3.3. Rousseau: the origins of the arts and sciences in inequality

Iselin's attempt to recruit the arts and the sciences as a vehicle for moral education was dealt a serious blow on the tenth of June 1752. Following an invitation by Grimm for a luncheon, Iselin arrived to find "a small man who had no good appearance and who was dressed poorly and without taste."[88]

dungen erwekken wollen; dise dringet in die Geheimnisse der Natur selbst hinein und entdekket uns die einfältigen und erhabnen Regeln, welche die Natur in der Austeilung der Güter beobachtet. Disen beiden Verfassern haben wir es zu verdanken, dass die Quellen des Schönen und des Guten aufgedekket vor uns liegen. Wenn man die Sitten der Menschen und die Änderung derselben zu den verschidenen Zeiten mit einer gehörigen Sorgfalt untersuchen will, so hat man einen trefflichen Leitfaden an disen Regeln. Wir müssen nur anmerken *wie weit* dieselben zu einer Zeit davon abgewichen, *worinne* und *aus was für Ursachen*; denn das ganze System der Menschlichkeit hänget davon ab. Die Natur und die Kunst machen das Glükk und das Elend der Menschen aus. Die Kunst soll den natürlichen Zustand der Menschen vervollkommnen. Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft und alles, was dieselbe vortreffliches an sich hat, ist ein Werk der Kunst."

87 See Herbert Hershel Golden, *Louis-Jean Léveques de Pouilly (1691-1750)*, Diss. Harvard University 1951; also Annie Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne 1680-1814*, Paris 1994, passim; Jean Ehrhard, *L'idée de nature en France dans la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 1994 (first edition, Paris 1963), passim.

88 *Pariser Tagebuch*, p. 128.

Although Iselin's friend Albrecht, who had accompanied him, was convinced that they had been introduced to Grimm's tailor, Iselin, obviously equipped with a sharper social instinct, soon realised that this could be no other than the reigning star of Parisian social life, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Despite his shabby appearance Rousseau, much to Iselin's delight, turned out to be an excellent entertainer. Rousseau seemed equally pleased at their encounter and honoured Iselin's presence by singing parts of his unfinished opera, *Le Devin du village,* which was to be performed later that year. Afterwards their conversation quickly turned towards Rousseau's first *Discourse* and his critique of the arts and sciences. Iselin had already read the first *Discourse* before coming to Paris, and had found its content rather puzzling. In fact, Iselin found the essay so puzzling that he took the opportunity of his stay in Paris to see Rousseau on a regular basis. They met either at Grimm's, or at the opera; on one occasion he even visited Rousseau in his modest flat. Each time their discussion focused on the arguments Rousseau had presented in the first *Discourse*. Iselin recorded each of these meetings, hence providing us with a good insight into what turned out to be a crucial period in Iselin's intellectual development. Throughout June, in particular, he was obsessed with Rousseau's arguments. Over and over again, he compared Rousseau's ideas to his own, rejecting views that he had found correct in the morning only to accept them once again in the evening.

Iselin was clearly not the only one to be puzzled by the first *Discourse*. Whilst admiring its style, contemporary readers often dismissed Rousseau's simultaneous praise and critique of the arts and the sciences as paradoxical, unclear and the product of an undecided mind.[89] Indeed, the *Discourse* is not as well organised as some of Rousseau's subsequent writings, notably the *Discourse on Inequality* and the *Social Contract,* which are true masterpieces in this respect. Certain parts, like his discussion of the state of nature or his politics, are not fully worked out. And yet, it would be exaggerated to describe its argument as paradoxical or unoriginal.[90] In the first *Discourse*

89 A notable exception is Johann Heinrich Füssli's *Remarks on the Writings and Conduct of J. J. Rousseau*, London 1767, where he stressed the continuity between Rousseau's works.

90 For a different view, see Robert Wokler, *Rousseau*, Oxford 1995, p. 20-21. Like many of Rousseau's contemporaries, Wokler comes to the conclusion that Rousseau "seems to have been unable to make up his mind." According to Wokler, "the first *Discourse* lacks originality"; "it was to prove his least characteristic, least personal, achievement."

Rousseau presented a perfectly coherent analysis of the self-destructive dynamics of modern commercial society which anticipated many of the arguments that became central to his later writings. The question rather is why so many of his contemporaries thought that the essay was so confusing.[91] One possible answer, at least as far as Switzerland is concerned, might be connected to another accusation raised against Rousseau by an anonymous reviewer in the *Lettres sur quelques écrits de ce temps*. In an entry dated Paris 5 October 1751, the author accused Rousseau of having plagiarised the sermons of the eminent moderate Calvinist theologian, Jean Alphonse Turrettini, where Turrettini had warned of the use of speculative reason for moral education.[92] This is interesting, because it suggests that many of his countrymen first read the *Discourse on the sciences and arts* as part of an already well-established Swiss Protestant tradition of *Kulturkritik,* reaching back to Muralt.[93] As we shall see, this was precisely how Iselin approached the *Discourse*.

91 For the reception of Rousseau's first *Discourse* in France and Germany see Ludwig Tente, *Die Polemik um den ersten Discours von Rousseau in Frankreich und Deutschland*, Kiel 1974, which also contains a list of all the contemporary reviews.

92 See Eugène Ritter, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Notes diverses)", *Annales de la société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 1907, p. 197. The relevant passage from the review reads: "Parmi ces discours il y en a un, où il est question du mauvais effet que produisent les sciences dans la religion et la société civile. Il [i. e. Turrettini] prétend qu'elles sont la source des heresies, des erreurs, de l'athéisme, et du relâchement de la morale. Il présente les écrivains comme des members absolument inutiles à l'Etat. Voilà, ce me semble le fond du discours de M. Rousseau, qui est aussi de Genève."

93 For the reception Rousseau's first *Discourse* in Switzerland see A. François, "Le premier "Discours" de Rousseau en Suisse", *Annales de la société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 1946-1947, p. 29-56; also Gonzague de Reynolds, "J. J. Rousseau et la Suisse. Rousseau et les écrivains du dix-huitième siècle helvétique", in ibid., 1912, p. 161-204. The way the majority of Swiss moderate Protestants approached the issue of the arts and sciences can be gathered from anonymous essay published in August edition of the *Journal Helvétique*, "Essai sur cette question, proposée par l'Académie des Sciences & Belles Lettres de Dijon, pour le prix de Morale de 1750. Le Rétablissement des Sciences & des Arts a-t'il contribué à épurer les Moeurs?", p. 138ff. While the author praises the civilising effects of the arts and sciences and the effect they had on European economic development, he expresses some strong doubts with regard to their effect on morals. "Depuis leur renouvellement,

It is fair to assume that Rousseau had a good knowledge of at least some of these Swiss texts. The critique of luxury, fashion and politeness was a common theme in early eighteenth-century Geneva and supplied much of the cultural backcloth to his early education.[94] Through Madame Warens, Rousseau must also have come into contact with Swiss French and Bernese Pietist literature and learnt about the ideas of Marie Huber, François Magny and Samuel Lutz.[95] We know for certain that he read Muralt very carefully. The Rousseau Archives in Neuchâtel contain lengthy commentated excerpts from Muralt's *Lettres sur les Anglois et les Français* and the *Lettres sur les voyages*.[96] Rousseau was especially interested in Muralt's analysis of French manners and fashion, and there are indeed several passages in the first *Discourse* which could be seen as proof of Rousseau's indebtedness to the *Lettres sur les voyages*. Modern scholars who have worked on these excerpts have thus concluded that Rousseau should be seen as a follower of Muralt.[97] It is important to see why this is wrong.

les Révolutions ont été moins fréquentes, les Projets mieux concertés, les enterprises plus sages, & moins téméraires, & les grands Crimes plus rares." (p. 144) "Je crains ici de ne pas entrer dans les vües de la célèbre Académie, qui a proposé ce sujet, & dont le but est, sans doute, de faire honeur, aux Arts et aux Sciences, de la réforme qu'on a crû trouver dans nos Moeurs. [...] Mais est-il bien sûr, qu'en éffet les Arts & les Sciences aient contribué à épurer les Moeurs? Mon penchant seroit pour l'afirmative; mais l'étude de l'Histoire & des Sciences, celle du Coeur humain, une triste experience, me jettent dans l'incertitude, & je vai prendre la liberté de proposer mes doutes." (p. 145) "La pureté des Moeurs est moins le fruit de nos Meditations & de l'étude des Sciences, que de celle de nôtre propre Coeur, de nôtre attention sur nous même, de l'éloignement des Objets qui font naitre nos Passions, & de nos efforts à corriger nos penchans vicieux." (p. 152)

94 See Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva. From the* First Discourse *to the* Social Contract, *1749-1762*, Cambridge 1997, passim; still essential, P.-M. Masson, *La Religion de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Paris 1916, 3 vols.

95 For the Pietist movement in the Vaud see Henri Vuilleumier, *L'église réformée du Pays de Vaud sous le regime bernois*, vol. 4, Lausanne 1933, p. 183ff.

96 Archives de la ville de Neuchâtel (Receuil A, Ms. 7842).

97 For the two most important studies on the Rousseau-Muralt connection, see Arthur Ferrazzini, *Béat de Muralt et Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Etude sur l'histoire des idées au XVIII^e siècle*, La Neuveville 1952; and François Jost, *Jean Jacques Rousseau Suisse*, 2 vols, Fribourg 1961; see especially vol. 1, Chapter X, 'Parenté bernoise: Haller et Muralt', p. 380ff. and vol. 2, Appendice V, 'Rousseau lecteur de Muralt. Extrait de ses cahiers de notes: textes inédits', p. 337ff.

Muralt had argued that man, when in harmony with 'order', was a naturally sociable creature who sought the company of his fellow beings for no other reason than friendship and love. As long as man followed the dictates of his *instinct divin* society was peaceful. No state or other form of institutionalised authority was needed. It was only under the double influence of bad politics and urban civilisation that man lost his original moral faculties and degenerated into a being that was in continuous conflict with itself and others. While Rousseau fully shared Muralt's distaste of modern refinement and French society, he firmly distanced himself from the theory of natural society which underlined Muralt's position. Accepting the idea of natural sociability, even if it was used merely as a yardstick with which to measure the depth of modern corruption, Rousseau fully realised, would mean opening the door to a possible critical apology of modern society along Christian lines. This is what several moderate Protestant thinkers like Francis Hutcheson, Levesque de Pouilly, Iselin (in his critique of Muralt), as well as many of Rousseau's critics attempted to do. Rousseau categorically refused to consider the idea that modern civilised society could in any way be seen as a moral society or that it could ever be turned into one. Modern society was void of any self-correcting mechanism. He equally categorically rejected the idea that men could live a purely social life without politics. In the first *Discourse,* and the replies to his critics, Rousseau backed up his position by considering three different kinds of society: the society of fear, the society of friendship and love, and commercial society. The first idea was the easiest to refute, he claimed, because it was inconceivable that men who had no grounds for trusting one another could ever come to agree on even the most basic common principles of behaviour. We can see this from a passage in the *Last Reply* where Rousseau answered Bordes' claim that the sciences allowed "naturally wicked" men to overcome "barbarism and misery". "If men are by nature wicked", Rousseau wrote, "then it is, admittedly, possible that some good might happen to come of the sciences at their hands; but it is perfectly certain that they will lead to far more harm: Madmen should not be given weapons."[98] Rousseau was equally dismissive of the second form

98 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses together with the Replies to Critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, ed. Victor Gourevitch, New York 1986, p. 71.

of society. While agreeing that "man is naturally good"[99] and accepting that some early societies had lived relatively peacefully, he made it clear that this was not a vindication of natural sociability. Even in early societies, "human nature was, at bottom, no better". Peace was possible, not because of men's natural fondness for one another, "but [because] men found their security in how easily they saw through one another, and this advantage, to the value of which we are no longer sensible, spared them a good many vices."[100] Rousseau, accordingly, associated 'man's natural goodness' less with any natural inclination for charity or love, than with the absence of those factors which enabled men to abuse their faculties, in particular institutionalised power and knowledge (ignorance was "man's natural state").[101] Finally, he also discussed a third form of society, one that was based neither on fear nor love but on the reciprocal satisfaction of individual needs. In the first *Discourse* Rousseau was almost exclusively concerned with this third form of society. According to Rousseau, modern society was a full blown commercial society; it was fuelled by individual self-interest, vanity and luxury. More importantly, the arts and the sciences were an integral part of it. As he explained right at the beginning of Part one of his *Discourse,* both society and the arts derived from needs; the first derived from the needs of the body, the second from the needs of the mind.[102] Together they established a tight net of mutual dependencies which made men civilised and obedient: "Need

99 Ibid., p. 73.

100 Ibid., p. 6.

101 Ibid., p. 69, see also p. 68: "The first men were exceedingly ignorant. How could one dare maintain that they were corrupted at a time when the sources of corruption were not yet open." And p. 73: "It is said that the first men were wicked; whence it follows that man is naturally wicked. [...] The Annals of all peoples [...] lend far more support to the contrary assumption; and it would take a great many testimonies to make me believe an absurdity. Before the dreadful words *thine* and *mine* were invented; before the cruel and brutal species of man called masters, and that other knavish and lying species of men called slaves existed; before there were men so abominable as to dare to have superfluities while other men die of hunger; before mutual dependence had forced all of them to become deceitful, jealous, and treacherous; I should like to have it explained to me wherein those vices, those crimes with which they are so insistently being reproached, could have consisted."

102 Ibid., p. 4: "The mind has its needs, as has the body. The latter make up the foundations of society, the former make for its being agreeable."

raised up Thrones; the Sciences and Arts have made them strong."[103] The claim that the arts and sciences were part and parcel of, and followed the same logic as commercial society provided the backbone of Rousseau's argument in the *Discourse*. As Rousseau presented it, they had to be embraced or dismissed as one; no separation was possible. The position he spoke out against most emphatically was one which defended the arts and sciences on the ground that they provided a moral layer to a purely utilitarian society. Those who wished to support the arts and sciences, Rousseau insisted, should do so not on moral grounds (because the arts and sciences helped to develop men's moral persona), but solely on the grounds that they made life in a selfish society more agreeable.[104] Rousseau insisted that this was a perfectly coherent position to adopt and he emphatically recommended it to modern rulers. He also believed that it was a far more honest one, because it spared both rulers and ruled from having to hide their lust for power and bodily pleasures behind a language of morality.

> Earthly Powers, love talents and protect those who cultivate them! Civilised peoples, cultivate them: Happy slaves, you owe them the delicate and refined taste on which you pride yourselves; the sweet character and urbane morals which make for so such engaging and easy relations among you; in a word, the appearances of all the virtues without having one.[105]

Modern men should accept the fact that they were neither good Christians nor good patriots. Despite the superficial uniformity which characterised modern life ("a vile and deceiving uniformity reigns in our morals, and all minds seem to have been cast in the same mold"),[106] the arts and sciences were a deep source of antagonism and continuously eroded the social fabric by stimulating envy, greed, and arrogance. For Rousseau modern art

103 Ibid., p. 5.

104 See for example Rousseau's reply to Stanislas, King of Poland in his *Observations*: "The Writer, noting that I attack the Sciences and Arts in terms of their effect on morals, answers me with an inventory of the uses to which they are put in all states; which is as if, in order to justify an accused person, all one did was to prove that he is quite well, most skilful, or very rich. As long as it is granted me that the Arts and Sciences make us bad people, I shall not deny that also greatly contribute to our convenience; that is one more respect in which they are like most vices." Ibid., p. 35-36.

105 Ibid., p. 5.

106 Ibid., p. 6.

and learning, too, were an exercise in vanity, driven by men's passion for superiority. Artists and scientists were thus no different from those who sought to accumulate riches. The so called "lovers of wisdom" resembled "charlatans, each hawking from his own stand on a public square: come to me, I am the only one who does not deceive?"[107]

One of Rousseau's central tasks in the first *Discourse* was to explain how art and science, which "in itself is very good"[108], had become infected by the spirit of luxury.[109] He made it clear that this was not a modern phenomenon but a feature inherent in all human social life: "the ills caused by our vain curiosity are as old as the world".[110] It was through life in society, that man acquired new, artificial passions, like arrogance, vanity, and envy. Originally, men were like other common animals, in harmony with nature. He explicitly rejected Pufendorf's 'imbecillitas' thesis which stated that men's original neediness in the state of nature had to be compensated for, through their ability to reason and the establishment of language. Natural men, like animals, had a set of instincts which guaranteed them survival; hence Rousseau's claim, in his reply to Bordes, that "we should not be made to feel so frightened of a purely animal life, nor regard it as the worst state we might fall into."[111] Natural man was locked into a "gentle and precious ignorance"; his soul was content with itself, and "finds all its felicity in retreating into itself, in confirming itself in its innocence, and has no need to seek a false and vain happiness in the opinion others might have of its enlightenment."[112] His understanding was in balance with his physical needs; and since needs were simple he required no more than a basic practical reason. Man also had "a guide within, much more infallible than all the books, which never forsakes

107 Ibid., p. 24.

108 Ibid., p. 32.

109 "But how does it happen that the Sciences, so pure in their source and so praiseworthy in their end, give rise to so many impieties, so many heresies, so many errors, so many absurd systems, so many vexations, so much foolishness, so many bitter Satires, so many wretched Romances, [...]; and in those who cultivate them, so much pride, so much avarice, so much malice, so many intrigues, so many jealousies, so many lies, so many evil deeds, som many calumnies, so many cowardly and shameful flatteries?" Ibid., p. 32.

110 Ibid., p. 7.

111 Ibid., p. 72.

112 Ibid., p. 49.

us when we are in need." As societies developed, this natural harmony was lost between the needs of the body and those of the mind. Rousseau gave a clear account of the sequence leading to the abandonment of the natural order and the establishment of a new, artificial order.[113] Once the organisation of natural needs was under control, human societies began to develop very differently from societies of common animals. Unlike animals, where one individual resembled another, men were equipped with very different sets of talents and abilities. Those blessed with talents realised that they could easily produce more than their basic needs required. According to Rousseau, it was the inequality resulting from the uneven distribution of talents which initiated the departure from a natural order.[114] The problem with the sudden surplus production of the talented was not that it deprived others from satisfying their own needs. Rousseau did not seem to believe this. Rather the problem was that it separated men into rich and poor, those who had more and those who possessed less, thereby giving rise to sentiments of arrogance and envy. "The first source of evil is inequality; from inequality arose riches; for the words poor and rich are relative, and wherever men are equal there is neither rich nor poor."[115] Riches, in turn, prompted the development of new needs; the rich, who were no longer satisfied with the essential goods, insisted on eating well and living more comfortably. Because the rich could not consume significantly more than the poor, they

113 In the Preface to *Narcissus*, Rousseau famously described the replacement of man's 'natural order' with a new order based on needs as the 'crowning achievement of our century's politics'. "All our Writers regard the crowning achievement of our century's politics to be the sciences, the arts, luxury, commerce, laws, and all the other bonds which, by tightening the knots of society among men through self-interest, place them all in a position of mutual dependence, impose on them mutual needs and common interests, and oblige everyone to contribute to everyone else's happiness in order to secure their own." In a footnote Rousseau added, "I complain that Philosophy loosens the bonds of society formed by mutual esteem and goodwill, and I complain that the sciences, the arts and all the other objects of commerce tighten the bonds of society through self-interest." Ibid., p. 104-105.

114 See for example p. 22: "Where do all these abuses arise, if not in the fatal inequality introduced among men by the distinction of talents and the disparagement of the virtues?"

115 Ibid., p. 45.

began using their riches for purely status-oriented spending. According to Rousseau, this was the birth of luxury.[116]

Luxury affected and transformed not just the rich but an entire nation. Excessive selfishness became the dominant principle of human action. Rousseau thus firmly opposed the view put forward by Stanislas, that the artists should be seen as the innocent victims of the rich. Once luxury had taken hold of a peoples' mind, all layers of society joined the race for ever more refined pleasures.[117] This applied in particular to the learned and the philosophers. Like the arts, the sciences derived from riches, which gave rise not only to luxury but also to idleness. Only idle men had the leisure to engage in speculative reason. Rousseau suggested that as long as learning was an activity of the rich it had a less negative effect on people's morals. It was only when the rich engaged in excessive selfishness and the pursuit of bodily pleasures, thus abandoning the field of learning to the poor, that the sciences became seriously harmful. The fact that most philosophers were poor did not, as Stanislas had claimed, signify that the sciences were in the hands of the virtuous. What it proved was that the learned hoped to achieve superiority by means that were different from the accumulation of riches. Just as luxury could be seen as the excessive pursuit of bodily pleasures, the sciences were an unnatural pursuit of the pleasures of the mind. Both of them were equally self-defeating. Luxury lead to physical degeneration, while modern sciences prompted the corruption of the mind. The study of the universe, Rousseau argued, "only elevates human vanity. The Philosopher, flattering himself that he fathoms God's secrets, dares to liken his supposed wisdom to eternal wisdom: he approves, he blames, he corrects,

116 The central passage, containing Rousseau's genealogy of the arts and sciences, is this: "I had also not said that luxury was born of the Sciences; I had said, rather, that both were born together and that one hardly ever goes without the other. Here is how I would arrange the genealogy. The first source of evil is inequality; from inequality arose riches; for the word poor and rich are relative, and wherever men are equal there is neither rich nor poor. From riches are born luxury and idleness; from luxury arose the Arts, and from idleness the Sciences." Ibid., p. 45.

117 "[I] do not see that our Artists are such simple and modest folk; luxury cannot prevail among one order of Citizens without soon insinuating itself under various guises into all the others, and everywhere it causes the same ravages. Luxury corrupts everything, the rich who enjoy it, and the wretched who covet it." Ibid., p. 46.

he prescribes laws to nature and limits to Divinity."[118] Unable to confront his own ignorance, the philosopher finally takes refuge in "dangerous Pyrrhonism."[119] The only section within the population which had managed to escape the corrupting effects of luxury was the farming community. The combination of continuous hard labour, and trust in the secret workings of nature, allowed the farmer to be at one with himself and maintain his natural harmony between the body and the mind.[120]

According to Rousseau, it was this balance of body and mind which had been at the very heart of the success of the early Greek republics and which Legislators like Lycurgus had tried to restore. "The ancient Republics of Greece, with the wisdom that was so conspicuous in most of their institutions, had forbidden their Citizens the exercise of all those quiet and sedentary occupations which, by allowing the body to grow slack and corrupted, soon enervate the vigour of the soul."[121] As Rousseau pointed out, Sparta was not a 'natural society'. Nor was the balance between body and mind which distinguished its citizens a late remnant of early agrarian societies. What made Sparta so special, an "eternal shame to vain teaching", was that its morals, the dedication of its citizens to the public cause, were solely the product of political will.[122] It was thus not due to ignorance or stupidity "that they preferred other forms of exercise to those of the mind", but due to their clear understanding of the corrosive and self-destructive effects of the arts and sciences.[123] By encouraging physical exercises and sporting competitions, the Spartans, moreover, had found a way for their citizens to satisfy their desire for superiority without letting it become socially disrup-

118 Ibid., p. 36.

119 Ibid., p. 6.

120 See especially the *Observations*, ibid., p. 36: "[T]he Ploughman who sees the rain and sun by turns fertilize his field, admires, praises and blesses the hand from which he receives these graces without troubling himself about how they reach him. He does not seek to justify his ignorance or his vices by his incredulity. He does not censure God's works, nor challenge his master in order to display his self-importance." Also first *Discourse*, p. 5: "[S]trength and vigor of body will be found under the rustic habit of a Plowman, and not under the gilding of a Courtier. Finery is no less alien to virtue, which is the strength and vigor of the soul."

121 Ibid., p. 19-20.

122 Ibid., p. 11.

123 Ibid., p. 9.

tive. In Sparta, "the good man is an Athlete who delights fighting naked."[124] Sport reduced human contest to its most basic level. Unlike the case of the pathologically enhanced competition between the rich, the artists and the learned, where all parties fought with acquired weapons, the wrestling matches between naked Spartans allowed no trickery or deceit. It was the immediate disclosed comparison of natural talents.

At the same time as Rousseau held up Sparta as an irrefutable proof of the idea that real social cohesion was possible only in purely political societies, he strongly discouraged modern rulers from engaging in any radical reform, such as banning all arts and sciences, or implementing strict sumptuary laws. Nor did he seem to believe that the sight of naked Parisians testing their physical abilities would lead to an upsurge of virtue. The best option for the modern world to recapture at least some of the positive features of the ancient republics was to establish militias and to have the population take part in military exercises.

3.4. Iselin and Rousseau in Paris: from Socrates to Diogenes

Although Iselin eventually came to understand what Rousseau was really saying in the first *Discourse,* it took him some time to get there. This also makes his travel diary of 1752 so interesting. Not only does it show the difficulties that a moderate Protestant like Iselin, who himself was anything but an apologist for modernity, had in coming to terms with Rousseau's radical critique of commercial society, and how he tried to squeeze Rousseau into the framework to which he believed they both belonged. Iselin's notes of his meetings also give a clear indication of the points in Rousseau's argument that he found impossible to digest.

Iselin had first read the first *Discourse* on 8 December 1751, at a time when he was developing his critique of Muralt's *instinct divin*. His initial comments on Rousseau were largely negative, not only because he judged Rousseau's critique of the arts and sciences as undeservedly harsh, but also, as he explained in a letter to his friend Frey, because the first *Discourse* seemed to offer little help on how the present corruption might be

124 Ibid., p. 6.

overcome.[125] Rousseau's argument, he wrote in another letter to Frey (25 December 1751), was only acceptable, if Rousseau made it clear that what he was really attacking was merely the "false" use of reason as practised by the semi-learned (Halbgelehrten), the witty, and other men of fashion, whose aim was to dazzle their audience rather than to seek enlightenment.[126] Rousseau should also have made it clear that the real cause of corruption

125 "One can not deny that all the pages of this short work are decorated with a delicate wit and a fiery rhetoric; but I think one can, without being partial towards the arts and sciences, regard the principle which this clever Genevan defends with so much liveliness to be completely wrong. The main proof that he gives in defence of his opinion is an induction, that whenever the sciences were the most developed morals too were at their worst. First, this has not yet been proven; quite the opposite, for the examples of all times and of all peoples prove that the arts and sciences have smoothed men's natural ferociousness and savageness. Secondly, there can exist two things at the same time without it being the case that one would have to be the other's cause or effect. Our present morals are corrupt, but are they so, because Bernoulli, Maupertius, Wolff, Euler, and Haller can see with their philosophical eyes into the inner and hidden structure of nature? [...] Corruption springs from the riches and from commerce which brings great treasures into our countries, not from the sciences which make men neither rich nor wicked. [...] Bad morals alone poison the sciences and it through them that the sciences become indeed like a poison that one mistakes for medicine." Letter to Frey, 11 December 1751, quoted in *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. R.A. Leigh, Geneva 1965, vol. II, p. 314. Writing at the same time, Lessing had come to an astonishingly similar conclusion on Rousseau's essay. "Wir könnten sagen, dass die Aufnahme der Wissenschaften und der Verfall der Sitten und des Staates zwo Sachen sind, welche einander begleiten, ohne die Ursache und Wirkung von einander zu sein. Alles hat in der Welt seinen gewissen Zeitpunkt. [...] Es ist wahr, das witzige Athen ist hin, aber hat das tugendhafte Sparta viel länger geblühet? ... Ferner können wir sagen: wann die kriegerischen Eigenschaften durch die Gemeinmachung der Wissenschaften verschwindet, so ist es noch die Frage, ob wir es für ein Glück oder für ein Unglück zu halten haben? [...] Und wenn ja den Strengen Sitten die Künste und Wissenschaften nachteilig sind, so sind sie es nicht durch sich selbst, sondern durch diejenigen, welche sie missbrauchen." J.G. Lessing, *Lessings Werke,* Berlin s.d., vol. VIII p. 29-30, see also p. 126-127.

126 "[D]ise unerträgliche Zunft nimmt den Wiz und die schönen Wissenschaften zu Hilfe, um die Gründlichen zu vergiften. [...] Aus der wahren Gelehrtheit fliessen allezeit Tugend und Wahrheit, aus den falschen Laster und Irrtum; schreibt er wider die leztere, so wird kein Denkender ihm seinen Beifall versagen können, und die erstere hat keiner Verteidigung nöhtig." Letter to Frey, 25 December 1751, Cited in Im Hof, *Isaak Iselin,* p. 333.

was not the arts and sciences but excessive riches and luxury. Rousseau saw things very differently, for when on 10 June 1752 Iselin laid out his objections to the first *Discourse,* Rousseau replied that it was impossible to separate the development of the arts and sciences from the rise of commerce. Both were closely intertwined, as could be seen by the way in which the learned always flocked around the rich.

> When I told Mr. Rousseau that the riches and other causes were more guilty of corruption than the sciences, he replied, that the problem was that these gentlemen congregated only where they could find wealthy people. I accused him of being ungrateful towards those very sciences from which he had received so many advantages. "Plût a Dieu que je fusse ignorant, je vaudroit mieux!" He said that besides Socrates and Montaigne he alone stood for the good cause; that healthy reason was better than all learning, and that the claim of the learned, that they taught us the truth, was charlatanism; he thinks of them as poisoners. Rousseau's principle might after all not be that ill founded.[127]

Even on the following day, Iselin seemed convinced that Rousseau had a point: "I was thinking of Hrn. Rousseau's principle. There is so much truth in it; I think it is almost entirely correct."[128] His own experience in Paris, Iselin added, had shown him that the learned had become part of the mutual admiration society, unsing their wit and intellect only to impress their benefactors. On 13 June, Iselin wrote, "there are no, or only few, wise left, however there are plenty of sophists, plenty of selfish learned artisans and seekers of fortune [Glükkesucher]. [...] Most of the learned are indeed charlatans who sell us something which they claim is the truth but which in effect is something entirely different".[129]

127 *Pariser Tagebuch,* p. 129: "Als ich Hrn. Rousseau sagte, die Reichtümmer und andre Ursachen wären mehr an dem Verderbnisse Schuld als die Wissenschaften, antwortete er, das ware eben sie Sache, dise Herren nisten sich nirgendwo ein, als wo sie reiche Leüte finden. Ich warf ihm vor, er wäre ein Undankbarer gegen die Gelehrtheit, indem er durch dieselbe so vile Vorteile erhalten. "Plût a Dieu que je fusse ignorant, je voudrait mieux!" Er sagt, er stehe nebst dem Socrates und dem Montaigne alleine für die gute Sache. Der gesunde Verstand sei besser als alle Gelehrtheit, und was die Gelehrten sagen, dass sie uns die Wahrheit lehren, sei eine Charlatanerie; er siehet dieselben als Vergifter an. Hrn. Rousseaus Saz könnte doch in der Taht nicht über gegründet sein."

128 Ibid., p. 130.

129 Ibid., p. 133: "Es sein keine oder wenige Weise mehr, es sein lauter Sofisten, lauter eigennüzzige gelehrte Handwerker und Glükkesucher. [...] Die meisten Gelehrte sein Charlatans und verkaufen uns für Wahrheit, was solche nicht ist."

The central question, Iselin insisted, that needed answering was whether the present entanglement of the sciences with the world of the rich and famous was merely a historical phenomenon, brought about by the specific nature of modern French society, or whether the sciences were in fact so deeply entangled with luxury that they could not exist without the latter. Iselin was convinced that the former was the case, and that 'good' learning was still possible, as long as men managed to restrain their desires, to stay clear of luxury and to guard themselves against the temptations of vanity. He was equally (at this time at least) convinced that this was also Rousseau's position, and that Rousseau himself was the living proof that 'good' learning could exist even in the midst of corruption. We can see this from Iselin's enthusiastic report of his visit to Rousseau's flat on 14 June.

> Hr. Albrecht with me, went with him to visit Hrn. Rousseau, who accepted us most cordially. We found him working on his music; he is a splendid man. He puts all his happiness in the limitation of his desires and in his independence. He says, one has to be prepared to live in a flat *au quatrieme* that is as sparsely decorated as his. "Ne donner des ordres a personne et n'en recevoir de qui que ce soit" is his great maxim. He wants to be neither servant nor master. He believes that without desires man would be happiest. [Man] should seek a moderate life style, to choose a life style where one can be independent, and then cease to wish for anything else. He believes that this is possible for all men. [...] He talks nothing but common sense and displays in everything he does an exceptional simplicity; this is why the good old Hrn Albrecht finds him so unappealing. I on the other hand find him very much to my taste. This would be a man for me. [130]

130 Ibid., p. 133-134: "Hr. Albrecht bei mir, mit demselben bei Hrn. Rousseau, der uns sehr wol empfing. Wir fanden ihn an der Musik arbeitend; er ist ein trefflicher Mann. Er sezzet sein ganzes Glükke in die Einschränkung seiner Begihrden und in die Unabhängigkeit. Er sagt, man müsse sich entschliessen können, au quatrieme zu wohnen und meubliert zu sein wie er für vergnügt zu sein. "Ne donner des orders a personne et n'en recevoir de qui que ce soit" ist seine grosse Maxime. Er will nicht Herr und nicht Knecht sein. Er glaubet ohne Begihrden würde der Mensch am glükkseligsten sein. Er soll trachten, einmal sich in einen mässigen Stand zu sezzen, eine Lebensart, darinne man unabhängig ist, zu wählen und alsdenn nichts weiters verlangen. Er glaubet, dises sei allen Menschen möglich. [...] Er redet nichts als gesunden Verstand und zeiget in allem eine ausnehmende Einfältigkeit; darum will er dem guten Hrn. Albrecht nicht so sehr einleuchten. Ich finde ihn aber ungemein nach meinem Geschmakke. Das wäre ein Mann für mich."

To Iselin, Rousseau presented the image of a modern day Socrates, who showed how self-discipline and moderation could open new paths for a moral life within a corrupt society. It took Iselin some time to realise not just that Rousseau's position was very much at odds with his own, but also that Rousseau himself was perhaps not quite the man he had initially thought he was. The process of estrangement was a gradual one. There was first of all the gossip about Rousseau's vile character which was being fed to him by Madame de Graffigny and the Abbé Raynal. Madame de Graffigny in particular was happy to share with Iselin her personal knowledge of Rousseau, that when he had begun writing the first *Discourse,* Rousseau had not yet decided which side to take, that he was a lover of paradoxes, and that his allegedly self-imposed poverty was less a moral choice but a result of his vile temper, which made potential benefactors keep their distance. Under the influence of Madame de Graffigny, Iselin too now started to see him as "a sort of Diogenes" whose "wisdom is too much governed by his moods."[131] Four days later, on 18 June, Iselin repeated his claim in a letter to Frey. Rousseau, he wrote, "is an admirable and very respectable man, but he is a sort of Diogenes [espèce de Diogéne]."[132] Iselin's growing suspicion that Rousseau might not be quite the stoic he pretended to be was confirmed at a common visit to the opera, where Rousseau showed himself to be deeply moved by the plot. "Despite all his philosophy, Rousseau wept as much as everybody else."[133]

More important for Iselin's growing hostility towards Rousseau was his reading of Rousseau's replies to his critics. During the months following the publication of the first *Discourse* Rousseau had been engaged in replying to a few of the innumerable criticisms which the essay had provoked. Iselin read at least three of these replies, namely the *Observations* to Stanislas, King of Poland, the *Lettres à Grimm* where Rousseau discussed the critique

131 Ibid., p. 135.

132 Letter to Frey, 18 June 1752, Cited in ibid., p. 205-206.

133 Ibid., p. 167. This was also the image he got from Raynal when they met at Grimms on 15 July. "We were talking about Rousseau. The Abbé said that Rousseau found it impossible to work. As soon as he decided to write, he would do so with such diligence and such obsessiveness, that his mind and his blood would heat up which was very bad for his health. This could have a great influence on Rousseau's philosophy." Ibid., p. 170.

of Joseph Gautier, and finally the *Dernière Reponse* to Bordes. Iselin was particularly struck by the concluding sections of the *Observations,* where Rousseau openly announced that modern society had passed the point of no return.

> It is with sorrow that I shall state a great and fatal truth. From knowledge to ignorance, it is but a single step; and Nations have frequently gone from one to the other; but never has a people, once corrupted, been known to return to virtue. You would in vain aspire to destroy the sources of evil [...]. Let us therefore let the Sciences and the Arts in some measure temper the ferociousness of the men they have corrupted; let us strive wisely to divert them, and try to baffle their passions. Let us feed the Tigers something to keep them from devouring our children. [...] I have praised Academies and their illustrious founders, and I am ready to do so again. When the sickness is incurable, the Physician administers palliative and adapts his remedies less to the patient's needs than to his constitution. Wise legislators ought to imitate his prudence; and since they can no longer adapt the best policy to a sick People, they ought at least, like Solon, give it the best which it can tolerate.[134]

It was precisely this pessimism in Rousseau's position which Iselin picked up and condemned as incompatible with his own Protestant critical apology of the arts and sciences. To Iselin it also directly contradicted Rousseau's own claim, which he had made on 14 June, that the road to salvation was open all men, if only they managed to curb their desires. More distressing still was a further passage where Rousseau seemed to make nonsense of the moderate Protestant claim that men had a natural moral duty to perfect themselves:

> "*If men were what they ought to be, they would hardly need to study in order to learn the things they have to do.*" It is true, but men are not what they ought to be. Were they ever? Mr. Rousseau seems to believe this; but I do not."[135]

134 'Observations', in *The First and Second Discourse*, p. 51. For a sharper formulation of the same argument, see also Rousseau's 'Preface to Narcissus', ibid., p. 105, note *: "I complain that Philosophy loosens the bonds of society formed by mutual esteem and goodwill, and I complain that the sciences, the arts and all the other objects of commerce tighten the bonds of society through self-interest. For it is indeed impossible to tighten one of these bonds without having the other relax by as much. There is therefore no contradiction here."

135 *Pariser Tagebuch*, p. 136. For the citation see 'Observations', in *The First and Second Discourse*, p. 37, note *.

However the passages he found most objectionable were in the *Dernière Reponse*. In this essay, Iselin wrote,

> There reigns a passion and a fire, which shows that Rousseau defends himself only because he has chosen to stick to his principles and not because he believes them to be true. Here honour comes into play. I finally believe good Rousseau is like the honest Diogenes: he treats the pride of Plato with his feet, but does so with even greater pride. *He reveals himself to be a real hater of mankind.*[136]

By preferring his own honour to moral rectitude Rousseau had committed the very crime which he had levelled against most other philosophers. Rousseau was even more blameworthy, because for honour's sake he had settled in the camp of the sceptics for whom modern society could never be anything else but an association of fundamentally selfish individuals. The passage that Iselin found most striking read,

> "*I will grant, then, since they so categorically insist on it, that luxury supports States as Caryatids support the palaces they adorn: or rather, as do the beams used to prop up rotting buildings and which often only complete their collapse altogether. Wise and prudent men, abandon any house that is being propped up.*" I would like to know, whether Mr. Rousseau himself thinks this epiphenomenona to be anything else but a mere witticism, and whether he believes it to be capable of a reasonable interpretation. I should rather say: Wise and learned men, you who cannot leave this house without committing an act of cowardice, do everything that is in your power to support it. Use all your strength to restore it to its former solidity, and if this is impossible for you, do anything to make it as good and long lasting as possible.[137]

136 Ibid., p. 136-137: "Es herrschet eine Leidenschaft und ein Feüer darinne, das mehr anzeiget, dass Rousseau sich verteidigt, weil er nun disen Saz in seinen Schuz genommen, als blos, weil er ihn wahr glaubt. Die Ehre mischet sich darein. Mich deücht zulezte, es gehe dem guten Rousseau wie dem ehrlichen Diogenes: er tritt den Stolz des Plato mit den Füssen, aber noch mit weit grösserm Stolz. *Er zeiget sich als einen offenbaren Menschenfeind.*" My italics.

137 Ibid., p. 139: "Ich möchte wissen, ob Hr. Rousseau dises Epifonema [sic] selbst für etwas anders als für einen wizzigen Einfall nimmt, und ob er glaubet, dass dasselbe einer gesunden Auslegung fähig sei. Ich wollte vilmehr sagen: Weise und kluge Leüte, die ihr ohne eine Feigheit zu begehen dises Haus nicht verlassen könnet, tuht alles das eürige dasselbe zu unterstüzzen. Strenget alle eüre Kräfte an, ihm so tuht alles, was eüch möglich ist, es so gut und so lange dauern zu machen, als es sein kan." For Iselin's citation of Rousseau see 'Dernière Reponse', in *First and Second Discourse*, p. 72.

Obviously, Iselin firmly opposed Rousseau's claim that Sparta held the key to understanding how 'the house could be restored' to its former solidity. Sparta's freedom, he argued, had been built on slavery and the unnatural repression of human talents. The pure politics of the Spartan republic was only sustained through continuous military aggression. "These Spartans had no esteem for agriculture and left this worthy occupation to their slaves. Sparta had no other aim but war, and can this be the purpose of human existence?"[138]

Iselin summed up many of these points in the chapter 'Die Gelehrtheit' of the *Patriotic Dreams*. Once again, he insisted that his disagreement with Rousseau was not over his analysis of modern politics. Like Rousseau he deplored the fact that, while the arts and sciences had reached unprecedented levels of refinement, they had done little to improve men's moral state. "I agree with him on most issues. Like him, I much regret that the sciences, due to their terrible misuse have become the tools of evil and corruption, or at least have been turned into an object of a sterile and often punishable wit. [...] I admit this and much more, that in our so frequently praised century, which calls itself the century of learning, the world is being poisoned to such a horrible degree; where wit, acuteness, and spirit have become the flatterers and eulogists of vice, luxury, pleasure and corruption; where scholars have turned into flatterers, leeches, and friends of the corrupt and unjust."[139] All these unfortunate effects of the misuse of learning

138 Ibid., p. 141: "Diser machete sich mit seinem Sparta so breit, und schreiet allezeit den Feldbau als bei nahe die einige des Menschen würdige Beschäftigung aus. Eben dise Spartaner machten doch sich nichts aus dem Feldbau und überliessen dise würdige Beschäftigung ihren Sklaven. Sparta hatte keine andre Absicht als den Krieg, und ist dises die Bestimmung des Menschen?"

139 *Patriotische Träume* (1758), p. 202-203: "Ich bin daneben in den meisten Stüken seiner Meinung. Ich bedaure eben so sehr als er, dass durch einen schändlichen Missbrauch die Wissenschaften zu Werkzeugen des Uebels und des Verderbnisses oder doch zu Gegenständen eines unfruchtbaren und oft sträflichen Vorwizes erniedriget worden. [...] Ich gestehe dieses, und noch mehr dass unsere so aufgeklärte, so gerühmte Zeit diejenige ist, da durch das was man Gelehrtheit nennet, die Welt auf das schändlichste vergiftet wird; da Wiz, Scharfsinn, Geist, die Schmeichlerinnen und Lobrednerinnen des Lasters, der Ueppigkeit, der Wollust und des Verderbnisses, und der Gelehrte der Schmeichler, der Schmarozer, und der Mitgenosse des Lasterhaften, und des Ungerechten geworden."

Iselin lamented "just as much as the well-spoken and virtue loving citizen of Geneva." Yet he found it "impossible to subscribe to the harsh judgement which he cast on the latter".

Again, Iselin stressed that man's natural curiosity proved that the development of his mental faculties were intended by God and were an integral part of the Creator's benevolent Design. The study of human nature showed that "our mind is constantly hungry for new ideas" and that it prompted men to enquire about the workings of the external world.[140] For these reasons alone, Rousseau's Spartan model of pure politics was unacceptable. However astonishing its military achievements might have been, it remained a system which had deliberately suffocated man's natural malleability. Only despotic societies, Iselin argued, could do without learning: "Despotism, be it monarchical or democratic, is the natural enemy of learning."[141] Those, however, who did not suffer from despotism had to find ways to smooth the real tensions which marked modern life. This duty, Iselin maintained, was all the greater for those living in republics. "The freer one is, the more understanding one needs."[142] While in monarchies, it was enough if the prince, the ministers and the administrative elite were enlightened, in republics, where all citizens were "entitled by birth to elect [their] own princes, ministers and officials", it was imperative to have as many learned people as possible.[143] The more enlightened [*erleuchtet*] the citizenry, the less likely it was that the body politic would become the victim of the ambition and selfishness of false patriots. Every citizen had to try to understand, as much as he could, how politics and the economy affected human happiness. He had to know the law, its origins, the history of his republic and how it had survived. "How could he be capable of fulfilling the duties that the fatherland is entitled to ask from him and to take part in government", if he remained in a state of (even innocent) ignorance. The study of politics and human nature, Iselin concluded, "is the essential science of any good citizen. This is the learning of republicans."[144]

140 Ibid., p. 209.
141 Ibid., p. 208.
142 Ibid., p. 207.
143 Ibid., p. 208.
144 Ibid., p. 213: "[W]ie soll er im Stande seyn die Pflichten zu erfüllen, die das Vaterland mit Rechte von ihm fordert, wenn er an der Regierung desselben Antheil nehmen will? Dieses ist also die erste, die wesentliche Wissenschaft eines guten Bürgers. Es ist die Gelehrtheit der Republikaner."

Iselin's critique of Rousseau's first *Discourse* did not stop there. In the opening chapters of the *Patriotic Dreams of a Friend of Mankind,* Iselin sketched out a reply to what he now believed constituted the central argument of Rousseau's attack on the arts and sciences. Iselin insisted that if the arts and sciences were to be rescued from Rousseau's overly harsh critique, two things needed to be shown. First, the development of arts and sciences had to be disconnected from luxury. Secondly, it had to be shown that the institutionalisation of inequality was a natural process driven by love and appreciation. The aim of the concluding section of this chapter is to discuss Iselin's alternative history of the origins of the arts and sciences and, finally, to present Iselin's suggestions for reform.

4. The restoration of natural order

4.1. Iselin's ideal of early patriarchal society

Iselin's *Patriotic Dreams* were profoundly influenced by his Paris experience and his attempt to grapple with the ideas of both Muralt and Rousseau. It is thus not surprising to see Iselin begin his book with a recapitulation of his position in early June 1752 when he was busy formulating a critique of Muralt. Before his encounter with Rousseau, Iselin, we will recall, had been convinced that the idea of 'moral sentiment' presented a genuine Christian alternative to Muralt's overly restrictive theory of 'divine instinct'. Both ideas of 'moral sentiment' and 'divine instinct' insisted on man's natural disposition for friendship and altruism, but while the 'divine instinct', if Muralt was to be believed, affected humans only so long as they lived a life of quasi-anarchic autarchy, man's 'moral sentiment', Iselin argued, remained with him throughout the entire process of civilisation. Rousseau's critique of a 'society of love' and his insistence on treating the arts and sciences as an outgrowth of man's pathologically enhanced self-interest and vanity had left Iselin's in tatters project to develop a theory of moral sentiment. But by 1755 Iselin was convinced that he was capable of proving

Rousseau wrong and of showing that the latter's critique of the 'society of love' was unfounded.

In his chapter, 'On human nature' [Die Menschheit], Iselin insisted that besides an "instinct for liberty", an "instinct for keeping his mind and body in activity"[145], an "instinct for procreation", and an "instinct for security", man in the state of nature also possessed an "instinct for love".[146] Man had "an inner voice which never fails to remind him to seek the friendship of other men, to do unto them what he would like to have done unto him, and to abstain from doing what he would not want to have done unto him." This, Iselin claimed, was "the first, the most noble and most simple law of [man's] sociable nature" from which man's "general love of mankind" derived. Man's natural sociability not only taught him to respect the property and lives of his fellow creatures, it "wants to make human life more agreeable and rich in pleasure through the mutual aid between men." Every good deed that one man did to another created "new ties between [them] and generated new situations which correspond to the wise intentions of nature."[147] From love sprang all other virtues "worthy of the natural beauty of the soul", such as loyalty, righteousness, honesty, and truthfulness in words and deeds. Because men could participate in others' pleasure, they fulfilled their natural duties "freely and with pleasure".[148] While man's love for others did not require reflection but occurred spontaneously, it directly lead to the development of language and hence reason.

145 *Patriotische Träume* (1755), p. 10.

146 Ibid., p. 12-14.

147 Ibid., p. 15.

148 See also p. 45-46: "We are born to make us mutually happy, and our instinct to further our own well being is intimately linked to an instinct to further the well being of our nearest. Our heart, if it is not corrupted, tell us clearly enough, and if we want think about it for a while we will find sufficient proofs that our own happiness is indeed directly related to the happiness of others. The sweetest impressions of our soul, the most simple one, the first is that of love. Incapable of procuring all the Good we desire and need on our own, we consider the person whom nature has placed next to us and who helps us to perfect our own situation as a Good; as indeed a most excellent Good, because he turns himself, through reason and on his own free will, into a tool for our own welfare, that is, into a Good for our sake."

> This idea (which does not require reflection) because nature herself has placed a secret, powerful, and fiery sentiment into our hearts, is the most simple and natural spring of all uncorrupted human societies. The first, the most basic society, and from which all subsequent societies derive, is one in which this instinct is at its most fiery and energetic. It seems to consist of nothing but flames. Those societies which evolve from this [initial society] are themselves based on nothing else but love.[149]

It was only once man became capable of confirming the truth of his natural sentiments that he became a genuine moral agent.

But Iselin's trump card came in the following chapter, 'Die Menschen', where he went on to give a historical vindication of his idea of a 'society of love'. While in 1752 Iselin had seemed uncertain whether such a society had ever existed, he was now convinced that it had and that he had the sources to prove it. Anyone who had doubts about the historical reality of his defence of a 'society of love', he argued, had merely to read the works of the early Greek historians, in particular Hesiod and Homer. The best illustration of the Homeric world, Iselin claimed, could be found on the shield of Achilles, described in the eighteenth song of the *Iliad*.[150] This was a world marked by the beauty and harmony between nature, production, leisure, art and war.[151] On the shield, Hephaistos, the god of craftsmen, had made an image of two 'beautiful cities', the city of peace and the city of war. The city of peace showed scenes of marriages, celebrations and banquetes. Brides were escorted through the city, while young men danced to the sounds of flutes and guitars. Another scene showed the elders gathered in the square. The second city, the city of war, meanwhile revealed scenes of siege and combat. Surrounded by two armies, which "sought to either destroy the city altogether or to divide her riches between themselves", the

149 Ibid., p. 46: "Diser Begriff, von dem die Natur, ohne dass unsre Betrachtung dazu nöhtig ist, ein geheimes, ein mächtiges, ein feuriges Gefühl in unsre Herzen geleget, ist die einfältigste und die natürlichste Feder aller unverderbten menschlichen Gesellschaften. Die erste, die einfachste Gesellschaft, woraus die andern aller zusammengesezzet sein und entstehen, ist dieienige darinne diser Trieb am feurigsten und am heftigsten ist."

150 Ibid., p. 24.

151 I am much indebted to William James Booth's excellent discussion of the 'household'. See his *Households: on the moral architecture of the economy,* Ithaca and London 1993; especially 'Part One: The oikos: beauty, domination, scarcity'.

city prepared itself for defence. The elderly guarded the walls while "the younger ones advanced outside the city walls to engage the aggressors in a heroic battle". Another fold of the shield showed a scene of ploughmen at work in the fields, of labourers reaping, of "young girls and boys picking fruits and placing them in woven baskets", of herdsmen attending their flock, and of communal gatherings at the end of a hard day's work. In their midst, overlooking the various activities, stood "the king, his mind at rest, and with a sceptre in his hand". A further scene showed "a lush valley with a large herd of white sheep standing next to fences, stables and huts". Close to it, "groups of young men and women, engaged in the singing of love songs and the practising of the steps of daedalian dances".[152]

To Iselin, the *Shield of Achilles* presented an image of a world in which nature and the changing seasons determine all cycles of human activity, of sowing and harvesting, of work and leisure. It was not a world without violence. Iselin provided a graphic description of "two frightening lions tackling a bull who sends out horrible cries" of pain, and of young fighters struggling to defend their city from foreign aggressors.[153] But here the killing of the bull or the attempted sacking of the city, was just one amongst many ways of procuring the necessities of life and, to this extent, belonged to the same universe of human activity as ploughing the field, cultivating the vineyards, or tending the flock.

Iselin's Homeric world was not void of politics, even though no mention is made of the kind of politics commonly associated with the post-Homeric world of the ancient Greek city republics. Iselin's account does include scenes of the council of elders who had gathered to pronounce judgement and give advice, but no mention is made of popular assemblies or other forms of specifically 'public' activity. The central organising principle of human association was not the city but the household or *oikos*. The city, likewise, was not an association of equal individuals but foremost a collection of households in which there were many kings, or heads of large households, and among whom the ruler was simply the head of the most powerful household.

152 *Patriotische Träume* (1755), p. 25-26.
153 Ibid., p. 25.

4.2. Order and love

The Homeric household proved two more things. First, it showed that the origins of inequality and the setting up of kingships were not the result of deception but of gratitude and love. Hierarchy was established, Iselin argued, when a particularly talented individual used his intellectual gifts for the better organisation of the individual family households. "A wise and sensible man was able to arrange labour in such a way that each individual [by collaborating with others] was guaranteed a greater profit than if he had continued to work for himself." This gifted individual, Iselin insisted, "had no other intention but to further their happiness and drew no other advantage from this but the pure and sweet sensation of having done a good deed."[154] For this, he was rewarded with "the purest love and liveliest gratitude. What could they do but to entrust their happiness to a person, whom the heavens had blessed with wisdom and ability to lead the people to perfection."[155] It was this hierarchy based on love and gratitude which was at the centre of the Homeric household.

Iselin was at pains to show that his history of the natural origins of inequality reflected in the Homerian household was not an endorsement of the perverse inequality supported by *Afterpolitik*. Agamemnon's gift, Iselin admitted, included not only women but entire cities and their populations, and this seemed to suggest that a master had as much claim over a person as he had over his land, his tools or his livestock. Yet Iselin never mentioned the figure of the slave, at least not in the sense of a being radically inferior to the person of the master (Iselin used the term *Knecht,* meaning worker). Rather, he seemed to argue that all members of the household, irrespective

154 Ibid., p. 47: "Ein weiser und kluger Mann war im Stande die Arbeiten viler auf eine Art einzurichten, dass ihnen ein weit grösserer Vorteil daraus erwuchs, als wenn sie für sich alleine gearbeitet hätten. Er hatte dabei keine andre Absicht als ihr Glükke, und das reine und süsse Vergnügen Gutes zu thun."
155 Ibid., p. 48: "Sie fanden in seinen Absichten nichts anders, und der Erfolg erwekte in ihnen nichts als Empfindungen der reinsten Liebe und der lebhaftesten Dankbarkeit. Was konnten sie daneben bessers tuhn, als ihr Glükke dem Manne anvertrauen, den der Himmel mit einem Geiste der Weisheit versehen, es zur Vollkommenheit zu bringen. Sie gaben sich ihm zu Knechten und er ward ihr Herr, oder Vater, denn damals bedeuteten beide Namen bei nahe das nämliche."

of their difference in rank and order, were united by a strong common bond and, to some important degree, were considered equal. Iselin's argument about love as the defining principle of life within the household community is closely linked to his claim about the central role of leisure for maintaining this community. Leisure was never seen as the privilege of the master but as something crucial to the life of every member of the household. This is why Menelaus, when listing "sleep, deeds of love, song and dance" as the main forms of pleasures, makes it clear that such pleasures are not there to be enjoyed by the master alone, but by all men in common.[156] Through communal forms of leisure, like harvest feasts, celebrations of victories and other gatherings, love binds all members of the household together.

No mention, for example, is made in Iselin's account of the household of the later Aristotelian notion of natural slavery; in fact, in the *Patriotic Dreams* Iselin repeatedly and very firmly positioned himself against any argument in favour of natural slavery, be it in its original Aristotelian form or in the modern variation which viewed the vastly unequal distribution of power and wealth in modern society as the necessary outcome of an underlying natural division of mankind. Hence, when modern defenders of natural slavery are confronted with the principle: "that no man should be made happy through another man's sorrow or disadvantage", they simply reply, "that there is no remedy to this situation. The nature of society requires it, and what are we to complain about an evil which is a necessary consequence of [the way society is organised]."[157]

156 Ibid., p. 23.

157 Ibid., p. 73; Iselin makes the refutation of this view a central issue of the *Patriotic Dreams,* most forcefully perhaps in the opening paragraphs of the chapter on *Die Ungleichheit der Stände,* where he firmly defends the idea that all men were by birth entitled to the same basic rights: "Nature has given every individual the same rights. The most powerful monarch of this world is no more entitled to liberty than the last of his subjects. Nature subjugates all her children to the same laws, because she embraces them with the same love. How do you, great, rich and powerful of this earth defend your much cherished supremacy over your brothers? Where do you get your right to sit alone in abundance and comfort, and to see your brothers suffer, without showing the slightest feeling of humanity or pity? Who gave you the permission to appropriate for yourselves what nature has given to all of mankind in common, and to turn your brothers into your slaves? Nature herself, if you can still hear her voice, calls you to the witness stand. Justify yourselves." Ibid., p. 69.

There was no ground on which one man could claim to have a natural entitlement to rule over another man. Nature, Iselin admitted, had "distributed her gifts to men not in equal measure."[158] The majority of humans had received talents most suited for the mechanical arts and agriculture. Others had received the gift of music or poetry. And finally there were nature's "chosen ones" [*Lieblinge*], who had received the special gift of "reason, noble sentiments, intelligence, and of many other kinds of talents." Again, the emphasis on reason or intelligence as a 'special gift' handed out to the chosen few could be read as an acknowledgement on Iselin's part of an Aristotelian notion of natural slavery. But this is an interpretation Iselin himself would have firmly rejected. Nature herself, he insisted, "permits no other distinction in ranks then one which renders each one of her sons more happy."[159] If nature provides some of her children with special talents, "she does this not like a partial mother for the latter's own advantage, or to favour them over all her other children, but so that they should care for the well-being of all their brothers, to teach them how to perfect the goods which nature has given to all in common, to multiply the means for happiness, and to teach their less wise brothers about the order without which no society can be maintained, and thereby to screen them from all forms of evil."[160] Hierarchy within the household was subjected to a clearly defined purpose, namely to determine the right use of tools and to decide the proper deployment of manual labour, so as to secure the goods which the community of the household required. The household was thus fundamentally about autarchy and the rules which needed to be enforced so that autarchy could be maintained.[161] It was only through careful management of the

158 Ibid., p. 70.

159 Ibid., p. 70.

160 Ibid., p. 70-71.

161 It for this reason that Iselin linked the hierarchy of the *oikos* primarily with ownership, in the form of land and agriculture. A master of a household, besides possessing land, had to possess "a house, a wife, an unmarried maid as well as all the necessary tools so that everything can be done at its appropriate time. For nothing can grow [or can be achieved] if it is not done at the right time." Besides the actual dwelling and the persons for accomplishing the tasks within the house, a master, Iselin continued, moreover needed to own "two nine-year old oxen, a forty-year old valet to plough the field, and another one of the same age to sow. If a man accomplishes these tasks wisely and well, he can then expect a rich harvest, after that

household, its tools and persons, that all the seasonal requirements could be met and the independence of the master secured. There was a kind of natural justice at work, Iselin suggested, for the agricultural economy of the old household was based on the fact that there was a direct correlation between the invested labour and its reward. While a badly managed household inevitably led to shortage of food and breakdown of order within the community, a well managed household, on the other hand, was healthy, its persons happy, and liked by the gods.

4.3. Order and wealth

The study of the Homeric world proved another point, namely, that wealth was compatible with virtue. The principal aim of the household, Iselin admitted, was not to accumulate fabulous riches. This could only be accomplished through extensive foreign commerce. Foreign trade as an economic activity was utterly alien to the nature of the household and was therefore left to foreigners. External trade was considered a lowly activity of merchants or pirates or, as Iselin recalls in the chapter describing the mechanisms of corruption, of a "wretched Phoenician" who infested the Mediterranean shores with his thirst for precious metals.[162] For Iselin, hence, there existed a fundamental difference between the economy of the household and that of trading people like the Phoenicians, especially with regard to their underlying motives; the foreign trade of the Phoenicians was driven by the desire for profit, *chrematistike,* a desire which was boundless and had no other end than the further accumulation of wealth, the continuous, tireless attempt to shore up new treasures. The aim of the household economy, on the other hand, was limited and had a specific purpose or end, namely the realisation of self-sufficiency through the satisfaction of the needs of the community. Indeed, for Iselin, much of the attractiveness of Hesiod's image of the household stemmed precisely from the fact that it presented a form of social and economic arrangement that did not depend

a no less fruitful autumn which will enchant him with all its riches, which he can then enjoy during the winter." Ibid., p. 18.

162 Ibid., p. 41.

on foreign trade. "There was peace and abundance at home, so that no one was forced to engage in [external] trade."[163] It was this absence of foreign trade which made the world of the ancient household a land of peace and of "milk and honey."[164] Unlike Phoenicians, the members of a household entered into an exchange relationship for the purpose of furthering the well-being of the community as a whole. They did so not for reasons of personal gain, but for reasons of "love". "What a beautiful state of society, worthy of mankind, this must have been, when love alone prompted this exchange and when righeousness was its sole guide."[165]

This, however, did not prevent a well managed household from becoming rich. By encouraging internal trade, these early societies were able to introduce sophisticated forms of the division of labour to generate widespread affluence. Agamemnon, Iselin recalled, was said to be so wealthy that he could use his riches even to appease Pluto. His gift to Achilles consisted of nothing less than 'seven tripods that were not meant to be placed over the fire, ten talents of gold, [and] twenty pots on the stove, twelve horses'. And yet these riches, Iselin claimed, were insignificant when compared to the wealth that could be encountered in modern society. Nor indeed was the inequality between the rich and the poor, between the master of a household and a mere servant, ever as noticeable as it was between equal members of a modern nation. Agamemnon himself was clothed in a new but simple undergarment, a large coat and light shoes.[166]

The development of the arts and crafts, Iselin argued, was brought about solely by internal trade, not by luxury. In contrast to Rousseau, who had described the arts as an outgrowth of luxury, Iselin insisted that the arts were an expression of innocent veneration and gratitude. It was "gratitude and respect [which] prompted men to reward the hero and the kings for their troubles with the invention of ever new and beautiful objects."[167] Since authority derived exclusively from moral excellence, kings not only tried to live up to the peoples' expectations, they also had no reason to indulge in

163 Ibid., p. 19-20.
164 Ibid., p. 20.
165 Ibid., p. 108.
166 Ibid., p. 21.
167 Ibid., p. 21.

conspicuous consumption or other forms of purely status oriented spending. Meleaus' understanding of luxury was limited to such simple pleasures as sleep, good deeds, songs and dance.[168]

4.4. The difficulties of reform

The historical reality of the Homeric golden age, Iselin believed, undermined both Muralt's and Rousseau's categorical rejection of modernity, because it showed that there had been societies which had achieved a high level of civilisation without having suffered the adverse effects of luxury and moral corruption. In this sense it gave hope to all those friends of mankind who believed that a Christian Enlightenment was theoretically still possible. At the same time, however, Iselin made it clear that if modern society wished to recapture the moral order of the ancient household, more was needed than the mere moral courage of individual citizens. What was called for were drastic, radical reforms which forced modern society back onto its natural trajectory. Iselin seemed doubtful whether the current rulers of Europe enjoyed the necessary authority and backing to bring this task to completion. Only an all-powerful and truly patriotic sovereign, he believed, would have both the courage and determination to take on those sections within the population who contributed most to the sorry state of modern Europe and who were most opposed to any change in the status quo.

In the event that a truly patriotic ruler should emerge, Iselin spelled out a number of reforms which he claimed would help to overcome the present crisis. The first set of reform policies concerned the restructuring of trade. "Trade [Commercien] would have to be organised very differently, if it is to be advantageous, rather than a hindrance, to morals and the true wellbeing of nations."[169] Extensive trade, especially foreign trade, was always harmful to a nation; it caused luxury, excessive inequality, envy, factionalism and

168 Ibid., p. 23.

169 Ibid., p. 104: "[I]ch gestehe es aufrichtig, [...] dass ich dafür halte die Commercien müssten auf eine ganz andre Art, als es nun geschiehet, getrieben werden, wenn sie den Sitten und dem wahren Wol der Staaten nicht eher nachteilig als vorteilhaft sein solten."

lead to the long-term decline of the local economy. Patriotic sovereigns should thus try and curb foreign trade as much as possible and instead encourage internal trade. As a result, wealth would be spread more evenly whilst at the same time encouraging men to perfect their individual talents and strive for a life of excellence. Once foreign trade had been reduced, it would once again become clear that trade "can also be the source of much good, as long as it is governed by a prudent authority and as long as a wise legislator manages, through careful institutional measures, to separate the evil from the good."[170] In an internal market, citizens would then simply exchange their superfluous goods beween one another. Legislation would also have to be introduced to prevent the activity of the major merchants from harming local artisans and small retailers. Republican and democratic states in particular, which "require as much equality amongst their citizens as possible," would have to see to it that massive individual fortunes could not be established. Iselin believed that the most effective measure for this would be the abolition of private property. "The community of goods would be a sufficient means to eradicate all evil from society, even from commercial nations; and I simply do not see the strength of the arguments that are commonly used against it."[171] If external trade could not be abolished entirely, Iselin recommended that the big trading companies [*Handelscompagnien*] should be brought under direct government control, by implementing the ideas of the seventeenth-century Austrian Cameralist, Johann Joachim Becher, author of the *Politischer Discurs von den eigentlichen Ursachen des Auff- und Abnehmens der Staedt, Laender und Republicken* (1668). Obliging each company to specialise in one particular branch of commerce would prevent monopolies and eliminate obstacles to establishing the 'natural price'. Separating external trade from the internal market would also

170 Ibid., p. 108: "[A]us dem Vorteile so wol als aus dem Schaden, den sie der menschlichen Gesellschaft gebracht, kan ein jeder leicht sehen, dass wie grosse Uebel daraus entstanden, sie also auch eine Quelle von vilem Guten sein könne, wenn sie von einem weisen Gesäzgeber, durch sorgfältige Einrichtungen, das Schlimme von dem Guten darinne abgesöndert würde."

171 Ibid., p. 109: "Ich bin überzeuget, dass sie Gemeinschaft der Güter ein zureichendes Mittel ware alles Uebel der Gesellschaften aus der Wurzel zu heben, auch selbst in Handelsstaaten, und ich sehe die Stärke der Einwürfe nicht ein, durch welche man dieselbe als völlig unmöglich vorstellet."

prevent the spread of mercantile values into society and hence further limit the emergence of "envy, resentment, persecution, and injustice."[172]

A second set of recommendations concerned the dual problem of rural depopulation and the overpopulation of modern cities. In the early stages of their development, Iselin argued, the cities and the countryside were in equilibrium. The countryside provided the city with primary goods while the city provided the rural population with all other necessities of life, clothes, manufactured goods and mechanical tools needed for agriculture.[173] Cities were considered as "a sort of prison" and held little appeal to those who sought the good life. This equilibrium was distorted once the nobility started to take up residence within the city walls and introduced luxury. The effects of this were twofold. First, cities became a magnet for a "large number of useless people who do not contribute to the well-being of the state, and who come into the cities, only for enjoyment's sake, and who drag along with them hoards of useless and corrupt riff-raff [Gesind]." Second, once the bloated city population faced the threat of food shortage, the cities began exploiting the countryside and became hungry for territorial expansion. This, Iselin claimed, was how the cities had lost their role as "mothers and housekeepers of the countryside and instead became its enemies and tyrants."[174] Any reformer who wished to combat the effects of luxury had to try to re-establish the original harmony between city and countryside. As a first measure, Iselin suggested that the surplus population should be expelled from the cities, resettled in rural areas, and forced back into agriculture. The same applied to "all rentiers and all nobles who do not have any useful role to play, as well as to all other idle urban dwellers".[175] As a

172 Ibid., p. 110.

173 Ibid., p. 114: "Es ist daneben gut dass die Landleute an einem nämlichen Orte beisammen alles dasjenige antreffen, was zu grösserer Bequemlichkeit des Lebens nöthig ist, und wo sie den Ueberfluss ihres Vorrathes dagegen vertauschen können."

174 Ibid., p. 115-116: "Wenn aber die Städte ungeheur anwachsen, wenn eine grosse Anzahl unnüzzer Leute, die zu dem Wol des Staates nichts beitragen, nur um mehrere Bequemlichkeiten zu geniessen sich in die Städte werfen, und eine Mänge unnüzzes und verderbtes Gesind nach sich ziehen [...], so sein die Städte wie Feindinnen und Tiranninnen der Länder uns nicht mehr als gute Mütter und Haushalterinnen derselben anzusehen."

175 Ibid., p. 118.

general rule, Iselin argued, cities should never be allowed to grow to such a size that an urban population could no longer be fed by a rural hinterland.

Iselin's plan for reform closely followed Fénelon's description of the reform of Idomeneus' Salente, and he made it clear that the *Télémaque* remained the central text for any attempt at European reform. It also made for a sobering read. The reforms in Salente had succeeded only because Idomeneus had received the support of the Goddess Minerva, desguised as Mentor. According to Iselin, there seemed little chance that a new Mentor would share his divine wisdom with modern rulers, and he admitted that his reform plans were in effect little more than wishful thinking; they constituted the 'Dream' part of his *Patriotic Dreams*. As much as he was convinced that the measures which he had indicated would restore Europe to a state of peace, love and general happiness, he also believed that in the absence of divine intervention, another Minerva in disguise, only a tiny minority of those in power would even consider taking his ideas seriously. While the ideal of the community of goods remained central to Christian thinking, Iselin realised "that it will be impossible to convince modern men to try this option."[176] A worthy attempt had been made by Count Zinzendorf, the "fanatical Lycurgus of our times"; however both the scandals surrounding the Herrenhuter community, and serious mismanagement of its communal funds, had ended up doing the idea of a community of goods more harm than good.[177] Nor did the plan to bring large trading companies under government control seem to have more chances for success. "[T]he example of Dr. Becher shows us what happens to those who try to teach merchants that the common good is more important than their own, and so the persecutions he was subjected to were the reward for his well-meaning advice."[178]

Iselin made his most disparaging remarks when discussing the case of his own hometown. The existing European republics, and Basel in particular, had lost all will for reform. Basel had violated every conceivable principle

176 Ibid., p. 109.

177 Ibid., p. 109: "[D]er Graf von Sinzendorf, [hat] hierinne einigermassen einen nicht unglücklichen Erfolg gehabt; [...] seine Gesellschaft [hat jedoch] durch eine verdächtige Anwendung diser Gemeinschaft, dieselbe in ein sehr schlimmes Ansehen gebracht."

178 Ibid., p. 110.

of good politics; it was a corrupt, commercial republic where mercantile selfishness hid under the cloak of democratic patriotism. In June 1752, Iselin had received a letter from his maternal uncle, Isaak Burckhardt, in which the latter had complained that "nous avons le malheur d'être nés dans la plus miserable république de l'univers où ni l'honnête homme ni le savant n'a point d'avantage devant tous ces misérables marchands qui sont nos Roys, et où les gens de metier, le dernier savetier, croient autant savoir en fait de politique que le premier Ministre de France."[179] Iselin could not have agreed more. Basel, he claimed, was a free city only by name: "Pride yourselves, poor republicans, pride yourselves with the hollow sound of the beautiful word liberty."[180] In most existing republics, Iselin complained, liberty was thought to mean little more than "the right to sell one's opinion and will to the mighty and to the rich." Hence, it would be "false to imagine that we are free. We are slaves, and the yoke we are under is all the heavier, because we no longer see it is a yoke."[181]

> If were to ask each one of my dear fellow citizens, what they thought of liberty, I would certainly receive the following answer from most of them, 'they believe that they are all the more free, the more they can do as they please, irrespective of whether their action is right or wrong.' Those in office would say, that 'they were all the more free, the less the citizens prevent them from using their posts to their own advantage, that is to say, to fulfil their vain pleasures through the sweat of their citizens and subjects.' And the citizens would argue that 'the more they can realise their eveil deeds, the less a magistrate can stop them from doing so, the less they have to pay their respect to their superiors, the freer they were.'[182]

179 Letter from Isaak Burckhardt to Isaak Iselin (1 June 1752), reprinted in *Pariser Tagebuch*, p. 217.

180 *Patriotische Träume* (1758), p. 121.

181 Ibid., p. 122.

182 Ibid., p. 128: "Und wenn ich einen jeden meiner lieben Miteidgenossen befragen sollte, was sie für Freyheit hielten, so würde ich gewiss von den meisten die Antwort erhalten, 'sie halten sich für desto freyer, je mehr sie thun können, was ihnen gefalle, es möge nun recht seyn oder nicht.' Die in Aemtern sind, würden sie sagen, sie wären desto freyer, 'je weniger die Bürger sie hindern können, sich ihre Aemter zu Nuze zu machen, das ist, aus dem theuren Schweisse der Bürger und der Unterthanen ihre eiteln Lüste zu erfüllen.' Und die Bürger würden behaupten, 'je ungestrafter sie ihre Bosheiten ausübern können, je minder der Magistrat ihnen darinnen Einhalt thun könne, je weniger sie demselben Ehrerbietung erweisen dürften, desto grösser sey die Freyheit.'"

Despite their democratic institutions, citizens of Basel were in fact no more free than the subjects of a monarch. Iselin complained that the republics had focused too much on the idea that liberty meant primarily freedom from princely rule. All republics which had liberated themselves from princely ruled suffered from the false belief that collective self-rule was in itself sufficient for maintaining liberty. Republicans who took this view usually tried to support their position by pointing out the high level of public virtue which marked the early phase of a republic. From this they concluded that the best way to maintain or reclaim this heroic commitment to the public cause was to fight anyone who might pose an obstacle to self-rule. Iselin believed this to be a highly dangerous doctrine. The kind of virtues which historians claimed had distinguished the citizens of the early Roman republic, or of the Swiss republics shortly after liberation, were mostly fuelled by their hatred of their former oppressors, rather than by any genuine love for the common good.[183] This was why, once the republics had secured their freedom, and their initial hatred against their former masters had worn off, the much admired republican virtues gradually disappeared. Collective self-rule indeed represented a form of liberty. Real liberty, however, which Iselin claimed meant the freedom to perfect one's self, to follow one's calling, and to do as much good as possible, could be achieved under either republican or monarchical rule, as long as the rulers were virtuous and the citizens acted on the basis of love.[184] Yet, when it came to the question of implementing reform, monarchies were undoubtedly in an advantageous position. Whilst in monarchies there still was a chance that a genuinely virtuous individual might inherit the throne, in republics like Basel, where the magistrates were drawn from a wide pool of citizens, many of whom utterly were unsuited for office, its was inconceivable that the virtuous elements within society could ever rise to the top. Iselin envisaged two scenarios of how Basel politics could be brought into an alignment with the natural order. The first one,

183 Ibid., p. 126.

184 Ibid., p. 129: "Ich halte davor dass man unter einem König frey und in einer Republik ein Sklave seyn kann; dass man nothwendig einer seyn muss, wenn man sich nicht von dem Joch des Eigennuzes, des Ehrgeizes, der Wollust, und seiner andern Leidenschaften, mit eben dem Muthe befreyet, den man wider den härtesten Tyrannen gebrauchen würde; und dass die politische Freyheit ohne die sittliche nicht möglich ist."

which he firmly rejected, was to launch a coup d'état in the hope that, once the corrupt magistrates had been driven out, the vacant posts could be filled with patriotic friends of mankind. However appealing this might seem, Iselin feared that it would merely lead to the perpetuation of ongoing conflict within the citizenry.[185] The second scenario was to push for constitutional change by peaceful means. Iselin believed that even this peaceful solution was bound to fail: "But who wants to dictate laws to merchants now that they have become our legislators, now that they have become almighty at the courts, now that in most republics they have come to occupy all posts, and now that they have deprived all other ranks of their former power."[186]

Thus, there seemed little reason to believe that the modern world would find its way back to the natural order of mankind or that modern nations would succeed in reviving the sense of community of the ancient Homeric household. And yet, the *Patriotic Dreams* ends on an upbeat note. While modern men could not entirely escape the tensions between politics and the modern economy, they had to make the best of the situation. Rather than conspiring for a change of regime, they should focus all their energy on improving themselves; they should put their *own* house in order by trying to control their passions and start listening to their inner voice. Iselin believed this could be achieved if men continuously subjected themselves to a process of strict self-examination. A few days before his first encounter with Rousseau, he had written down a long plan for his future life. His aim in life, Iselin wrote, was to "cultivate my heart and establish a clear understanding of how my passions worked and of how I should act."[187] By carefully dissecting his passions, and by tracing them back to their source, he hoped he would gradually be able to unmask the false justifications he used to defend the latter, thereby clearing the path for the development of his conscience. In the *Patriotic Dreams* he returned to his June plan. Knowing one's passions and motives was imperative to any moral improvement. This did not imply that men had to follow Muralt's lead and retreat to the countryside, or imitate the Rousseauean ideal of the Spartan athlete. Nor did it mean that men should follow the teaching of the Stoics and suppress all passions entirely. They should rather try to moderate their more selfish and socially-disruptive passions, their envy, greed, and lust for power, so that their natural love could come to the fore and play a more significant role in society. Teachers should double their efforts and provide their pupils with good analytical skills. Artists should strive to represent the underlying beauty of the external world. Ministers, meanwhile, should remind the rich and powerful that by indulging in their selfish ways, and raising the level of tension within the community, they directly contributed to their own fall. As long as men kept believing in the possibility of moral improvement, Iselin believed, they would also find the strength to keep on fighting against corruption wherever it occurred.

185 Ibid., p. 123.

186 *Patriotische Träume* (1755), p. 111: "Alleine wer will mehr denen Kaufleuten Gesäzze vorschreiben, da sie allerorten sich selbst zu Gesäzgebern hinaufgeschwungen, da sie an den Höfen der Könige nun allmächtig sein, in den meisten Republiken alle Stellen eingenommen, und alle Stände, wo nicht des Ranges, doch des wirklichen Ansehens beraubet haben."

187 *Pariser Tagebuch,* p. 181.