

Iselin believed that it would be possible to locate a source of motivation in the pleasure (either aesthetic or cognitive) involved in the idea of truly general utility. A real patriot, thus, gained as much pleasure from witnessing the development of patriotism in other countries as in his own fatherland. "A true British patriot is pleased to observe [the revival of patriotism] in modest Switzerland. A virtuous [Swiss] Confederate regards with true joy the shining example of British virtue."¹³² Real patriotism was necessarily an international collaborative effort. Iselin concluded his speech with a call to all patriots of Europe to share their findings and to help one another other in detecting the obstacles which prevented individual states from progressing towards a state of maximum utility.

CHAPTER THREE

Iselin's Critique of Rousseau's Second Discourse

¹³² Ibid., p. 177.

1. Introduction

This chapter deals with Iselin's encounter with Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*; more precisely, it deals with his critique of Rousseau's derivation of justice from the natural instinct of pity. Iselin developed his critique of the second *Discourse* at great length in Book Two of his *History of Mankind* which he dedicated to his friends of the *Patriotic Society* in Berne. In the preface he thanked them for having "encouraged me to pull from my drawer a manuscript that had lain there forgotten for many years."¹ In letters to his friends Iselin insisted that his *History of Mankind* was no more than the final result of a longstanding project he had been toying with, even prior to his encounter with Rousseau in Paris in the early 1750s.² For Ise-

¹ *Ueber die Geschichte der Menschheit*, Frankfurt und Leipzig 1764, vol. 1, 'Zuschrift'.

² In the preface of the second edition of 1768 Iselin elaborated on this point: "Durch eine vielleicht allzukühne Schwärmerey dahingerissen, suchte er aus dem Staube eine fast in seiner ersten Jugend gewagten, aber längst vergessenen Entwurf hervor, von dem er glaubte, dass er dadurch die Absichten dieser entstehenden Gesellschaft befördern werden könnten; und er verfertigte also in einem Anfall von Enthusiasmus einen Versuch über die Geschichte der Menschheit." *Über die Geschichte der Menschheit*, Zürich 1770 (reprint of the second edition), volume 1, p. 4. Ulrich Im Hof traces the origins of the *Geschichte der Menschheit* back to Iselin's student days at the University of Basel, in particular to his essay, *Kurze Betrachtungen über die Verschiedenheit der menschlichen Sitten nach dem Unterschied des Alters*, of 1745, where he attacked Bayle's historical scepticism. See, Im Hof, *Isaak Iselin*, vol. 1, p. 46 and vol. 2, p. 455f. Im Hof also refers to Iselin's brief encounter with the Aberdeen professor of moral philosophy, David Fordyce (author of the *Elements of Moral Philosophy*), in Basel on 10 August 1751, during the course of which Iselin was astonished to realise that his ideas on the history of morality were very close to those of Fordyce. See *Isaak Iselin*, vol. 2, p. 459. For a more detailed

lin the opportunity to work out and write down his project came in 1762, when he accepted an invitation by Daniel von Fellenberg to contribute to the society's plan to establish a science of a Christian Legislator. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Fellenberg envisaged using the *Patriotic Society* as the basis of an international collaborative effort which, he hoped, would include some of the most prominent philosophers in Europe, including Hume, Smith, Diderot and Helvetius. The members themselves were to write essays on one particular aspect of moral legislation; the essays were then to be published together with those sent in by the society's foreign correspondents. From their correspondence we know that Fellenberg intended to write a treatise on the need for legislators to instil a greater taste for life in the countryside. The Aargau philosopher and author of the *Essais sur divers sujets intéressans de politique et de morale* (1761), George Louis Schmid von Auenstein, declared that he wanted to write either on the state of nature or on how best to communicate philosophical findings to the common people. Hans Kaspar Hirzel, the author of the *Socrate Rustique*, was to write on the prejudices of judges and how they could be overcome. Johann Georg Zimmermann, author of the much acclaimed, *Vom Nationalstolze*, toyed with the idea of working on "the art of conducting moral experiments" or alternatively on the "physical means needed to render men happy".³ Mendelssohn hoped to write on the "relationship between the good and the beautiful".⁴ Iselin himself announced that he was presently working on an essay in which, as Fellenberg reported to Sulzer, "he wants to follow the progress of humanity from the state of barbarism to the state of the highest perfection of society".⁵

account of the Iselin-Fordyce connection and of its relevance for understanding the difference between Iselin and Ferguson, see Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment. Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, Oxford 1995.

³ Zimmermann to V. B. Tschärner, 1 December 1762, in Richard Hamel (ed.), *Briefe von J. G. von Zimmermann, Wieland und A. von Haller and Vincenz Bernhard von Tschärner*, Rostock 1881, p. 48-49.

⁴ Mendelssohn to Iselin, 5 July 1763, in Ferdinand Schwarz (ed.), "Briefe Moses Mendelssohns an Isaak Iselin", *Basler Jahrbuch* 1923, Basel 1923, p. 65. Mendelssohn later dedicated the first part of his *Phaedon* to the *Patriotic Society*.

⁵ Fellenberg to Sulzer, 11 November 1762 (Berne Burgerbibliothek, Fellenberg-Archiv); see especially Iselin's letter to Fellenberg from 31 May 1762 (Berne

Between 1762 and 1764 Iselin enlarged this initial manuscript into two large volumes, making his *History of Mankind* the single largest contribution to the society's project.⁶ It was also by far the most ambitious. Rather than dealing with merely one particular aspect of the science of the Christian legislator, he offered the society a complete theory of political and moral reform. In his introduction Iselin closely followed the *Patriotic Society's* programme, where he and Fellenberg had both called for the joint study of metaphysics and the history of legislation. Both of these fields, they had argued, should complement one another and ultimately blend into a single coherent science of mankind and the history of human society. The resulting deeper understanding of human nature and society would provide the cognitive tools needed for the realisation of a new system of practical ethics which would take the form of a 'modern' or 'economic patriotism'.

In the previous chapter we saw how the members of the *Patriotic Society* hoped to adapt the *Economic Society's* theory of meritocratic honour to a Christian republican setting by trying to eliminate its overtly utilitarian features. Honour, they argued, was a feeling that served solely to regulate the selfish behaviour of corrupted men. Those who sought honour acted virtuously not because of the intrinsic value of virtue but because they hoped to gain the approval and applause of those in power. Whilst accepting that the *Economic Society's* call for handing out medals, reading speeches and other forms of public appreciation could give a stimulus to Berne's languishing economy, the members of the *Patriotic Society* claimed that

Burgerbibliothek, Fellenberg-Archiv) where he gives a more detailed account of his project: "Je me suis proposé de faire une courte histoire de l'humanité. Je tâcherai d'y montrer ce que l'homme doit et peut être. Je suivrai toutes ses facultés pas à pas dans leur développement naturel & psychologique. Je l'observerai après cela dans l'Etat naturel comme les historiens & surtout les Voyageurs nous le dépeignent. J'étudierai les différents degrés par lesquels tant de générations d'hommes sont passés jusqu'à ce que les Connoissances humaines & les moeurs aient commencé à exister. Je finirai leurs progrès lents & tardifs jusqu'à nos jours, et je finirai par des réflexions sur la législation en general. La plupart de ce que je vous ai lû à Schinznach, de mes observations entrera dans ce Memoire. Je mettrai d'abord à arranger ce que j'ai recueilli depuis long temps sur cette Matière quoique dans un autre bût, & à ramasser d'autres matériaux."

⁶ Fellenberg's own contribution was published only in the late 1770s: *Entwurf der allgemeinen Grundsätze des Gesetzgebung*, Frankfurt und Leipzig 1777.

these measures would fail to generate a genuinely republican culture. The main problem of this kind of honour-based system of patriotism was that it was based on the appreciation of others. In their writings, they sought to eliminate its utilitarian features. One suggestion was to make sure that the judges responsible for the distribution of signs of public esteem were themselves credible moral authorities (which, as Hirzel had argued, meant that they should live morally irreproachable lives and be qualified experts in the field of agriculture). Another suggestion was to try to de-personalise the honour system by leaving the vetting-process to an anonymous society of virtuous citizens. A third suggestion, supported by Iselin, was to make honour entirely independent of the judgement or appreciation of others and instead make it solely dependent on the actor's own self-judgement. Rather than trying to please one's prince, one's peers, fellow-citizens, or even the 'public', an actor should try to please his own internal arbiter. Honour would no longer be rewarded through public applause but solely through an internal sense of pleasure deriving from the harmony between one's action and one's will. However, because man's ideal of himself was determined largely by a variety of external factors, including the climatic conditions of his habitat and the social and political conditions of the society he happened to be born into, even man's internal arbiter was subject to errors of judgement. According to Iselin, the partiality of man's internal arbiter would be overcome only when he recognised himself fully as a member of mankind at large. Reason, art, and religion played an important part in the process. But Iselin's central idea was that because of his limited understanding, man's reconciliation with mankind could take place only through and within the state. He believed that it would be possible to identify a source of motivation in the pleasure (either aesthetic or cognitive) involved in the idea of the utility of the state in realising man's moral faculties. The task of a patriot was thus to try to generalise this utility as much as possible by showing how existing states could move closer to the ideal of a genuinely ethical state.

Iselin had worked out his ideas on modern, aesthetic patriotism in a number of speeches and essays written in the late 1750s and early 1760s. In his *History of Mankind* he now presented a complete theory of moral legislation. His reform theory was couched in a complex historical analysis of the dual development of liberty and the human mind, and how these two strands interacted with one another. Whilst writing his *History of Mankind*,

Iselin decided to enlarge his project even further by adding a long treatise on moral psychology and the natural foundations of morality in man's ability to feel sympathy with both the pleasure and the pain of his fellow creatures. The reason for doing so, he argued in the Preface to a later edition, was a heated debate amongst members of the *Patriotic Society* about the relevance of Rousseau's ideas for their own theory of modern patriotism.⁷ Iselin firmly opposed any attempt to recruit Rousseau for their undertaking and in 1762 and 1763 he tried hard to convince some of his Bernese friends, notably Feltenberg and Tschärner, of the danger in Rousseau's position. In Book Two of the *History of Mankind*, Iselin insisted that a refutation of Rousseau's second *Discourse* was imperative for any theory of modern patriotism and moral legislation. The present chapter aims to reconstruct the Bernese debate on Rousseau. The first section deals with the Bernese reception of Rousseau and the failed attempt by the *Patriotic Society* to recruit Rousseau for their project. The second section shows how the Bernese members of the society tried to respond to Rousseau's criticism of modern patriotism. The third section will provide a detailed analysis of Rousseau's attempt in the second *Discourse* to derive justice from the natural instinct of pity. In the fourth section, finally, I will reconstruct Iselin's elaborate and original reply to Rousseau.

⁷ *Geschichte der Menschheit*, Karlsruhe 1784, xiii: "[E]r würde es für einen Undank halten, wenn er der Welt verborgen hielte, dass Lord Home, durch einen an diese Gesellschaft geschriebenen Brief, ihn veranlasst habe seinen hauptsächlich der Prüfung der *Rousseauischen Paradoxen*, die damals ein so grosses Aufsehen machten, bestimmten Entwurf, auch auf die Untersuchung zu richten ob Montesquieu die Staaten getreuer geschildert und ihre Triebfedern richtiger zergliedert habe, als Herr Rousseau den einzelnen Menschen; oder ob beyde an statt wahrer Nachbilder uns nur die Geburten ihrer Phantasie dargestellt haben."

2. Rousseau's critique of modern patriotism

2.1. The Bernese reception of Rousseau

The importance which Iselin attributed to the idea of sociability is reflected in the fact that the entire second book of the *History of Mankind* is dedicated to the latter's defence. The immediate reason for dealing with the issue of sociability at such length, Iselin argued in a note added to a later edition of the *History of Mankind*, was a letter that Rousseau had written on 29 April 1762 to the *Patriotic Society*. The majority of the society's members were supporters of Rousseau; a support which in some cases took the form of near religious veneration. In a letter to Charles Bonnet, Albrecht von Haller later played down this local support for Rousseau as a naïve infatuation with his literary work, especially the *Nouvelle Héloïse*. The young Bernese, he claimed, showed little or no interest in his political writings. In light of what we can gather from Fellenberg's, Tscharner's, Zimmermann's, Julie Bonde-li's and others' correspondence, Haller's statement clearly needs revising. Rousseau's Bernese supporters were avid readers, not just of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, but also of the article on *Political Economy*, the *Discourse of the arts and sciences*, the *Discourse on Inequality*, the *Emile*, and the *Social Contract*, even though it is admittedly not always easy to discern what they took his politics to be. Unlike the case of Zurich, where we can rely on a range of first rate documents – Wegelin's account of his visit to Rousseau in October 1763, J. H. Füssli's famous *Remarks on the Writings and Conduct of J. J. Rousseau*, (where he defended Rousseau during the Hume-scandal) or, most importantly perhaps, the numerous unpublished speeches delivered at both the *Gesellschaft zur Gervi* and the *Historisch-politische Gesellschaft zu Schuhmachern* many of which contain detailed discussions of the second *Discourse* and the *Social Contract*⁸ – the Bernese sources regarding

⁸ Jakob Wegelin's account of his visit to Rousseau has recently been edited by R. A. Leigh, "Wegelin's visit to Rousseau in 1763", *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 249 (1987), p. 303ff.; J. H. Füssli, "Remarks on the Writings and Conduct of J. J. Rousseau", edited by Eudo C. Mason, *Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstgeschichte Zürich, Kleine Schriften Nr. 4*, Zürich 1962; excerpts of the speeches delivered at the *Gesellschaft zur Gervi* have been published in J. Zehnder, *Pestalozzi. Idee und Macht der menschlichen Entwicklung*, Gotha 1875. Highly

Rousseau are comparatively sparse. Yet, when put together, they provide a sufficiently coherent picture.⁹

What is immediately noticeable is that the Bernese did not read Rousseau as the radical democrat often depicted by his critics. They knew perfectly well that the *Social Contract* had to be read within a Genevan context. They were also fully aware of Rousseau's aristocratic leanings in the *Social Contract*, with its argument that an elected aristocracy offered, at least in theory, the best chance of overcoming some of the more destructive tensions within modern political life. And finally, they were well informed of Rousseau's favourable view of the Bernese political system, its strong military tradition, its civic institutions and especially its attempt to maintain a strict separation between politics and the economy. Although, like everyone else in Switzerland, they objected to Rousseau's idea of a civil religion, the younger Bernese generally considered Rousseau's theological idiosyncrasies to be much less of a cause for alarm than did some of their

interesting is also the *Correspondance de Jean-Jacques Rousseau avec Léonard Usteri*, edited by Paul Usteri and Eugène Ritter, Zurich et Genève 1910. For the reception of Rousseau in Zurich see Gonzague de Reynold, *Bodmer et l'école Suisse*, passim; Some useful comments can also be found in Leonore Speerli's otherwise outdated study, *Rousseau und Zürich. Vom Erscheinen des ersten Discours bis zum Ausbruch der Revolution in Frankreich*, Diss. Zürich, Brugg 1941; see also François Jost, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau Suisse*, vol. 1, Fribourg 1961, p. 408ff.; the most interesting, recent study is the article by Francis Cheneval, "The Reception of Rousseau's Political Thought by Zurich's "Patriots"", in Michael Böhler et al. (eds.), *Republikanische Tugend. Ausbildung eines Schweizer Nationalbewusstseins und Erziehung eines neuen Bürgers*, p. 425ff.

⁹ Some comments on the Rousseau-Berne connexion can be gathered from François Jost, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, passim; also, Alexis François, *Jean-Jacques et Leurs Excellences*, Lausanne 1924; on the reception of Rousseau's *Social Contract* in Switzerland, see Charly Guyot, 'L'accueil fait en Suisse au Contrat Social', *Etudes sur le Contrat Social de Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Actes des Journées d'étude organisées à Dijon pour la Commémoration du 200e Anniversaire du Contrat Social*, Paris 1964, p. 381ff. A still neglected treasure for Rousseau scholarship is the *Journal Helvétique*, which between 1750 and 1782 published more than seventy articles and poems relating to Rousseau. A list can be found in Rodolphe Zellweger, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le Mercure Suisse', *Musée Neuchâtelois*, 1983, p. 15-32. Some of this material has now been used by Raymond Trousson for his extremely useful study, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau jugé par ses contemporains: du "Discours sur les sciences et les arts" aux "Confessions"*, Paris et Genève 2000.

fellow-citizens. Hence they strongly disagreed with Haller's classification of Rousseau as a classical sceptic; nor did they agree with his claim that the latter's scepticism could be overcome only by implementing a strict system of Christian Absolutism.¹⁰ This is what Haller later argued in his *Fabius und Cato, ein Stück der Römischen Geschichte*, first published in 1774.¹¹

¹⁰ In a letter to Zimmermann from 25 July 1766, Julie Bondeli writes that: "[J]'ose bien dire, pourquoi Voltaire et Haller persécutent Rousseau, l'un et l'autre par envie, et ce dernier fait plus encore, car il ne veut pas seulement avoir une façon de penser avec lui. Dernièrement il dit à un français: "La liberté est nuisible aux hommes, ils sont tous méchants, il faut les gouverner par le despotisme."" *Bondeli*, p. 307. See also Haller's letter to Tissot from 19 July 1762: "On dit, car je ne l'ai pas vu, que Rousseau a écrit contre la religion chrétienne avec une imprudence, qui surpasse, tout ce qu'on a jamais osé. Les restes de bonsens, qu'il fait paroître, ne rendent ce poison que plus dangereux. Je crois que tout Prince Chrétien doit, sur les ordres précis de Dieu même, marquer son indignation contre un blasphémateur, ce que l'est dans le plus exact sens du terme le S. Jean-Jacques. L'exil d'un étranger me paroît bien doux et bien modéré." *Albrecht von Hallers Briefe an Auguste Tissot 1754-1777*, ed. Erich Hintzsche, Bern 1977, p. 143. A proper study of 'Haller and Rousseau' would be highly interesting, not least because Haller's early literary work, especially his moral poems from the 1730s, reveal some strong similarity with Rousseau's first *Discourse*. (See, for example, Haller's reviews of Rousseau's first *Discourse* in the *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*, 1753 p. 235f. and 1091-1096). Like Rousseau, Haller believed that commercial society leads to continuous civil strife and could be stabilised only through the imposition of a quasi-Hobbesian will. In contrast to Rousseau or Hobbes, however, Haller insisted on a Christian voluntarist solution. See for example his *Discours sur l'irreligion, ou on examine ses Principes & ses Suites funestes, Opposés aux Principes & aux heureux Efets du Christianisme*, Neufchâtel 1755, p. 31-32: "Je crois qu'il est assez démontré que cette nouvelle sagesse est la ruine de la vie sociale. Elle ne donne pour objet à chaque homme que son Bonheur particulier, & son Bonheur purement sensuel. Elle met perpétuellement en opposition les forces de tous les hommes & d'inimitié universelle, que Hobbes a reconnu sincèrement en être la suite, & qui ne peut finir que lorsque la Religion viendra ramener la Paix. La Religion fait précisément le contraire de l'incrédulité: Elle réunit toutes ces forces, toutes ces volontés divisées en un seul point, je veux dire en Dieu."

¹¹ Albrecht von Haller, *Fabius und Cato, ein Stück der Römischen Geschichte*, Bern und Göttingen 1774. Book Four was reprinted separately during the French revolution, first in 1790 under the title, *Fragment d'un roman philosophique du célèbre Haller sur les principes d'un bon Gouvernement. Traduit de l'Allemand* (s.l.) and then in 1792, *Examen des principes de l'Assemblée nationale comparés aux anciens gouvernemens des Grecs et Romains* (s.l.). See, Susanna Lundsgaard-

Book Four recounts the arrival of the Athenian sceptic Carneades to Rome, his influence on Scipio and other young patricians and Cato's attempt to unmask the frivolous destructiveness of Carneades' teachings. To contemporary Swiss readers it was immediately clear that Haller's story, despite its endless references to Roman history, was a thinly disguised critique of Rousseau's influence in Berne during the early 1760s; that the cultured, democratic Athens and the rustic, virtuous Rome represented Geneva and Berne; that Scipio and the younger Cato stood for Fellenberg, Tschärner and their friends; and that the wise, elder Cato who steered the Roman youth back on to safer grounds was none other than Haller himself. Nor was it difficult for his readers to discern that making Rousseau appear in the guise of Carneades was Haller's way of emphasising what he took to be the close intellectual affinity between Jean-Jacques and seventeenth-century sceptical political theorists, in particular Hobbes who, in his works, had given the figure of Carneades a symbolic position.¹² If Haller portrayed Rousseau as the sceptic who required a Hobbesian answer, others went even further and insisted that Rousseau's theory was itself essentially that of Hobbes. We can see this from the correspondence of Julie Bondeli, a core member of the Fellenberg-Tschärner circle, where she repeatedly complained about a Bernese thinker who argued that Rousseau was a Hobbist.¹³

Much closer to their own understanding of Rousseau was the verdict of the Bernese parishioner Beat Herport who, in his *Versuch über die wichtigsten Wahrheiten, zur Glückseligkeit der Menschen*, defended Rousseau against any accusation of scepticism and claimed that the Genevan, despite certain inconsistencies in his work, remained committed to finding a positive solution to the problems of modern society. Rousseau, Herport argued,

Hansen-von Fischer, *Verzeichnis der gedruckten Schriften Albrecht von Hallers*, Berner Beiträge zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften, Bern 1959.

¹² See Richard Tuck, "Grotius, Carneades and Hobbes", *Grotiana*, New Series, 4 (1983), p. 43-62.

¹³ In a letter to J. G. Zimmermann from 20 July 1762, Bondeli refers to "un homme de lettres d'ici [qui confond] les principes de Hobbes et ceux de Rousseau". In her letter from 7 August 1762 she repeats this claim: "Je vous ai déjà parlé de celui qui disait, que les principes de Rousseau étaient ceux de Hobbes." Both letters are reprinted in *Bondeli*, p. 228 and 232.

was far too knowledgeable, and too much in control of his passions, to believe that mankind could be saved by returning to a life in the woods. Rousseau was no 'philosophe à quatre pattes' as Voltaire had claimed. All Rousseau aimed to show was that men could slow down the process of corruption only if they accepted a more moderate life style. In brief, what Rousseau wanted was not to bring about revolution but merely to "straighten the crooked timber" of mankind.¹⁴

¹⁴ Beat Herport, *Versuch über die wichtigsten Wahrheiten, zur Glückseligkeit der Menschen. Bestens empfohlen allen Regenten der freyen Staaten, zur Erdauring und nöhtigen Besserung: von einem redlich gesinnten Schweizer*, s.l. [Bern] 1766, p. 19-20. "Indessen ist gewiss, dass nach seinen Sätzen, vieles Wissen und Kennen die Begierden schärfet, viele Beschäftigungen die Habsucht entzündet, das gesellschaftliche Leben viele starke Leidenschaften veranlasst, die der mit wenigem zufriedene Natur unbekannt bleiben. Es ist auch nicht zu zweifeln, dass wann die alte einfältige Lebensart wieder angewöhnet wurde, diese das beste Mittel wäre, die heftigen Triebe zu mässigen. Dieser Weltweise hat zu viel Einsicht, als dass er seine Sätze als eine genaue Regel vorschreibe; Dann worzu solte uns die gütige Natur so viele Gaben innert und auf der Erden mitgetheilet haben, die wir ohne Beyhülff der Menschen nicht geniessen könnten? Wozu solten wir die Leibs und Seelenkräften, die eine beständige Würksamkeit erfordern, anwenden, da eben in dieser Würksamkeit unsere Glückseligkeit beförderet wird? Seine Absicht kan also keine andere als diese gewesen seyn, den ins krumme gewachsenen Baum wiederum umzuspannen, damit er ins grade wachse; ich will sagen, die vielen Missbräuche des gesellschaftlichen Lebens durch Vorstellungen einer einfältieren Lebensart zu verbessern. Vielleicht mögen die erlittene Unbill von beschabten Völkern, und die anlachende unschuldige Lebensart der Wilden ihne dahin verleitet haben, dass er seinem Witz keine Schranken, und seiner strömenden Beredsamkeit keinen Damm entgegen gesetzt." Herport's book, which was mainly directed against the role of public oaths in Bernese politics, was put on the Index; the remaining copies were seized and burnt, while the author was put under house arrest. The case gained international notoriety due to the involvement of the English republican propagandist, Thomas Hollis, who had the work translated into English. See Hollis' article in the *London Chronicle*, vol. XX (1766), Nr. 1511, p. 121: "Literary Intelligence. Switzerland. The Tyrants who forced the celebrated Rousseau to take refuge in England, are at this Instant scandalously persecuting the sensible, the worthy Author of the excellent Book, entitled "An Enquiry concerning Truths of Importance to the Happiness of Mankind". His Name is Herport, a learned, publick-spirited Divine, a Citizen of Berne. Being known to be the Author of the above-mentioned Treatise, he hath lately been put under Arrest in his own House, by the Secret Council (the Inquisition) of Berne; all the Copies of his Work (a very few exepted) are seized, and he will probably be deprived of his Stipend and branded with Infamy. Such

There is no document to indicate any close relationship between Herport and the *Patriotic Society*, yet it is fair to assume that the latter probably approved not only of his defence of Rousseau but also of his views on patriotism, which he summarised in epigram form on the back of the title page: "The lowest subject who freely cleans the street from loose stones: is a patriot within the sphere of his activity. The citizen who founds his liberty not on licentiousness but on the laws and the love of his neighbours is a patriot. The magistrate who makes the common good and each individual's well being and happiness his point of view is a patriot, a gift from heaven who should be honoured and loved. From this it follows that every one, irrespective of his rank, is entitled to acquire that priceless honour which comes with being a patriot."¹⁵ It was this view of Rousseau, that is to say of a thinker who, despite his often puzzling taste for paradoxical statements, remained loyal to a Protestant vision of modern patriotism (and not Haller's association of Rousseau with Hobbes) that is the one encountered most frequently in the correspondence of the Bernese patriots.

2.2. Rousseau's critique of the *Patriotic Society*

The extent to which the Bernese had misjudged their idol became clear in the letter that Rousseau sent to the *Patriotic Society* from Montmorency on 29 April 1762.¹⁶ While Rousseau expressed his sympathy for the society and its

are the Rewards which these pious Guardians of the Liberties of the People are about to bestow upon a Subject, whom Justice, not to mention Generosity, would have loaded with Honours." A few years earlier, Hollis had donated a substantial part of his library to the Bernese republic, an act he seems to have regretted after the incident involving Herport.

¹⁵ "Der geringste Unterthan, der ungedingt die Strassen von losen Steinen raumet: der ist in dem Kreis seiner Würksamkeit ein Patriot. Der Bürger, der seine Freiheit nicht in der Ausgelassenheit, sondern auf die Gesätze und die Liebe des Nächsten gründet, ist ein Patriot. Der Regent, der die gemeine Wohlfahrt, und aller Heil und Glückseligkeit befördert, und dieses sein Gesichtspunct seyn lässt, ist ein Patriot, ein Geschenk des Himmels, so stets zu verehren zu lieben ist. Demnach kan ein jeder, wess Standes er immer ist, die unschätzbare Würde eines Patrioten sich erwerben." Beat Herport, *Versuch über die wichtigsten Wahrheiten*, ii.

¹⁶ *Correspondance complète*, (CC), R.A. Leigh (ed.), Geneva and Oxford 1965-

cause, and even agreed to become a loosely associated corresponding member, he made it clear that he had no intention of spending his time and energy on a project which he held to be doomed from the start. In particular, he ridiculed the society's rationalism, the hope that mere reasoning could alter people's behaviour. Truth, he argued, had never changed anything in this world; instead of teaching men the truth in the hope of making them become wise, the *Patriotic Society* should first try to make men become wise:

However beautiful your plan and however great your talents might be for executing it, don't flatter yourselves that you could achieve a result that would fully correspond with your views. Prejudices based on simple error can be corrected; however those based on our vices will disappear only together with the latter. You want to begin to teach men the truth in order to make them wise; whereas on the contrary, you should first make them wise so that they can love truth. Truth has hardly ever achieved anything in this world because men are always led by their passions more than by their understanding; they commit evil whilst approving what is good. The century we live in is amongst the most enlightened, even with regard to morals; but is it one of the best? What use is knowledge to society? Books are good for nothing, nor are academies, nor learned societies; useful things are never given anything but sterile and vain approbations. [...] You can instruct the people, but you can't make them better or happier.¹⁷

1998, x, p. 225-229. Rousseau's letter was a reply to V.B. Tschärner's letter of 5 April 1762 (*CC*, x, p. 184-187). Tschärner's letter makes it clear that the Bernese considered their own project to be fully in line with Rousseau's writings: "Je ne doute pas un instant que Vous n'applaudissiez aux vues expliquées dans l'imprimé que je suis chargé de Vous communiquer. Vous pouvez regarder tout cela comme votre ouvrage."

¹⁷ *CC*, x, p. 225-226: "Quelque beau cependant que soit votre plan, et quelques talents que vous ayez pour l'exécuter, ne vous flatter pas d'un succès qui réponde entièrement à vos vues. Les préjugés qui ne tiennent qu'à l'erreur se peuvent détruire, mais ceux qui sont fondés sur nos vices ne tomberont qu'avec eux. Vous voulez commencer par apprendre aux hommes la vérité pour les rendre sages; et, tout au contraire, il faudroit d'abord les rendre sages pour leur faire aimer la vérité. La vérité n'a presque jamais rien fait dans le monde, parceque les hommes se conduisent toujours plus par leurs passions que par leurs lumières, et qu'ils font le mal, approuvant le bien. Le siècle où nous vivons est des plus éclairés, même en morale; est-il des meilleurs? Que servent donc les connaissances pour l'avantage de la société? Les livres ne sont bons à rien, ni les academies, ni les sociétés littéraires; on ne donne jamais à ce qui en sort d'utile qu'une approbation stérile et vaine. [...] Vous pourrez instruire les peuples, mais vous ne les rendez ni meilleures ni plus heureux."

According to Rousseau, the *Patriotic Society's* attempts were not simply futile, they were also counterproductive because the only likely outcome of the society's activities was to increase its members' reputation and standing within the republic of letters, thus giving them exactly the kind of vain and false honour that a modern patriot was trying so desperately to avoid.

Gentlemen, you will state your position better and more advantageously, but you will not be more successful; and rather than the common good which you seek, you will find only the glory which you seem to fear.¹⁸

Despite Rousseau's rejection, most members of the *Patriotic Society* do not seem to have been deterred by his doubts about modern patriotism. Their chance to reiterate their interest in his collaboration came in June 1762, when the Parlement of Paris forced Jean-Jacques to leave France and take refuge, first in Yverdon, and then in Môtiers. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau described his arrival on Bernese soil as an occasion of great joy and relief: "Heaven, protector of liberty, I praise you; I touch free soil!"¹⁹ But even a second letter from Tschärner, this time sent to Rousseau's Yverdon residence, failed to secure any clear commitment.²⁰ In his reply (dated 27 July 1762) he wrote:

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 226: "Messieurs, vous direz mieux et davantage, mais vous n'aurez pas meilleur succès, et au lieu de bien public que vous cherchez, vous ne trouverez que la gloire que vous semblez craindre."

¹⁹ "Ciel, protecteur de la vertu, je te loue; je touche une terre de liberté!" Berne, Rousseau claimed, was "l'Etat de l'Europe pour lequel j'avois le plus d'estime." Cited in R. Hamel, *Mittheilungen aus Briefen*, p. 14.

²⁰ "J'estime infiniment, mon cher Concitoyen, votre liberté courageuse à prouver les droits de la raison et de l'humanité, quelqu'audacieux que dussent paraître aux chefs des polices établies quelques uns de vos principes en thèse. Je me promettois de Vous voir et de me lier avec un homme si propre à me donner d'importants conseils. [...] Les amis qui se sont liés pour l'établissement de la Société de Citoyens m'ont chargé de vous assurer que leurs sentimens de respect pour votre personne et leurs regrets sur les poursuites inquiètes qui troublent actuellement votre vie sont inexprimables. Nous vous prions de nous instruire de vos projets, afin de nous ménager le plaisir d'un petit instant d'entrevue, et celui d'une correspondance suivie lorsque vos pas seront mieux fixés." Tschärner's letter dates from 13 July, see *CC*, xii, p. 25-26.

As to you, Monsieur, and your laudable society, I remain in the same disposition as when I wrote to you from Montmorenci; I shall always take a keen interest in the success of your enterprise, and if I had not taken a firm decision never to write again [...], I would consider it an honour and pleasure to contribute to it.²¹

Nor did subsequent visits by Tschärner, Fellenberg and Kirchberger, in the summer of 1762 and 1763, prompt any change of mind. What these pilgrimages to Môtiers did achieve, however, was to force Rousseau to formulate more clearly what he found so objectionable in the *Patriotic Society's* project of modern patriotism. The clearest statement in this respect can be found in a manuscript that Rousseau wrote for the *Patriotic Society* but never sent off, and which is now known under the title *Du bonheur publique*.²² The fundamental problem with the Bernese programme (as indeed with any programme that sought to reform modern society), Rousseau argued, was that it failed to realise just how radically modern society had alienated and continued to alienate man from himself, how it forced man to be in constant conflict with himself, and prevented him from becoming either fully a man or fully a citizen. In contrast to what the Bernese patriots seemed to believe, Rousseau insisted that modern society could not be reformed from within. Modern man was constantly being pulled in two opposite directions: the urge to follow his natural inclinations and desires, and the need to act according to the rules of the political society he happened to live in. Being half man and half citizen, he was neither; modern man found himself in a state of limbo. It was this radical self-alienation, which Rousseau held to constitute the true tragedy of modern existence.²³

²¹ CC, xii, p. 110-111: "Quant à vous, Monsieur, et à votre estimable société, je suis toujours à votre égard dans les mêmes dispositions où je vous écrivis de Montmorenci; je prendrai toujours un véritable intérêt au succès de votre entreprise; et si je n'avois formé l'inebranlable résolution de ne plus écrire, à moins que la furie de mes persécuteurs ne me force à reprendre enfin la plume pour ma défense, je me ferois un honneur et un plaisir d'y contribuer."

²² Section VI of the "Fragments Politiques" in *OC* III, p. 509-514.

²³ See also the 'Neuchâtel Manuscript' of the second *Discourse*, where Rousseau writes: "Rappelons-nous à quel point l'esprit de la société attire et change nos inclinations naturelles. L'homme sauvage et l'homme policé diffèrent tellement à cet égard que l'état qui fait le bonheur suprême de l'un réduiroit l'autre au désespoir." Reprinted in J.-J. Rousseau, *Diskurs über die Ungleichheit*, 2. Auflage, edited by Heinrich Meier, Paderborn, München, Wien und Zürich 1982, p. 399.

What causes human misery is the contradiction between our condition and our desires, between our duties and our inclinations, between nature and social institutions, between the man and the citizen. Make man united and you will make him as happy as he can be. Give him entirely to the state or leave him entirely to himself; but if you divide his heart, you will tear him to pieces. [...]. Make men consistent with themselves, being what they want to appear and appearing what they are. You will have placed the social law at the bottom of their hearts. Civil men by their nature and Citizens by their inclination, they will be united, they will be good, they will be happy, and their felicity will be the Republic's. For being nothing except through it, they will be nothing except for it. It will have everything they have, and will be everything they are.²⁴

If legislators wanted men to be happy, to live at one with themselves, and in harmony with nature, they had to choose between two radically different options. They either had to place men in a state where they could freely follow their natural inclinations and desires; or they had to transform men entirely by giving them a radically new, second nature, namely that of the citizen. Anything short of either a complete liberation from all social institutions, or a complete identification with the state, condemned men to a shadow-existence, where they could neither follow their natural inclinations nor fully accept the duties that came with being a member of political society.

Rousseau's short manuscript, *Du bonheur public*, was never published at the time, nor, it seems, was it circulated. The members of the *Patriotic Society* would thus have been unaware of its content. But they still had ample opportunity to familiarise themselves with Rousseau's profoundly sceptical

²⁴ "Ce qui fait la misère humaine est la contradiction qui se trouve entre notre état et nos desirs, entre nos devoirs et nos penchans, entre la nature et les institutions sociales, entre l'homme et le citoyen; rendez l'homme un vous le rendez heureux autant qu'il peut l'être. Donnez-le tout entier à l'état ou laissez-le tout entier à lui-même, mais si vous partagez son coeur vous le déchirez [...]. Rendez les h[ommes] conséquens à eux-mêmes étant ce qu'ils veulent paroître et paroissant ce qu'ils sont. Vous aurez mis la loi sociale au fond des coeurs, hommes civils par leurs nature et Citoyens par leurs inclinations, ils seront uns, ils seront bons, ils seront heureux, et leur félicité sera celle de la République; car n'étant rien que par elle ils ne seront rien que pour elle, elle aura tout ce qu'ils ont et sera tout ce qu'ils sont." *OC* III, p. 510-511. The English translation is taken from *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, edited by Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, vol. 4, Hanover and London, p. 41.

account of modern human existence.²⁵ We can see this from Bondeli's report of Rousseau's meeting with Kirchberger, where he directly attacked the idea, so dear to the *Patriotic Society*, that aesthetic education could serve as a tool for the transformation of men into members of a moral polity.

Let's have a look at your ideas of morality, Mr. Kirchberger, what are its first principles? "The beautiful, the good, pleasure attached to virtue." O, how mistaken you are! Note that the scoundrel feels pleasure in doing evil. This morality resembles the earth placed on top of an elephant which stands on top of a tortoise; what does the tortoise stand on? "On religion, Monsieur." Correct, without doubt on religion, and I have thank God made this experience during the course of my latest mishaps.²⁶

Rousseau reiterated his critique of pleasure as the basis of a system of ethics in a letter to Kirchberger from March 1763 where he openly called on the Bernese to abandon their programme of moral legislation. Given the insurmountable difficulties that any such project had to face, Rousseau argued, Kirchberger should put aside his literary ambitions and concentrate instead on his domestic life, on becoming a good housefather, a loyal husband, a

²⁵ The Bernese were, of course, familiar with the opening passages of the *Émile*, where Rousseau gives an account of the 'misery of man' that is strikingly similar to that of the *Bonheur publique*; see *OC*, IV, p. 249-250: "L'homme naturel est tout pour lui: il est l'unité numérique, l'entier absolu qui n'a de rapport qu'à lui-même ou à son semblable. L'homme civil n'est qu'une unite fractionnaire qui tient au dénominateur, et donc la valeur est dans son rapport avec l'entier, qui est le corps social. Les bonnes institutions sociales, sont celles qui savent le mieux dénaturer l'homme, lui ôter son existence absolue pour lui en donner une relative, et transporter le *moi* dans l'unité commune; en sorte que chaque particulier ne se croye plus un, mais partie de l'unité, et ne soit plus sensible que dans le tout. [...] Celui qui dans l'ordre civil veut conserver la primauté des sentimens de la nature, ne sait ce qu'il veut. Toujours en contradiction avec lui-même, toujours flotant entre ses penchans et ses devoirs il ne sera jamais ni homme ni citoyen; il ne sera bon ni pour lui ni pour les autres. Ce sera un de ces hommes de nos jours; un François, un Anglois, un Bourgeois; ce ne sera rien."

²⁶ E. Bodemann, *Julie Bondeli*, p. 249: "Voyons un peu ce que c'est votre morale, Mr. Kirchberger, quels en sont les premiers principes? "Le beau, le bon, le plaisir attaché à la vertu." Oh comme vous vous trompez! Sachez que le scélérat a aussi du plaisir à mal faire. Cette morale-là est la terre sur l'éléphant, l'éléphant sur la tortue, et la tortue sur quoi est-elle appuyée? "Sur la religion, Monsieur." Oui, sans doute sur la religion, et j'en ai Dieu merci fait l'expérience dans mes derniers malheurs."

dedicated father, and a sincere Christian. Only by committing himself fully and completely to the ethos of domesticity and Christianity could he prepare himself for a possible future career as a Bernese magistrate.²⁷

Rousseau had made a similar point in his first letter to Tschärner of April 1762. Rather than opting for far-reaching moral reform, and trying to bring the Bernese subjects into the sphere of a moral polity, the Bernese patriots should focus their energy on preserving current popular opinions, even if this meant protecting superstitious beliefs. His answer to the second prize question which asked, *whether there existed forms of superstition that should be respected and which a good citizen should abstain from criticising in public*, would thus be a clear yes:

If I had to discuss your second question, I shall not hide it from you, I would declare myself, together with Plato, in favour [of preserving superstition]; which is certainly not what you had intended when proposing the question. Follow the example of the French Academy, which well avoids asking questions where she might be afraid of receiving a truthful answer.²⁸

The reason, Rousseau claimed, why superstition, customs and other deeply engrained forms of belief, should best be left untouched would become clear to the Bernese when they saw the dangers resulting from having moral reforms implemented by mere humans. Unless a project as important as that

²⁷ Letter of 17 March 1763, *CC*, xv, p. 285-288: "Mais ne vous mettez pas dans l'esprit d'en chercher au loin, ni dans la célébrité, ni dans les plaisirs, ni dans la fortune. La véritable félicité ne se trouve point au dehors; il faut que votre maison vous suffise, ou jamais rien ne vous suffira. Conséquent à ce principe, je crois qu'il n'est pas temps, quant à présent, de songer à l'exécution du projet dont vous m'avez parlé. La société conjugale doit vous occuper bien davantage que la société helvétique: avant de publier les annales de celle-ci, mettez vous en état d'en fournir le plus bel article. [...] Mon cher Kirchberger, je crois voir germer beaucoup de mérite parmi la jeunesse suisse; mais la maladie universelle vous gagne tous. Ce mérite cherche à se faire imprimer; et je crains que, de cette manie dans les gens de votre état, il ne résulte un jour à la tête de vos républiques plus de petits auteurs que de grands hommes. Il n'appartient pas à tous d'être des Haller."

²⁸ *CC*, x, p. 227: "Si j'avois à traiter vôtre seconde question, je ne vous dissimulerais pas, que je me déclarerais avec Platon pour l'affirmative; ce qui sûrement n'étoit pas vôtre intention en la proposant. Faites comme l'Académie Française, qui se garde bien [de] mettre en problème les questions sur lesquelles elle a peur qu'on ne dise la vérité."

of moral legislation was placed firmly under the control of a superbly virtuous and truly wise being, like Socrates, Solon, Lycurgus or a Deity, the only likely outcome was the replacement of one form of superstition by another, generating social upheaval and widespread misery in the process.

2.3. Rousseau's defence of aristocratic Berne

Rousseau's profoundly sceptical conclusion, that local customs and superstitious forms of belief were a better safeguard for liberty than reason, is somewhat mitigated when read within the Swiss context. In the letters to his Swiss admirers, Rousseau repeatedly argued that of all people the Swiss in particular should be careful not to initiate any hasty moral reforms. The reason for this, as he put it, was not because the Swiss republics already corresponded to the ideal polity described in the *Social Contract*, but because they, and Berne in particular, had managed so far to maintain a much clearer distinction between 'man' and 'citizen' than any other state in Europe. The peasants lived in surroundings that were still predominantly determined by the structure of the *oikos*, while the citizens were fully incorporated into the political life of the city.

We know that Rousseau was an enthusiastic reader of Hirzel's *Socrate Rustique* and that he praised the account of Kleinjogg's household as a good description of the rural way of life that could still be found in many parts of the Swiss and Bernese territory.²⁹ In the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, and especially his

²⁹ In a letter to Michel Huber, the translator of the Zurich poet Samuel Gessner (24 December 1761) Rousseau calls Kleinjogg "un paysan plus sage, plus vertueux, plus sensé que tous les Philosophes de l'univers". *CC*, ix, p. 350. See Leonhard Usteri's letter to Rousseau of 20 November 1761 (*CC*, ix, p. 254-264) where he praises Kleinjogg's work ethics and sense of responsibility as a model for thinking about how to harmonise the inequality of the household with the egalitarianism of the city: "[...] cela feroit un bon citoien dans le sisteme de l'Egalité! Je vai Vous le faire paroître en Pere de famille. Celon l'idée des devoirs d'un père de famille, personne ne lui enverra le sort de l'être: Il n'a d'autre pouvoir sur les membres de la famille, que celui de les engager a suivre son Exemple, & lui-même doit être le premier a travailler. Il faut qu'il continue avec les autres jusqu'à mettre la fin a l'œuvre; sans quoi dit-il, tout le travail seroit perdu". Usteri as well as many other reformers from Zurich clearly saw Kleinjogg as an answer to the problems Rous-

famous series of letters to the Maréchal de Luxembourg from January 1763, where he summarised his own impressions of Swiss society, Rousseau described the Jura as a sort of rural *arcadia*, where farmers lived a Hesiodic existence of autarchy and innocent sociality. Because of the harsh climate, the absence of large cities, the deeply entrenched local customs, and the fact of constantly having to fight for their subsistence, the life of the Swiss peasants had remained largely untouched by the social and economic pressures which had transformed the rest of European society.³⁰

seau had raised in the opening paragraphs of his essay on *Economie politique*. See also Usteri's letter to V.B. Tschärner of 8 May 1762: "Vous apprendrez peut-être avec plaisir que Kleinjogg [sic] est fort applaudi par Jean-Jacques Rousseau; je lui ai passé quelques dialogues pour lui faire connaître les maximes qu'il observe dans le gouvernement de sa famille, cette petite république, et dans l'éducation de ses enfants, sur quoi il a trouvé que Kleinjogg [sic] était plus sage, plus vertueux et plus sensé que tous les philosophes de l'univers. Ce mémoire ne tardera pas à paraître en français." Cited in R. Hamel, *Rousseau in der Schweiz*, Rostock 1881, p. 5.

³⁰ Letter to Charles-François-Frédéric de Monmorency-Luxembourg, maréchal-duc de Luxembourg (20 January 1763) *CC*, xv, p. 48-69. See, p. 49-50: "[Les Suisses] ont des manières de vivre qui ne changent point parce qu'elles tiennent pour ainsi dire au sol, au climat, aux besoins divers, et qu'en cela les habitans sont toujours forcés de se conformer à ce que la nature des lieux leur prescrit. Telle est, par exemple, la distribution de leurs habitations, beaucoup moins réunis en villes et en bourgs qu'en France, mais éparées et dispersées ça et là sur le terrain avec beaucoup plus d'égalité. [...] Ce mélange bizarre a je ne sais pas quoi d'animé, de vivant, qui respire la liberté, le bien-être, et qui fera toujours du pays où il se trouve un spectacle unique en son genre, mais seulement fait pour des yeux qui sachent voir. Cette égale distribution vient du grand nombre de petits états qui divise les capitales, de la rudesse du pays, qui rend les transports difficiles, et de la nature des productions, qui, consistant pour la plupart en pâturages, exige que la consommation s'en fasse sur les lieux mêmes, et tient les hommes aussi dispersés que les bestiaux. Voilà le plus grand avantage de la Suisse, avantage que les habitans regardent peut-être comme un malheur, mais qu'elle tient d'elle seule, que rien ne peut lui ôter, qui malgré eux, contient ou retarde le progrès du luxe et des mauvaises mœurs, et qui réparera toujours à la longue l'étonnante déperdition d'hommes qu'elle fait dans les pays étrangers." See the excellent article by Judith Shklar, "Rousseau's Two Models: Sparta and the Age of Gold", in *Political Science Quarterly*, 81, No. 1 (March 1966), p. 25-51; also, Chapter One: "Two journeys to Utopia" of Shklar's *Men & Citizens. A study of Rousseau's social theory*, Cambridge 1985.

It was not just the peasants who had remained true to themselves; the same could also be said of those who participated in political life. For while the Bernese peasants lived according to the precepts of nature, the young patricians in turn were real 'citizens'; they lived entirely for the state; they identified with it and could think of themselves in no other terms than those of citizen. According to Rousseau, this applied especially to the members of the strictly regimented cast of the Patricat. In his *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse* (1764-1765), where he repeatedly alluded to the exemplary character of Bernese politics, Rousseau praised the Patriciate as a single, unified body that displayed all the characteristics of a true *civitas*:

The [political nobility], united in one single body and not in its distinct parts constitutes such an essential part of the political body that it cannot exist without the latter nor can the latter exist without it, so that all its members, who by birth share the same titles, privileges and authority, become one single entity called Patriciate.³¹

Rousseau repeated his praise of Berne's political institutions at great length in his *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, this time specifically referring to the *Äusserer Stand* as an institute of political education that any virtue-loving state should seek to imitate:

In Berne, they have a remarkable exercise that the young patricians go through when they leave school. They call it the *External state*, and it reproduces, on a small scale, all the component parts of the government of the republic: the senate, the avoyers, the officials, clerks, speakers; law-suits, judgements, ceremonies. The miniature state even has its own tiny territory and its own revenues; it draws its powers from, and is protected by, the sovereign, and so serves as an incubator for the statesmen who one day – performing functions that they first performed in a game – will administer the republic's affairs.³²

³¹ "Projet de Constitution pour la Corse", *OC* III, p. 909: "La [noblesse politique], unie dans un seul corps, non dans ses membres, forme une partie tellement essentielle du corps politique qu'elle ne peut subsister sans lui ni lui sans elle et tous les individus qui la composent, égaux par leur naissance en titres, en privilèges, en autorité, se confondent sous un nom commun de patriciens."

³² "Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne", *OC* III, p. 969: "A Berne, il y a un exercice bien singulier pour les jeunes Patriciens qui sortent du college. C'est ce qu'on appelle l'*Etat extérieur*. C'est une copie en petit de tout ce qui compose le gouvernement de la République: un Sénat, des Avoyers, des Officiers, des Huisiers, des Orateurs, des causes, des jugemens, des solemnités. L'Etat extérieur a même un petit gouvernement de quelques rentes, et cette institution, autorisée et

Rousseau was equally impressed by Berne's system of public finance, the absence of direct taxation, and the fact that public works, such as the building of roads, were executed by *corvée* and thought of as part of a citizen's duty to labour physically for the republic. Rousseau was perhaps most enthusiastic about the fact that magistrates and officers, as in the Roman republic, were paid in natural goods, rather than money.

What of the expenses incurred by the state – are they not unavoidable? Agreed again; defray them any way you like, except with money. In Switzerland, one sees, even today, officials and magistrates and other public employees being paid in kind, that is, in the form of tithes, wine, wood, privileges, both utilitarian and honorific. All public services in that country are discharged by conscripted labour, and the state has little or no occasion to pay anything in money. [...] The method of payment I have just spoken of is not without disadvantages. It entails waste and extravagance. It is clumsy to administer. It is, above all, distasteful to administrators, who have a hard time making a good thing out of it. All that is true. But how small all this is in comparison to the multiplicity of evils it prevents.³³

It was this latter device in particular, Rousseau argued, that provided a highly effective obstacle to the ever-growing intrusion of the economy into the sphere of politics and which guaranteed that, in the case of Berne, citizens could remain real citizens while men could remain real men. If happiness could be found only where politics was separated from the economy, the *polis* from the *oikos*, Berne and other Swiss cantons were clearly in a highly

protégée par le souverain, est la pépinière des hommes d'Etat qui dirigeront un jour les affaires publiques dans les mêmes emplois qu'ils n'exercent d'abord que par jeu." For an eighteenth-century account of the *Äusserer Stand*, see Daniel Tscharnner essay of 1737, "Eine Beschreibung des Aeusseren Standes aus dem Jahre 1737" edited by Hans Strahm, in *Berner Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Heimatkunde*, 1958, Heft 2, p. 50-68.

³³ "Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne", *OC* III, p. 1006: "Les dépenses publiques sont inévitables; j'en conviens encore. Faites-les avec toute autre chose qu'avec de l'argent. De nos jours encore on voit en Suisse les officiers, magistrats et autres stipendiaires publics payés avec des denrées. Ils ont des dixmes, du vin, du bois, des droits utiles, honorifiques. Tout le service public se fait par corvées, l'Etat ne paye presque rien en argent. [...] Cette manière de paiement n'est pas sans inconvénient; il y a de la perte, du gaspillage: l'administration de ces sortes de biens est plus embarrassante; elle déplaît surtout à ceux qui en sont chargés, parcequ'ils y trouvent moins à faire de leur compte. Tout cela est vrai; mais que le mal est petit en comparaison de la foule de maux qu'il sauve!"

advantageous position; a position, he claimed, that should be maintained at all cost, not just for Switzerland's sake, but also for the sake of the rest of mankind to whom it should serve as a shining example. It was in this sense that Rousseau could write to Hirzel (11 November 1764) that: "That country is happy where Klyioggs [sic] cultivate the soil and where Hirzels cultivate the arts! Abundance reigns and the virtues are being honoured."³⁴

3. *The Bernese response to Rousseau*

Rousseau found the Bernese patriots guilty on three counts. First, they overlooked the fact that reason was not all that determined the will. Secondly, they were misguided in their belief that the principle of pleasure could serve as a proper basis for morality. Thirdly, they failed to realise that the present Bernese regime, despite its numerous shortcomings, granted both its citizens and rural population a morally more rewarding existence than any other state; any reform, however well-intentioned, was more likely to cause a deterioration of the current situation rather than an improvement.

As far as the first and the third of Rousseau's charges are concerned, we can merely speculate about the Bernese reaction. The fact that neither of them is ever discussed in any of their correspondence suggests that they were held to be minor points, to be put down due to mere misunderstanding. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Bernese idea of modern patriotism included a strong anti-rationalist stance. It was built on the premise that man was a passionate creature and that man's ethical nature could be secured through his capacity for moral sentiments, more than through his faculty of reason.

A similar misunderstanding, it could be argued, lay behind Rousseau's idealisation of Berne as a highly successful form of decidedly pre-modern politics, where the only threat seemed to come, not from abroad, but from the reformist zeal of its own enthusiastic youth. From the reformists' point of view, Rousseau's image of Berne, however flattering it might appear, simply failed to take into account the republic's already *de facto* entanglement with

³⁴ CC, xxii, p. 46: "Heureux le pays où des Klyioggs cultivent la terre, et où des Hirzels cultivent les lettres! L'abondance y règne et les vertus y en sont en honneur."

the European world of commerce. According to people like Fellenberg or Tschärner, the question that needed to be answered was not how to best sever the links that tied Berne to the European economy, but how to restructure Berne's continuing integration into the modern world in such a way that allowed the republic to maintain a high level of political independence *and* secure long-term economic prosperity. For the Bernese it must have seemed remarkable that Rousseau completely failed to recognise that the very arrangements which lent Berne's public economy its pre-modern feel, the absence of direct taxation, the public welfare programmes, the economic independence of the magistracy, depended to a considerable degree on the revenue derived from the republic's highly modern foreign-investment schemes. Rousseau never mentioned Berne's role as a major investor in foreign public debts; nor did he ever comment on the fact that Berne's investments had effectively rendered it hostage to the will and fancy of its various debtors. From the *Patriotic Society's* point of view it must have seemed ironic that Rousseau, by clinging to an image of a Berne still untouched by the currents of modernisation, had adopted a position that had more in common with that of his Bernese persecutors than that of his friends.

3.1. *Rousseau and moral sentiment*

Much more important to the Bernese was Rousseau's dismissal of pleasure as the basis of morality. The members of the *Patriotic Society* themselves consistently maintained that a simplistic epicurean theory of pleasure was not a sufficient ground for a comprehensive system of ethics. This argument had also been put forward by J.G. Sulzer in the opening pages of his *Recherches sur l'origine des sentimens agréables et désagréables* of 1751, where he turned explicitly against the "fundamental maxim of the moral philosophy of modern Epicureans" which stated "one should try to procure oneself as much pleasure known to man as possible and to avoid any pain."³⁵ According to Sulzer, the modern Epicurean principle was un-

³⁵ J.G. Sulzer, *Recherches sur l'origine des sentimens agréables et désagréables*, first published in *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences et des belles lettres de Berlin, avec les mémoires*. Part one and two appeared in 1751, part three and four in

tenable, first because various forms of pleasure often excluded one another, and, secondly, because experience showed that pleasure could degenerate into pain and sorrow. If men were capable of experiencing only one form of pleasure, as would be the case if their sensory faculties were reduced to that of taste, the modern Epicureans' maxim would be correct. Under these circumstances, men who wished to become happy should maximise the pleasure they gained from eating and drinking. Because men possessed more than one sensory faculty, the path leading to happiness was infinitely more complicated and entailed establishing a clear hierarchy amongst the various forms of pleasures.³⁶ This in turn, Sulzer argued, required a detailed knowledge of the working of the human psyche and the origin of pleasurable and painful sentiments. For his enquiry Sulzer relied heavily on the work of earlier Christian theorists of moral sentiment, notably Hutcheson and Levesque de Pouilly, but also Baumgarten and the later work of Wolff. Sulzer himself was a key member of the *Patriotic Society*, his work was widely circulated within Bernese patriotic circles, and many of the society's members relied directly on it in their discussions of the moral theory underlying the idea of modern patriotism.³⁷ To most of them Rousseau's

1752. Sulzer developed his ideas in the *Essai sur le bonheur des êtres intelligens*, which was published in the same series in 1754.

³⁶ "Malgré la solidité apparente de cette Maxime, il n'est pas fort difficile de voir, qu'elle est très défectueuse. Il ne faut que peu d'expérience, jointe à un jugement solide, pour s'apercevoir de deux choses, qui la rendent fort suspecte. 1°. Il arrive fort souvent, que les plaisirs s'entre-choquent. Nous avons plusieurs facultés, qui nous rendent susceptibles de plusieurs espèces de plaisirs. ... Que faut-il faire alors? Auquel dois-je donner la préférence? Au plus grand? Mais le moyen de calculer les plaisirs? [...] 2°. Nous apprenons encore de l'expérience, qu'un plaisir goûté peut dégénérer en peine & en chagrin, ou pour parler plus juste, un plaisir goûté peut devenir la cause d'un chagrin beaucoup plus grand, que n'a été le plaisir dans son genre. Cela vient de la diversité de nos facultés. Si nous n'étions susceptibles que d'une seule espèce de plaisir, par ex. si de toutes nos facultés il ne nous restait que le sens du Goût, la maxime seroit très solide. Pour devenir heureux alors, il ne faudroit que chercher par tous les moyens possibles de flatter notre goût. [...] Je me flatte que ce peut de remarques suffira pour faire voir, que la Maxime Epicurienne ne peut servir en aucune manière à nous conduire au grand but de la Nature, & qu'il faut des recherches bien plus difficiles, pour parvenir à quelque chose de solide & assuré en fait de Morale." (p. 59)

³⁷ The strong influence of Sulzer's theory can be traced in a number of Bernese works

critique of the principle of pleasure thus touched at the very heart of their programme of modern patriotism. The importance which they attributed to Rousseau's doubts is reflected in the intensity with which the Bernese, from late 1762 onwards, tried to improve their understanding of current discussions of moral sentiment. Once again, the correspondence of Julie Bondeli proves revelatory.

On 3 April 1763 Bondeli writes to Zimmermann that "Everybody talks about 'moral sense', and everyone gives it a different name; Rousseau defines it by calling everything 'instinct', and sees in his instinct what theologians call conscience; this is also what is commonly used for the establishing of moral obligation."³⁸ Already in 1761, in a short essay entitled *Sur le sens moral et l'esprit d'observation*, Bondeli had argued for the need to establish a more accurate definition of 'moral sense' than the one given by Hutcheson, which she taxed as overly metaphysical.³⁹ While it remains unclear how Bondeli and her friends defined 'moral sense', in her letter to Usteri of July 1763 Bondeli provides some important clues as to which authors the Bernese patriots thought were especially useful for their undertaking. They are, firstly, Sulzer, secondly Henry Home, Lord Kames and thirdly, Adam Smith: "Our men of letters who know the outline and certain parts of Mr. Sulzer's Dictionary prefer it to Mylord Home's 'Elements of criticism', which they are reading at present. This Scotsman starts from the same principles as Sulzer. One is also very enthusiastic about Smith's 'Theory of moral sentiments.'"⁴⁰ Bondeli herself expressed a particular lik-

on moral theory. See, for example, the *Essai Philosophique et Moral sur le Plaisir* (Neuchâtel 1778), written by Elie Bertrand, former minister of the Bernese French church, member of the *Economic Society* and close associate of V. B. Tscharnier.

³⁸ Bondeli, p. 256: "Tout le monde parle de "sens moral" et chacun lui donne un autre nom; Rousseau le définit en l'appellant tout uniquement "instinct", et il voit dans son instinct ce que les théologiens appellent conscience; c'est aussi la chose qu'on cherche pour y appuyer l'obligation morale."

³⁹ The essay is reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 201-206.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Letter to Usteri, 19 July 1763, p. 327: "Je ne sais si c'est prevention ou justice, mais nos gens de lettres qui connaissent le plan et quelques morceaux du dictionnaire de Mr. Sulzer le préfèrent aux "Elements of criticism" de Mylord Home, qu'ils lisent à present. Cet écossais part des mêmes principes que Mr. Sulzer. On est aussi tout enthousiasmé de le "theory of moral sentiments" par Smith."

ing for the works of Kames. In another letter to Usteri, this time of August 1763, she writes:

I have presently lying on my table the works of Mylord Home in English, 'Essays on the principles of morality and natural religion', published in 1758 and which serves as the basis of his 'Elements of criticism'. I haven't yet read anything from the first one because I received it only yesterday; I have read about one hundred pages from the second one and I am very pleased with it, especially with the introduction and the first chapters; however, I have been told that Mylord quickly loses the string of his metaphysics and that he gradually becomes a Hutchesonian in his rather unphilosophical attempt to divide his instincts into thousand sub-categories. Still, the beginning is admirable; had he continued the same way, he could pride himself of having produced the best theory of the passions so far [...].⁴¹

Finally, in October after having finished her reading of Kames, she was able to report that: "I have finished reading Mylord Home and am more pleased than I can tell. He is a perfect observer, no one ever followed nature better

⁴¹ Ibid., Letter to Usteri, 17 August 1763, p. 327-328: "J'ai actuellement sur ma table les ouvrages de Mylord Home, en anglais, 'Essays on the principals of morality and natural religion', publié l'an 1758 et servants de base aux 'Elements of criticism'. Je n'ai encore rien lu dans le premier, parceque je ne l'ai que depuis hier; dans l'autre j'ai lu une centaine de pages, dont je suis très contente, surtout de l'introduction et des premiers chapitres, mais on dit que Mylord perd bientôt le fil de sa métaphysique et qu'en avançant dans son ouvrage il devient Hutchesonian par la division et la formation peu philosophique d'une fourmilière d'instincts. Toujours le commencement est il admirable, s'il eut continué sur le même ton il aurait pu se vanter d'avoir fait la meilleure des théories sur les passions". See also her letter to Zimmermann from 27 August 1763, *ibid.*, p. 265: "In etlichen Stücken bin ich mit Mylord Home übereins gekommen, in andern hat mich der schottische Weltweise sehr weit übertroffen. Er unterscheidet die Leidenschaften von den Affecten durch zwei wichtige Merkmale, das erste, dass die Leidenschaften thätig, die Affecte unthätig sind; das andere, dass die Leidenschaften mit Begierden begleitet sind, die Affecte aber keine haben; ferner unterscheidet er die Wünsche von den Begierden, die erstern sind die höchste Thätigkeit der Affecte." In another letter to Zimmermann from September 1763, Bondeli repeats her praise of Kames', but this time of his *Essays on the principles of morality and natural religion*: "Je ne veux pas vous dire du bien de Mylord Home, je voudrais que vous le luissiez vous-mêmes, faites cela sur ma parole et débutez par ses 'Essays on the principles of morality and natural religion'. Mr. Fellenberg peut vous donner l'un et l'autre, vous verrez un homme (dans ses 'Elements of criticism') assez sage pour tout observer et pour ne point faire de système." Ibid., Letter to Zimmermann, 29 September 1763, p. 266-267.

than he did; he only observes and [then] constructs nothing or little."⁴² The same enthusiastic verdict was given of Smith's *Theory of moral sentiments*: "I have almost finished the 'Theory of moral sentiments by Smith'; this is an excellent book, full of interesting details; his chapter on the different systems of moral philosophy is the best I have ever read on this issue."⁴³

Perhaps the most interesting comment can be found in the letter to Usteri of October 1763, where Bondeli writes that Kames "would clearly be the man for Rousseau, I wish he could read his work." The reason why this comment is interesting is that it clearly indicates that a considerable part of the Bernese reformers still, and despite Rousseau's repeated criticism, believed that there was no serious incompatibility between their own position and that of Rousseau: the difference between the two sides could be overcome if their own understanding of the theory of moral sentiments was developed in a direction suggested by both Kames and Smith.

3.2. *Iselin's critique of the Bernese Rousseauists*

In contrast to Bondeli and her friends, Iselin insisted that Rousseau's position remained strictly incompatible with the programme of the *Patriotic Society*. From the very beginning, Iselin took a keen interest in all the *Patriotic Society's* dealings with Rousseau, and he carefully studied the latter's reply of April 1762. Fellenberg must have forwarded it to him soon after its arrival, for already in May Iselin requested that Fellenberg send the letter once again for closer inspection.⁴⁴ Iselin's verdict was highly critical and dampened Fellenberg's previous enthusiasm. We can see this from a

⁴² Ibid., Letter to Usteri, 4 October 1763, p. 329: "J'ai fini Mylord Home et j'en suis contente au delà de l'expression. Observateur parfait, jamais on n'a mieux suivi la nature il observe et ne batit point ou peu."

⁴³ Ibid., Letter to Zimmermann, 29 November 1763, p. 271: "J'ai presque achevé 'theorie of moral sentiments by Smith'; c'est un excellent livre rempli de details intéressants; la partie sur les différens systèmes de philosophie morale est tout ce que j'ai vu sur ce chapitre de mieux en ma vie."

⁴⁴ See Iselin's letter to Fellenberg from 31 May 1762: "Vous m'obligéris si vous vouliez me faire parvenir encore une fois la Lettre de Rousseau, que je vous renverrai d'abord." Berner Burgerbibliothek, Fellenberg-Archiv, Schachtel 153.

comment that Bondeli made to Zimmermann in November 1763 where she explains why the recent praise by two passing Rousseauistes from Zurich had not been given unanimous acclaim: "Back in Zurich, Mr. Wegelin said that his friendship with and high esteem for Rousseau did not win him any friends in Berne. He is mistaken; what happened was that he and Mr S[chulthess] were imprudent enough not to praise Mr. Iselin in front of Mr. Fellenberg, and this is why everything went wrong and will always go wrong if one forgets this precaution. What [...] made him change his view of Rousseau all of a sudden last year was a letter he had received from Mr. J[selin]."⁴⁵ Fellenberg was not the only one to receive a warning letter from Iselin. In his reply to a letter from V. B. Tschärner, where the latter had given an enthusiastic account of his visit to Rousseau in Môtiers in August 1762, Iselin declared: "to be frank, I think somewhat differently about his case than most of our friends." Whilst agreeing that there was nothing more worthy of "philosophical attention than this man", and that Rousseau was admittedly "very sincere in his claim that he only wanted the good", Iselin insisted that Rousseau should be approached only with the utmost caution. "I consider him [...] to be a man who destroys on the one hand what he builds with the other."⁴⁶ In this respect at least, Iselin informed Tschärner, Rousseau had not changed since their first encounter in 1752.⁴⁷ In his *His-*

⁴⁵ Letter to Zimmermann, 29 November 1763, in *Bondeli*, p. 271-272: "Mr. Wäguelin, de retour à Zurich, y a dit, que l'estime et l'amitié, qu'il avait énoncé pour Rousseau, ne lui avait pas fait des amis à Berne. Il se trompe, ce n'est pas cela, mais lui et Mr. S. eurent l'imprudence de ne pas faire le panégyrique de Mr. Iselin à Mr. Fellenberg, et voilà comme tout a manqué et comme tout manquera à jamais vis-à-vis de lui faute de cette précaution. Ce [...] qui lui fit changer l'année passée si subitement de ton sur le conte de Rousseau [était] une lettre, qu'il reçut dans le même temps de Mr. I."

⁴⁶ Letter to Tschärner, 27 August 1762, *CC*, xiii, p. 257-258: "Pour parler franchement je pense un peu autrement sur son chapitre que le pluspart de nos amis. Il ne me paroit pas si grand. Je crois qu'il veut le bien très sincèrement, & je sens qu'il n'y a personne au monde qui le dépeigne avec autant de force & de charme lorsqu'il attrappe le vrai. Mais son imagination paroit encore se plaire infiniment plus à orner & à proner le faux & quelque fois l'absurde. Je le regarde par conséquent comme un homme qui détruit d'un coté tout ce qu'il bâtit de l'autre."

⁴⁷ "Je l'ai connu personnellement il y a dix ans & je l'ai déjà envisagé de cette manière, quoique alors il n'aie été qu'au commencement de sa carrière enthousiastique." *Ibid.*, p. 256.

tory of Mankind Iselin was even more explicit. He reiterated his claim that it was false to believe that a Kamesean or Smithian moral theory could bridge the gap between Rousseau and the *Patriotic Society*. It was equally false to believe that Rousseau would approve of the works of either Smith or Kames. According to Iselin, modern moral philosophers could be divided into two separate camps. In the first camp were Kames, Smith, Hutcheson, Levesque de Pouilly, Mendelssohn, and Sulzer. Rousseau, by omission, was in the other camp.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See *Ueber die Geschichte der Menschheit*, Frankfurt und Leipzig 1764, vol. 1, p. 24, note*: "Die Natur der menschlichen Empfindungen ist in unsern Zeiten durch verschiedene grosse Philosophen in ein ausnehmendes Licht gesetzt worden. Herr Sulzer hat die erste Quelle und die verborgensten Triebkräfte davon in seiner Theorie aufgeschlossen. Herr Moses [Mendelssohn] hat insbesondere die sinnlichen Empfindungen mit einem nicht geringen Tiefsinne erklärt. Das vortreffliche Werkgen des Herrn von Pouilly, obwohl älter als dieser beyder Schriften scheint geschrieben um die Sätze derselben begreiflicher und verständlicher zu machen. Herrn Schmits [sic] Theorie der sittlichen Empfindungen entdeckt nicht weniger viele Geheimnisse des menschlichen Herzens, obwohl sie durch die Beobachtungen der drey erstern viel aufgeheitert und so gar verbessert werden könnte. Ein gleiches kan ungefehr von Herrn Hutchesons Werkgen über das moralische Gefühl und über die Leidenschaften gesagt werden, dem es aber gar zu sehr an deutlichen Begriffen fehlet. Hieher können auch Mylord Homs [sic] Anfangsgründe der Kritik gerechnet werden. Sie sind eines der schönsten Werke in ihrer Art. Das erste, das neunte und das zehnte Hauptstück derselben verdienen mit Herrn Sulzer Theorie verglichen zu werden. Herr Home war den Grundsätzen des Herrn Sulzer sehr nahe. Seine Arbeit ist eine Art von Aesthetick. Diese Wissenschaft scheint also in Gross-britanien und in Deutschland erfunden worden zu seyn. Doch in dem ersteren dieser Reiche etwas späther, wenn man nicht einige Gedanken des Baco hierher rechnen will welche uns veranlassen könnten die Ehre der ersten Erfindung Engelland zuzuschreiben. Indessen ist es sehr wahrscheinlich, dass Herr Baumgarten diese Entdeckung in dem Reiche der Wissenschaften seiner eigenen Erfindsamkeit zu verdanken habe." A study of Rousseau's place within mid eighteenth-century European debates on moral sentiment would be much needed. See Timothy O'Hagan's detailed study, *Rousseau*, London 1999. For a recent comparison between Rousseau and Smith, see Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith. A Genealogy of Economic Science*, Cambridge 2003; Rousseau's indebtedness to Mandeville is brilliantly discussed in E.J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable. Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society*, Cambridge 1994, p. 105f.

3.3. *Two ways to refute utilitarianism*

It is thus important to realise what separated Iselin from Rousseau and what they had in common. What Iselin shared with Rousseau was above all his highly critical view of modern society. Both believed that modern society was profoundly unjust and that it favoured almost exclusively the rich and the powerful. They both deplored the importance that economic interests had acquired within the field of politics, that most modern princes were more concerned with enriching themselves than with the community as a whole, and that modern politics tried to impose social cohesion by means of a brutish and ignorant nationalist frenzy, which set one nation against the other, rather than by generating a genuine patriotic sentiment. They both shared a deep love for republican values, the rule of law, and religious toleration, and they both maintained that an elected aristocracy presented, at least in theory, the best chance for modern men to overcome some of the more disruptive tensions that marked a society of unequals.

Both hated what appeared to be a purely utility-driven modernity, and both desperately wanted to replace it with something else. They disagreed about the extent of the critique of modernity: how deep one was allowed to dig, without running the risk of undermining the possibility of a positive alternative to modern utilitarianism. In the *Patriotic Dreams of a Friend of Mankind* we have seen how Iselin carefully stripped modern man of his multiple, and gradually acquired, layers of corruption, how he systematically undermined one argument after another by which the rich and powerful had come to defend the claim that the modern condition was a necessary and justifiable result of human nature, and that men had a natural interest in becoming subject to the yoke of political rule. The reason why none of the arguments put forward by aristocrats, rentiers, manufacturers, absolutist rulers and all the others who openly profited from the present condition possessed any validity was because they relied in one way or another on a false premise – a premise which said that men were by nature weak, incapable of surviving on their own and unable to solve their conflicts without the help of a third party which both defined and imposed the rules for peaceful social life. One of the central points of Iselin's strategy in the *Patriotic Dreams* was thus to refute the premise on which, he claimed, the entirety of modern political theory had come to rest. According to Iselin, the idea

of man's natural weakness and selfishness, instead of being grounded in human nature, was the invention of thinkers dedicated to a sceptical philosophical tradition who had been on the payroll of ambitious princes. What they created was not a theory of politics but of *Afterpolitik* – the politics of corruption. By cutting through the layers which had disfigured modern man Iselin claimed that he found a very different image of natural man, one which showed him in a much more positive light. Rather than being weak, fearful and selfish, true natural man was strong and healthy. Most importantly, natural man acted not just on the basis of self-seeking motives but also from a genuine feeling of love for other members of his species. He had a natural inclination to enter society, not for reasons of utility, but because he felt naturally attracted to other humans and could partake in the pleasure experienced by others. For Iselin it was this capacity to freely associate with others on the basis of love which provided the yardstick with which the failings of modern society could be measured. At the same time, it supplied a theoretical foundation on which a decidedly non-utilitarian theory of politics could be established. Despite an earlier flirtation with the idea that mankind could be saved by a return to a more primitive, pre-monetary positive community, Iselin insisted in the *Patriotic Dreams* that no such return was possible. The purpose of establishing the natural foundations of society on love was to provide modern reformers with a theoretical anchor-point to hold on to in their attempt to purge modern society of its overly utilitarian features.

At first glance, Rousseau's critique of modern society, especially in the second *Discourse*, looks similar to the one that Iselin had developed in his *Patriotic Dreams*. Like Iselin, he argued that the best way to undermine the normative foundations of a utility driven modernity was to cut through the artificial layers that modern life had placed over natural man which, like the crust which over the course of time had covered the statue of Glaucus, had disfigured him beyond recognition. Like Iselin too, he claimed that, once the distorting veils had been lifted, real natural man appeared in a very different light from the one presented by most modern political theorists. Finally, like Iselin, he argued that the study of natural man provided no basis on which to argue that men were prompted to join society for reasons of self-interest, like weakness, fear, or the inability to satisfy their own continuously expanding needs. Natural man was self-sufficient, healthy and strong.

This is also where the similarity between Iselin and Rousseau ends. For while Iselin's critique stopped at precisely the point where man's natural sociability became apparent, Rousseau pushed his critique even further. In his zeal to systematically destroy the position of those advocates of modern society who had argued that society originated from self-interest, Rousseau, as Iselin complained, had ended up by also destroying the position of the many Christian and republican reform thinkers who had come to rely on the principle of sociability and love as the starting point for formulating an alternative, non-utilitarian theory of society. In so doing, Rousseau not only destroyed his adversaries but also his friends. The most troublesome aspect of Rousseau's critique was clearly his account of the state of nature. By reducing natural man to a mere animal existence, Rousseau had enclosed him in a hermetically sealed cocoon, where nothing could penetrate that might disturb or awaken man's dormant faculties. Feeling no desire to communicate, he had no sense of separation. No metaphysical divide, as Jean Starobinski aptly put it, separated consciousness from external objects. Man lived in perfect equilibrium with his environment, he was part of nature and nature was part of him. Need, desire and the world were in harmony. The state of nature remained firmly outside the boundaries of history and time: it was endless.⁴⁹

There is no doubt that Iselin was captivated by the sheer brilliance of the second *Discourse*, the clarity of its style and the devastating efficiency with which one argument followed another. He also immediately realised the consequences that Rousseau's critique had for the attempt to find a positive solution to modern corruption that he had outlined in the *Patriotic Dreams*. The consequences were quite clearly devastating. If Rousseau's account of the state of nature was correct, Iselin's claim that society originated in love was just as invalid as the claim that society derived from needs. What makes Iselin stand out from the vast number of Rousseau's critics is that his attempt to grapple with the challenges presented in the second *Discourse* is never just limited to a mere repeating of his earlier line of argument. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, Iselin never tried to give validity to his own position by labelling Rousseau a heretic, as was done by Swiss clerics or

⁴⁹ Jean Starobinski, "The Discourse on Inequality", in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Transparency and Obstruction*, Chicago and London 1988, p. 293.

Christian philosophers like Bonnet or Haller. It is a testimony to Iselin's intellectual honesty and ability to recognise a good argument when he saw one, that he did not take the easy route of dogmatism or ridicule but instead chose to confront Rousseau on his own grounds. Just how seriously he took the latter's argument becomes apparent from the *History of Mankind*. It is important to notice that in his book Iselin (unlike his Bernese friends) never so much as mentions the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, or *Emile* but focuses exclusively on Rousseau's second *Discourse* and, in particular, on the latter's account of the state of nature. The reason for doing so is obvious. Rousseau's account of the state of nature effectively undermined Iselin's original argument in favour of natural sociability. It was this very thesis which now in turn had to be refuted. Only if Rousseau's image of natural man could be proven wrong could the road be opened again for a non-contractual, Protestant *History of Mankind*. To appreciate Iselin's reply we need briefly to recapture some of the main points of Rousseau's second *Discourse*.

4. Rousseau's critique of sociability and the derivation of justice from the natural instinct of pity

4.1. Rousseau against the moderns

Rousseau's second *Discourse* is a work of exceptionally rare density. It is rightly seen as one of the most important texts of eighteenth-century political thought; however, it is clearly much more than that. The arguments that Rousseau presents here concern not just the field of politics but also those of biology, anthropology, moral philosophy, history, and sociology. What the second *Discourse* is not is a theological text. And yet it is profoundly religious in outlook. It presents a comprehensive secular version of the Fall, the transition from man's original, non-reflective state of completeness and harmony with nature to a state of consciousness, morality and alienation. It is no exaggeration to say that the second *Discourse* is the one piece of eighteenth-century writing that has had the biggest and most lasting impact on modern thinking. The following elucidation is nothing more than a very fragmentary account of one particular aspect of Part One of the second *Discourse*, namely Rousseau's discussion of the foundations of justice in pity.

The best way to make sense of the first half of the second *Discourse* is to read it as a systematic critique of what he called the 'modern' tradition of natural law. In the *Preface* Rousseau summarised the position of the 'Moderns' as follows:

[The Moderns] allow the name of Law only for a rule prescribed to a moral being, that is to say to a being that is intelligent, free, and considered in its relations with other beings, restrict the province of natural Law to the only animal endowed with reason, that is to say to man; but while each one of them defines this Law in his own fashion, all of them base it on such metaphysical principles that, even among us, there are very few people capable of understanding these principles, let alone capable of discovering them on their own. So that all the definitions by these learned men, which in every other respect constantly contradict one another, agree only in this, that it is impossible to understand the Law of Nature, and hence obey it, without being a very great reasoner and a profound Metaphysician. Which precisely means that in order to establish society men must have employed an enlightenment which develops only with much difficulty and among very few people within society itself.⁵⁰

According to Rousseau, there were several faults with the way in which the Moderns dealt with the issue of natural law. One concerned the universality of natural law. If laws were to be universally valid they had to be recognisable as such to all members of the human species alike, not just to those few capable of metaphysical reasoning. Another problem, directly linked to the previous one, concerned the actual status of natural laws. For natural laws to acquire the status of real laws, as opposed to mere precepts or recommendations, they had to entail some form of obligation and actively encourage an individual to act in a certain way. Rules of natural law that derived from mere rational principles had little effect on the human will. There were other problems with modern theories of natural law, but for Rousseau the main problem resided in the assumption, made by virtually all modern natural law theorists, that natural man had a natural desire to enter society – either because of a genuine love for society, or because

⁵⁰ The edition I am using is *The first and second Discourses together with the replies to the critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, edited, translated and annotated by Victor Gourevitch, New York 1986, p. 131-132. (From now on cited as *Second Discourse*). An indispensable tool for the study of the second *Discourse* is the excellent critical edition by Heinrich Meier, *J.-J. Rousseau, Diskurs über die Ungleichheit. Discours sur l'inégalité*, second edition, Paderborn etc. 1984.

their survival required the collaborative effort of other humans. The first of these interpretations, namely that men desired society for its own sake, was at the heart of Grotius' argument about man's natural sociability in the *De iure belli et pacis*, where he claimed that men were not only naturally self-interested but that they also possessed a natural propensity for society, an *appetitus socialis*, which Grotius associated with man's natural faculty of reason.⁵¹ While Grotius insisted that his natural law applied to the whole of the human race, he proceeded to derive its content from the common customs of the more civilised nations, rather than from a proper study of human anthropology. Many of his critics argued accordingly that in doing so Grotius had seriously compromised the universal aspirations of his theory, making it vulnerable to the sceptical view of history as cultural diversity. This argument was central to Pufendorf's critique of Grotius and also played an important part in Rousseau's own critique of the 'Moderns'. It was essentially Grotius who Rousseau had in mind when turning on those theorists who failed to consider that their highly metaphysical principles of natural right could be understood only by (and as a consequence applied only to) those humans who had already benefited from the educational experience of modern civilisation.

More difficult for Rousseau was the view which saw the origins of society in needs, because, unlike the position associated with Grotius, it was committed to an anthropological position. During the first half of the eighteenth century this view was closely associated with Pufendorf's *Le droit de la nature et des gens*, a text which Rousseau had studied in the translated and annotated version of Barbeyrac. In the famous opening chapter of Book Two of *Le droit de la nature*, Pufendorf explained why men in the state of nature, in contrast to mere animals, could not live without laws (*ex lex*).⁵² What this did not imply was that man had a natural fondness for society, an *appetites*

⁵¹ My account of Grotius and Pufendorf is largely indebted to the article of Istvan Hont, "The language of sociability and commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the theoretical foundations of the 'Four-Stages Theory'", in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of political theory in early-modern Europe*, Cambridge 1987, p. 253-276.

⁵² The edition I am using is *Le Droit de la Nature et des Gens, ou Systeme General des Principes les plus importants de la Morale et de la Politique*, Traduit du Latin par Jean Barbeyrac, Basel (Emanuel Thourneysen) 1750, 2 vols.

socialis as Grotius had maintained. Pufendorf's anthropology was firmly grafted onto the premise of man's natural selfishness. Society according to this reading was still natural, yet not in a primary, or immediate sense, but merely in a secondary sense – in the same way, to use a Mandevillian metaphor, as it was natural for grapes to become wine. The idea that natural law should be founded on the principle of *socialitas* was thus not primarily an argument about human nature. It expressed the idea that all reflection about human normative behaviour, the organisation of society and of politics, had to start from the premise that man's self-preservation (as well as his status as God's favourite creature) required life within society.

The influence of Pufendorf's *De iure naturae et gentium* on eighteenth-century thinking has been well documented and need not be repeated here. His anthropological investigations and especially his stages-theory, which projected the establishing of a positive right of private property through a conception of need, were readily adopted and transformed throughout the Enlightenment period. What, on the other hand, needs repeating is the critical attitude that many thinkers of Rousseau's and Iselin's generation adopted towards Pufendorf's account of sociability. Whilst paying tribute to the innovative features of his approach, many of his readers complained that he had gone too far in his attempt to accommodate the sceptical invocations of Hobbes. The only way Pufendorf could forestall any allegation of scepticism was to resort to a strongly voluntarist framework and to assure the law-like status of natural law by declaring it to be the direct expression of God's will.⁵³ With the *de facto* breakdown of orthodox Lutheranism and

⁵³ The frequently discussed controversial passage is II.III.xx. in *De iure naturae et gentium*, where Pufendorf discusses the need to ground the speculative principles of moral action in the will of God. "[P]our donner force de Loi aux maximes de la Raison, que nous avons établies, il faut, comme je lai dit, supposer ici un principe plus relevé. En effet, quoi que leur utilité soit de la dernière évidence, cette considération seule ne seroit pas assez forte pour convaincre l'Homme qu'il est dans une nécessité indispensable de les pratiquer, toutes les fois qu'il voudroit renoncer aux avantages qui reviennent de leur observation, ou qu'il croiroit avoir en main des moiens plus propres à avancer ses intérêts. [...] Il faut donc nécessairement poser pour principe, que l'Obligation de la Loi Naturelle vient de DIEU même, qui, en qualité de Créateur & de Conducteur Souverain du Genre Humain, prescrit aux Hommes avec autorité l'observation de cette Loi."

Calvinism during the last decade of the seventeenth century, Pufendorf's voluntarist solution lost much of its attractiveness.⁵⁴ A frequently voiced criticism was that Pufendorf, instead of relying exclusively on an argument about God's will, should have shown that the obligation to follow the principles of natural law could also be drawn directly from human nature. Many eighteenth-century thinkers thus regarded Pufendorf not so much as Grotius' saviour but as his intellectual opponent, as *the* theorist of market sociability whose work on natural law provided the intellectual manual for apologists of a needs driven modernity.⁵⁵ It was also for this reason that Rousseau chose Pufendorf as one of his main targets.

4.2. Rousseau's critique of Pufendorf

In his second *Discourse* Rousseau directly attacked Pufendorf's notion that all natural laws could be derived from the principle of *socialitas*. If there was to be found a principle of natural law, Rousseau argued, it had to derive *directly* from human nature, and not *indirectly*, in the form of a consequence of man's dignity, malice, or wickedness or any other theologically derived account of human motivation.⁵⁶ In the Preface, Rousseau announced that

⁵⁴ The best recent study of Pufendorf and the reception of Pufendorf's natural law theory in early eighteenth-century Europe is Timothy Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories in the early Enlightenment*, Cambridge 2000. For an interesting account of the relation between Pufendorf's orthodox Lutheranism and his moral philosophy, see Kari Saastamoinen, *The morality of fallen man. Samuel Pufendorf on Natural Law*, *Studia Historica* 52, Helsinki 1995.

⁵⁵ See for example, Ernst Ferdinand Klein, *Grundsätze der natürlichen Rechtswissenschaft nebst einer Geschichte derselben*, Halle 1797, p. 356: "Der Mangel seines [i. e. Pufendorf's] Systems besteht darin, dass es mehr den Nutzen der Geselligkeit, als die Pflicht dazu gezeigt hat, und dass dessen Erfinden eben deswegen den Befehl eines Obern zu Hülfe nehmen muss." See also Peter Och's *Geschichte der Stadt und Landschaft Basel* (Leipzig und Basel 1786-1822) which he claimed to have written in the spirit of Iselin's *Geschichte der Menschheit*: "Die Sociabilität, oder Geselligkeit. Dieser Grundsatz ist von dem berühmten Puffendorf ausführlich entwickelt worden. Ich vermisse aber bey demselben, mehr Bestimmtheit, nemlich den Endzweck des gesellschaftlichen Lebens." (vol. 1, p. xxii)

⁵⁶ There is an interesting study to be written about the attempt, by early eighteenth-century German natural law theorists, to derive the principles of natural law from

this principle could be found in the interaction of two features common to pre-rational man, namely man's desire for self-preservation and his natural repugnance at seeing any sentient being perish or suffer. It was from the association of these two features, "without it being necessary to introduce into it that of *sociability*", that all the rules of natural right seemed to flow, rules, as Rousseau added, "which reason is subsequently forced to re-establish on different foundations when, by its successive developments, it has succeeded in smothering Nature."⁵⁷

Throughout the *Discourse* Rousseau showed himself to be a highly attentive reader of Pufendorf. In his *De iure naturae et gentium* Pufendorf had claimed that, in order to arrive at a true understanding of natural man, it

human instincts. One of the key advocates of this position was the brilliant but controversial Professor of Jurisprudence, Johann Jacob Schmauss, who taught Iselin during his stay at the University of Göttingen in 1747-1748. It was on the basis of Schmauss' insistence that natural law should be based directly on human nature that late eighteenth-century natural jurists associated him (together with his colleague Johann Christian Claproth) with Rousseau. See for example J. J. Schmauss *Neues Systema des Rechts der Natur* (Göttingen 1754), where he attacks Pufendorf's principle of *socialitas*. p. 452: "Die Natur wird unter andern der Kunst entgegen gesetzt; und folgt also daraus, dass Recht der menschlichen Natur nicht auf den Fuss einer von den Menschen erfundenen Wissenschaft, oder als ein Theil der Gelehrsamkeit angesehen werden muss; sondern als ein blosses ungekünsteltes Werck der Natur, so und nicht anders, als wie es dem Menschen angebohren ist." Gottlieb Hufeland, *Lehrsätze des Naturrechts und der damit verbundenen Wissenschaften*, Jena 1790, p. 18: "Auf Triebe bauten das Naturrecht Claproth, Schmauss, Rousseau, u. a.". See also Ernst Ferdinand Klein, *Grundsätze der natürlichen Rechtswissenschaft*, Halle 1797, p. 360: "Einige Philosophen und Rechtsgelehrten verwechseln sogar das Müssen mit dem Sollen, und das Dürfen mit dem Können. Sie gründen daher das Recht auf die Triebe des Menschen, und fügen dem auf solche Weise gebildeten System einige Klugheitsregeln hinzu. Dahin gehören Johann Christian Klaproth a), Johann Jacob Schmauss b); selbst Rousseau ist in dieser Klasse zu finden." Iselin's relationship to Schmauss is discussed in Im Hof, *Isaak Iselin*, vol. 1, p. 57f. and 307f. On Schmauss, see Wolfgang Sellert, "Johann Jacob Schmauss – Ein Göttinger Jurist" in *Juristische Schulung*, 1985, Heft 1, 843-47; Ursula A. Becher, *Politische Gesellschaft. Studien zur Genese bürgerlicher Öffentlichkeit in Deutschland*, Göttingen 1978, p. 91-98; and, most recently, Frank Grunert, "Das Recht der Natur als Recht des Gefühls. Zur Naturrechtslehre von Johann Jacob Schmauss", in *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik*, 12 (2004), p. 137-156.

⁵⁷ *Second Discourse*, p. 132-133.

was not enough to imagine human life outside the state. Instead one had to imagine man without the possession of the artificial faculties, which could only have been acquired through life in society. Natural man was civil man without *culture*. Discovering the true state of nature required the study of the possible history of society, starting with the present and gradually working back through time to the source from where culture seemed to originate. In his second *Discourse* Rousseau proposed an identical strategy when arguing that the study of natural man should take the form of "hypothetical history of governments".⁵⁸ Where he disagreed with Pufendorf, and other natural law theorists, was over where this journey against the current of time and culture should stop. The philosophers, Rousseau claimed, "who have examined the foundations of society have all felt the necessity of going back as far as the state of Nature, but none of them has reached it. [...] [A]ll of them, continually speaking of need, greed, oppression, desires, and pride transferred to the state of Nature, ideas they had taken from society; they spoke of Savage Man and depicted Civil Man."⁵⁹ Pufendorf, Rousseau could have added, had in fact provided an accurate description of the state of nature, although not in his account of natural man, but in his account of animal existence (II.I.iv.)⁶⁰. It was thus Pufendorf's account of animal existence, in Chapter One of Book Two of the *De iure naturae et gentium*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶⁰ *Le Droit de la Nature et des Gens*, p. 163-165: "[L]eurs Sens peut délicats & leurs désirs rampans, ne les portent qu'à un petit nombre d'objets, auxquelles elles s'attachent même assez légèrement; n'étant guères sensibles qu'aux choses grossières & très-communes. [...] Il semble y avoir entre quelques sortes de Bêtes une espèce de mariage, mais cela se réduit à un accouplement pour les plaisirs de l'Amour, & à je ne sai quelle apparence d'inclination réciproque, où l'engagement & la fidélité n'entrent pour rien. La plupart, après avoir contenté leur désirs, ne font plus paroître aucune ombre d'amitié, aucune honte, aucune considération pour leur sang. Plusieurs d'entr'elles témoignent à la vérité une grande affection pour leurs petits, mais qui dure seulement jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient en état de se nourrir eux-mêmes. Hors de là, elles n'en ont plus de soin, & cette tendresse si empressé en apparence disparoit entièrement. [...] Une autre raison pourquoi les Bêtes n'avoient pas grand besoin du frein des Loix, c'est que leurs désirs n'étant excitez que par la faim, la soif, ou les aiguillons de l'Amour; la Nature leur fournit abondamment & sans peine de quoi les satisfaire."

(II. I. iv.), which Rousseau followed in the second *Discourse*, when arguing that to an external observer, natural man seemed no different from common animals:

By stripping the Being, so constituted, of all the supernatural gifts he may have received, and of all the artificial faculties he could have acquired by prolonged progress; by considering him, in a word, such as he must have issued from the hands of Nature, *I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but, all things considered, the most advantageously organized of all.*⁶¹

Rousseau's decisive move against Pufendorf consisted in shifting the dividing line that the latter had drawn between animal and man and in placing natural man in the sphere of the animal state of nature. The first part of the argument consisted in systematically refuting the claims that Pufendorf had relied on in his attempt to prove why humans could not live *ex lex*. The second part was then to show that true natural man did in fact live under laws, although unconsciously, and which appealed directly to his sentiments.

While, according to Pufendorf, solitary man, because of his *imbecillitas*, was unable to acquire even the level of animal skills, Rousseau on the other hand maintained that

[m]en, dispersed among them, observe, imitate their industry, and so raise themselves to the level of the Beasts' instinct, with this advantage, that each species has but its own instinct, while man, perhaps having none that belongs to him, appropriates them all, feeds indifferently on most of the various foods which the other animals divide among themselves, and as a result finds his subsistence more easily than can any one of them.⁶²

There was no reason to assume, as Pufendorf had done, that man's initial handicaps (his nakedness, his lack of specific instincts) could not be overcome in the absence of the long-term co-operative efforts of other human beings.

To go naked, to be without habitation, and to be deprived of all the useless things we believe so necessary is, then, not such a great misfortune for these first men nor, above all, is it such a great obstacle to their preservation. While their skin is not very hairy, they do not need it to be in warm Countries, and in cold Countries they soon learn to appropriate the skins of the Beasts they have overcome; though they have

⁶¹ *Second Discourse*, p. 141. My italics.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

only two feet for running, they have two arms to provide for their defence and for their needs; their Children may walk late and with difficulty, but the Mothers carry them with ease.⁶³

Having shown that man in the state of nature was fully capable of satisfying his basic needs, Rousseau proceeded to show that natural man could have *nothing but* basic needs. He was eager to point out that reducing the desires of natural man to a level of basic needs did not imply depriving him of his moral potential. In contrast to animals, Rousseau agreed, natural man was both a free agent and equipped with the property of perfectibility.⁶⁴ The point of insisting on the absence of artificial needs in the state of nature was to show that the natural state did not provide any of the external stimuli needed for man's perfectibility to develop. Hence, what mattered at this stage of the argument was not that natural man was genuinely different from animals, but that this difference did not manifest itself in human behaviour and could not be recognised by any external observer.

The reason, Rousseau argued, why artificial needs could not develop in the state of nature was due to the complicated interdependent relationship between reason and the passions. 'Moralists' commonly (and quite mistakenly) saw the relationship between reason and the passions in unilateral terms (where reason gives rise to the multiplication of the passions), whereas in fact their relationship should be seen as a circular one, with both reason and the passions influencing each other. Not only did reason prompt the development of the passions, the passions themselves were responsible for the development of man's understanding: "It is by their activity that our reason perfects itself; we seek to know only because we desire to enjoy, and it is not possible to conceive of why someone without desires or fears would take the trouble of reasoning."⁶⁵ The passions, Rousseau explained, owed their origins to man's needs. Needs in turn owed their progress to man's understanding, for man could desire or fear things only in terms of

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁶⁴ It is in his faculty of free-will, rather than in understanding, that Rousseau places the main difference between man and animal. "Nature commands every animal, and the Beast obeys. Man experiences the same impression, but recognizes himself free to acquiesce or to resist; and it is mainly in the consciousness of this freedom that the spirituality of his soul exhibits". *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149-150.

his ideas about them or by the simple impulsion of nature. Since natural man lacked reason, his only desires were those directly dictated to him by nature; namely food, water, rest, a sexual partner and the absence of pain.

Rousseau also explicitly ruled out the possibility that man's mind could be prompted into action by any stimulation resulting from his habitat. Man's natural surrounding, the virgin forest, was monotonous, even in its alterations:

His imagination depicts nothing to him; his heart asks nothing of him. His modest needs are so ready to hand, and he is so far from the degree of knowledge necessary to desire to acquire greater knowledge, that he can have neither foresight nor curiosity. The spectacle of Nature becomes so familiar that he grows indifferent to it. Forever the same order, forever the same revolutions; he lacks the wit to wonder at the greatest marvels [...]. His soul, which nothing stirs, yields itself wholly to the sentiment of its present existence, with no idea of the future, however near it may be, and his projects, as narrow as his views, hardly extend to the close of day.⁶⁶

Given that reason evolves from the passions and the passions from reason, Rousseau concluded, "it is inconceivable how a man could, by his own strength alone, without the help of communication and without the goad of necessity, have crossed such a wide divide."⁶⁷

The obvious solution to this difficulty was to show how communication and language had evolved gradually from what some thinkers called 'natural marriage', that is, man's natural inclination to establish monogamous sexual relationships.⁶⁸ Needless to say, this solution, too, was vehemently and systematically refuted by Rousseau. Language, Rousseau maintained, could evolve only within society; society on the other hand could be formed only on the basis of an already established language. Neither could develop without the prior existence of the other. The difficulty, according to Rousseau, that needed answering was "how language could have become necessary; for, Men having no relationships with one another and no need of any, one cannot conceive the necessity or the possibility of this invention if it was not

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 150-151.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

⁶⁸ On the function of the argument of 'natural marriage' in modern natural law theories, see especially, Hubert Rinkens, *Die Ehe und die Auffassung von der Natur des Menschen im Naturrecht bei Hugo Grotius, Samuel Pufendorf und Christian Thomasius*, Diss. Frankfurt 1971, especially p. 101ff.

indispensable." To assume simply that natural men lived in families would be once again "to commit the fallacy of those who, in reasoning about the state of Nature carry over into it ideas taken from Society". In the state of nature, without houses or huts, "everyone bedded down at random and often for a single night". Moreover:

males and females united fortuitously, according to chance encounters, opportunity, and desire, without speech being an especially necessary interpreter of what they had to tell one another; they parted just as readily.⁶⁹

Rousseau was equally dismissive about the idea that language could have evolved from the natural union between mother and child – traditionally seen as the strongest proof of men's propensity to form stable relationships with his kind. Following Rousseau, even this bond was determined not by love but by a mixture of self-interest and habit. The mother, at first, nursed the children because of her own need; habit then having made them dear to her, she nourished them because of theirs. Once the infants had grown sufficiently strong their relationship ceased. Unrestrained by filial or maternal inclinations, they both disappeared into the woods, never to be seen or recognised again.

Nor, finally, were there any grounds on which to conclude that natural man was capable of forming any moral form of love as Cumberland and other Christian critics of Hobbes had maintained. The moral aspect of love, Rousseau explained, was "a factitious sentiment" and required the ability of abstract reasoning, of forming general ideas which alone permitted natural man to distinguish one individual female from another. A sentiment of moral love "since it is based on certain notions of merit or of beauty which the Savage is not in a position to possess, and on comparisons he is not in a position to make, must be almost nonexistent for him: For as his mind could not frame abstract ideas or regularity and of proportion, so his heart cannot feel the sentiments of admiration and of love that arise".⁷⁰

From this, Rousseau concluded,

It is at least clear from how little care Nature has taken to bring Men together through mutual needs and to facilitate their use of speech, how little it prepared their Sociabil-

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 153.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 164.

ity, and how little of its own it has contributed to all that men have done to establish the bonds of Sociability.

Indeed, Rousseau famously added, "it is impossible to imagine why, in a primitive state, a man would need another man any more than a monkey or a Wolf would need his kind."⁷¹

4.3. *The principle of pity*

By successfully ruling out the possibility of artificial needs, of language, general ideas and of moral love in the state of nature, Rousseau had indeed provided an entire battery of arguments, which could be levelled against Pufendorf's idea of sociability. The problem that Rousseau now faced (at least from the perspective of his critics) was that, by fully integrating natural man into Pufendorf's animal kingdom, he had manoeuvred himself into a position that looked dangerously close to that of Hobbes. Rousseau was well aware of this, for the second half of Part One of the *Discourse on Inequality* is an explicit attempt to distance himself from any possible allegation of Hobbism. The problem with Hobbes, as Rousseau pointed out, was not so much in his methodology – in fact, Rousseau insisted that his own methodology had a greater affinity with Hobbes than with any other natural law thinker – but the conclusions that he had drawn from his account of natural man. Hence, "Hobbes very clearly saw the defect of all modern definitions of Natural right: but the conclusions he draws from his own definition show that he understands it in a sense that is no less false." Hobbes was in particular mistaken when describing man as naturally wicked; as a creature driven by vanity and a multitude of passions, which could only be tamed through the disciplining force of externally imposed laws.⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 158.

⁷² For an explicit association of Rousseau with Hobbes see, Karl Ludwig von Haller, *Restauration der Staats=Wissenschaft oder Theorie des natürlich-geselligen Zustands*, vol. 1, Winterthur 1816; p. 33: "Aecht republikanisch wie späterhin Rousseau u. a. m. erkennt [Hobbes] keinen Vertrag zwischen dem Fürsten und dem Unterthanen, sondern nur einen wahren *Contrat social* zwischen den einzelnen Individuen selbst (*pactum sociale inter singulos*)." p. 40: "Er ist und bleibt durch sein Principium der Ahnvater aller Jakobiner, aller revolutionären Irrthümer, wiewohl

There were two features natural to man which Hobbes had overlooked in his account of the state of nature. First, Hobbes "improperly included in Savage man's care for his preservation the need to satisfy a multitude of passions that are the product of Society and have made Laws necessary." Had he realised that the multitude of passions which gave rise to man's conflictual nature was itself made possible only through the development of human understanding, he would have been forced to admit that pre-rational man had no more than simple needs. Instead of insisting that the state of nature resembled a state of war, Hobbes "should have said that, since the state of Nature is the state in which the care for our own preservation is least prejudicial to the self-preservation of others, it follows that this state was the most conducive for Peace and the best suited to Mankind."⁷³

There was a second principle that Hobbes had overlooked, and which further ensured the general peacefulness of the state of nature, namely the ability of natural man to feel 'pity'.⁷⁴ By regulating natural man's "ardour

dieses nicht seine Absicht war." Concerning Rousseau, p. 58: "zum Grund liegt die nemliche Grille wie bey Hobbes, nemlich der bürgerliche Vertrag, Ursprung der Gewalt bey dem Volk, Abtretung aller Privat=Macht, alles Privat=Urtheils, jedoch nicht an eine einzelnen oder mehrere, sondern nur an die ganze Communität, und die Souverainität soll bey der Volks=Corporation verbleiben, sie soll unveräußerlich und untheilbar seyn.;" p. 117: "[Rousseau] ist indessen nicht der Erfinder des Systems, welches den Ursprung aller Staaten aus der Grille eines Social=Contrakts und mithin der ursprünglichen Volks=Souverainität herleiten will: sondern er hat diese 100 Jahre vor ihm erdichtete Princip [i. e. by Hobbes] nur consequent, ächt demokratisch ausgeführt, mit mancherley anderen seltsamen Paradoxen untermischt und durch das Vehikel einer allgemein herrschenden Sprache und eines reizenden Styls in alle Classen verbreitet. Der wesentliche Unterschied zwischen Hobbes und Rousseau besteht eigentlich nur darin: dass jener nach geschlossenem *Contrat social* die ursprüngliche Volks=Souverainität an einen Fürsten oder einen Senat abtreten, dieser hingegen sie bey der ganzen Volks=Corporation behalten will."

⁷³ Ibid., p. 159-160. The best study of Rousseau's idea of 'natural goodness' is Arthur M. Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man. On the System of Rousseau's Thought*, Chicago 1990.

⁷⁴ In Chapter nine of *De Homine*, Hobbes had in fact commented on 'pity' although not in the *De Cive*, which is obviously the text that Rousseau had in mind. See, *The moral and political works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, London 1750, p. 19: "Pity is imagination or fiction of future calamity to ourselves, proceeding

for well-being with an innate repugnance to see his kind suffer", pity managed to neutralise the potential aggressiveness that might arise during the chance encounter of two or more individuals. Also, because pity preceded the exercise of man's mental capacities, it could be properly called a *natural* virtue. According to Rousseau, pity was in fact "the only Natural virtue"; something that even that "most extreme Detractor of human virtue", Mandeville, was forced to acknowledge.⁷⁵

In revising Hobbes, Rousseau faithfully followed Mandeville's account of pity, with the important difference that for Rousseau pity was indeed a *genuine* and *natural* virtue. Not only had Mandeville failed to realise that

from the sense of *another* man's calamity". Compare again to Schmauss, *Neues Systema*, p. 391: "nach Hobbesii Vorstellung des *status naturalis* und des *Juris omnium in omnia* die Menschen, wann sie concurriren *in re aliqua occupanda*, zu vergleichen sind zweyen Hunden, die sich über einen Knochen herum beißen. Wer *Hobbesium* hierinn widerlegen will, muss beweisen: dass zwey Menschen in dergleichen Fällen ganz anders sich verhalten; dass sie sich wegen einer Sache, die sie beyde sich zueignen wollen, entweder gar nicht veruneinigen, oder doch einer dem andern gutwillig nachgibt, und zwar nicht desswegen, weil er zu schwach und zu furchtsam ist; (dann das thun Hunde auch) noch weil dergleichen Sachen sonst noch in grosser Menge zu haben sind; noch *ex principiis Christianismi*; sondern aus einer *aequitate naturali connate*, und aus *principiis*, die dem Menschen von Natur in das Herz geschrieben sind. So lang das noch nicht bewiesen wird, steht *Hobbesii* Meynung noch fest". Hence, the question is, "ob es ein solches *Ius naturae* gebe, das einem Menschen zur Gerechtigkeit gegen andere Menschen verbindet, und das nicht nur aus einer *ratiocinatione* erdacht wird, sondern dem Menschen angebohren ist." (p. 504). According to Schmauss 'natural justice' in the state of nature is established through man's natural pity (p. 506) and his 'natural fear' of punishment (p. 509-515). From this he concludes that "der Mensch ist so geschaffen, dass es ihm genug zu seiner Glückseligkeit seyn kann, *naturae suae convenienter vivere*, oder seiner Natur zu folgen". (p. 528) Because, in the state of nature, man's will naturally (and freely) follows the dictates of pity and *metus mali*, man's natural state is, like that of sovereign states, one of complete freedom. "Es ist keine grössere *Praerogativ*, als *exlex* seyn, das ist, nach seinem eingenen Willen zu leben. Diss ist das Leben *souverainer Könige*" (p. 528). Civil society, in this respect, resembles a state of slavery: "Der *status hominum civilis* ist *comparative* wie eine Slavery dagegen zu achten." (p. 531)

⁷⁵ On Rousseau and Mandeville see Malcolm Jack, 'One State of Nature: Mandeville and Rousseau', *Political Theory*, 1979, p. 119-124; also, E. J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable. Bernard Mandeville and the discovery of society*, p. 105f.

pity was disinterested, but according to Rousseau, he had also failed to realise that pity was the natural source of all subsequent virtues, like charity and friendship, which man acquired through society.⁷⁶

Mandeville sensed clearly that for all their morality, men would never have been anything but monsters if Nature had not given them pity in support of reason: but he did not see that from this single attribute flow all the social virtues he wants to deny men. Indeed, what are generosity, Clemency, Humanity, if not Pity applied to the weak, the guilty, or the species in general? Even Benevolence and friendship, properly understood, are the products of a steady pity focused on a particular object; for what else is it to wish that someone not suffer, than to wish that he be happy?⁷⁷

The fact that pity was a 'natural sentiment', a 'natural virtue', which affected even natural man, did not imply that man in the state of nature was a moral agent. Ignorant of the meaning of 'good' and 'bad', natural man remained a strictly amoral creature. Consequently, even for Rousseau, rescuing an innocent babe from certain death did not qualify as a genuine moral act, at least not from the perspective of civil man. Pity was a 'natural virtue' in the sense that it functioned as a regulative principle *prior* to the establishing of laws and morality. It was an ingenious psychological mechanism devised by nature to moderate in every individual the activity of self-love and, in so doing, to contribute to the mutual preservation of the entire species.

It is pity which carries us without reflection to the assistance of those we see suffer; it is pity which, in the state of Nature, takes the place of Laws, morals, and virtue, with the advantage that no one is tempted to disobey its gentle voice; it is pity which will keep any sturdy Savage from robbing a weak child or an infirm old man of his hard-won subsistence if he hopes he can find his own elsewhere.⁷⁸

Because its voice spoke in the midst of the silence of the passions it had an immediate *and* compelling effect on natural man's soul. Pity pronounced natural man's 'natural law', and man obeyed. Hence, the advantage of this

⁷⁶ For a good overview of the Enlightenment debate on pity see, L. Samson's article 'Mitleid' in J. Ritter and K. Gründer (eds.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Stuttgart 1980, vol. V.; much useful information can also be gathered from K. von Orelli, *Die philosophische Auffassung des Mitleids. Eine historisch-kritische Studie*, Bonn 1912; see also Ulrich Kronauer (ed.), *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil des Mitleids*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990.

⁷⁷ *Second Discourse*, p. 161-162.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162-163.

truly 'natural virtue' was that, in contrast to positive law and metaphysical principles of moral reasoning, it actually inspired natural man to comply with the principles of 'natural goodness': "It is pity which instead of the sublime maxim of reasoned justice *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you* inspires all Men with this other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect, but perhaps more useful than the first: *Do your good with the least possible harm to others.*"⁷⁹ It was thus this latter maxim (which presents a particular form of the negative version of the Golden Rule) which, according to Rousseau, was the only principle of moral reasoning that could be derived directly from human nature.

5. *Pleasure and pain*

5.1. *Rousseau and Mandeville*

In his *History of Mankind*, Iselin directly attacked Rousseau's claim that the principle of pity could serve as a natural foundation of morality and justice. Despite Rousseau's self-professed opposition to Hobbes and Mandeville, Iselin maintained that the position developed in the second *Discourse* was in fact one of profound scepticism, not only with regard to the foundations of morality but also with regard to the foundations of justice. Rousseau's claim to have shown how a positive theory of ethics could be drawn from Mandevillean premises should hence be regarded as a failure. The similarity between the two thinkers was too great for pity to carry the argumentative weight of a decisive and convincing anti-Mandevillean strategy.

Like Mandeville, Rousseau insisted that men did not possess any strong instinct to join society. The sole difference was that Mandeville explained the origin of society from man's imbecility and desire for self-preservation, while Rousseau saw society emerge as a result of some accident: an earthquake that forced solitary men to share a strictly confined space thereby setting off a process of socialisation, accompanied by the growth of artificial needs and *amour propre*. Rousseau's account of the history of morality, in the second part of the *Discourse on Inequality* in particular, showed him to

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 163.

be a loyal pupil of Mandeville's Epicureanism.⁸⁰ According to Rousseau, the mechanism that led to the establishment of morality was set in motion through natural men's forced cohabitation. Being able to observe a group of individuals over a lengthy period of time, social man learnt to compare them to one another, to distinguish their individual features and to judge them according to their beauty or deformity. By a second step, man became sensible of the fact that he too was being compared and judged by others, he felt pleased when his appearance found others' approval and felt pain when his exterior was judged inadequate. Morality made its first entrance when social man expressed a desire of wanting to be appreciated by his fellow creatures. With the help of his imagination, and through a process of role switching, man could take the place of others: he could observe himself and judge his own actions through foreign eyes. It was this strong desire to avoid censure and gain approbation which provided the prime motivational force behind social man's desire to control his actions and to conform to the predominant norms of the particular group of individuals he happened to live with. Rousseau left no doubts that this was the system of false morality of fallen men, that is to say social men, who recognised themselves only through the eyes of others. According to Rousseau, this artificial system of ethics even managed to smother the original natural voice of pity.

Iselin was fully aware that the introduction of the principle of pity was meant to be a corrective to this system of artificial morality. The resulting issue was not the extent to which Rousseau was a follower of Mandeville.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Rousseau's Epicureanism is repeatedly underscored by Jean de Castillon in his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes. Pour servir de réponse au Discours que M. Rousseau, Citoyen de Genève, a publié sur le même sujet*, Amsterdam 1756, vi: "Il y a presque un an qu'il relève les délires des Epicuriens sur notre origine; qu'il réduit nos premiers pères au rang des bêtes les plus stupides [...]". See also xxx: "Ou les hommes ont autrefois vécu dans la dispersion, ou ils ont toujours été en société; voilà les deux seules hypothèses qu'on peut faire. La première est une rêverie des Epicuriens, que Rousseau a adoptée & revêtue des apparences les plus séduisantes."

⁸¹ Iselin's position was largely shared by Mendelssohn. See his much under-rated *Sendschreiben an Lessing* which presents one of the most insightful German discussions of Rousseau's second *Discourse*. Page 98, he writes: "Je öfters ich über diese Materie nachdenke: desto mehr werde ich in meiner Vermuthung bestärkt, dass die Absicht unsers Verfassers niemals gewesen sey: Die wahre Würde der

Rather, the question that needed to be asked, once again, was whether the insistence on pity as a natural virtue was enough to provide Mandeville's purely epicurean account of the genealogy of morals with a non-epicurean foundation. Could morality evolve *ex nihilo*? How could an amour-propre driven history of morality end up with a non-selfish system of ethics? How could Rousseau's selfish system expressed in his pity-based, negative version of the Golden Rule produce a system of humanity, friendship and charity?

In his discussion of the second *Discourse* in the *Letter to the Authors of the Edinburgh Review* of 1756, Adam Smith complained that Rousseau's essay presented above all a display of stylistic mastery, of an ability to enchant the reader with philosophical paradoxes which, on closer inspection, revealed themselves to be mere rhetorical smokescreens. A similarly disappointing result emerged from the closer inspection of the principle of pity. According to Smith, Rousseau's principle of pity was far too selfish to serve as a proper foundation of either justice or morality. After pointing to what he saw as a striking similarity between Mandeville and Rousseau, Smith claimed that Rousseau's anti-sceptical move hinged on two fundamental features:

Menschlichkeit mit Füßen zu treten und das unvernünftige Thier über sich selbst zu setzen. [...] Er hat vielleicht nur den Stoltz einiger Irrdischgesinnnten züchtigen wollen, die das ganze gesittete Wesen, in einige Bequemlichkeiten setzen, daran Menschen Jahrhunderte gearbeitet haben, und eine Verzärtlung, eine Weichlichkeit des Verhaltens, die für die wahren Vorzüge der Menschlichkeit ausgeben. [...] Und der Strom seiner Einbildungskraft hat ihn so sehr mit sich fortgerissen, dass er nicht selten über das vorgesezte Ziel hinwegrennet, uns auf die Gedanken bringt, er habe mehr verheeren, als anbauen wollen." Mendelssohn directly compares Rousseau to Hobbes and Mandeville and interprets their commitment to a position of philosophical scepticism as a particular stringent form of Calvinism. "Sie haben sich beflissen, diese Welt mit verhassten Farben abzuschildern. Sie haben sie einen Kerker, ein Jammerthal genannt, um durch deren Verdunkelung den Glantz einer herrlichen Zukunft desto mehr in unsern Augen zu erheben." p. 102. For a recent discussion of Rousseau's German reception see Herbert Jaumann (ed.), *Rousseau in Deutschland. Neue Beiträge zur Erforschung seiner Rezeption*, Berlin und New York 1995; especially Ulrich Kronauer's essay, "Der kühne Weltweise. Lessing als Leser Rousseaus" (p. 23-45) where he includes a brief account of Mendelssohn's discussion of pity.

It is by the help of this style, together with a little philosophical chemistry, that the principles and ideas of the profligate Mandeville seem in him to have all the purity and sublimity of Plato, and to be only the true spirit of a republican carried a little too far.⁸²

Iselin came to very similar conclusions. In chapter fifteen of book two, Iselin declared:

[T]his sentiment [of pity] is far too selfish and too insecure. I simply cannot see, how it could be recognised as the basis of a theory of reasonable ethics [*vernünftige Sittenlehre*].⁸³

Both Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and Iselin, in the *History of Mankind*, hoped to build on the insights of Rousseau's critique of Mandeville and show how an acceptable system of ethics could be derived from minimalist natural foundations. What makes Iselin's reply to Rousseau stand apart from those of many other (most German Protestant) critics was that he did not simply revert to defending the standard argument in favour of man's natural sociability.⁸⁴ This had been Iselin's strategy against Rousseau's *Discourse on the arts and the sciences* in the opening chapters of

⁸² "Letter to the Edinburgh Review" in *The Glasgow edition of the works and correspondence of Adam Smith*, volume 3, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, edited by I. S. Ross, Oxford 1980, p. 251.

⁸³ *Ueber die Geschichte der Menschheit*, Frankfurt und Leipzig 1764, vol. 1, p. 128, Note *: "[S]elbst dieses Gefühl [i. e. pity] ist gar zu eigennützig und zu unsicher. Ich sehe einmal nicht wie man es als die Grundlage einer vernünftigen Sittenlehre ansehen könne."

⁸⁴ The description of Rousseau as an opponent of any notion of 'sociability' became a staple item in the anti-Rousseau polemic. Christoph Martin Wieland, in his *Betrachtungen über J. J. Rousseau's ursprünglichen Zustand des Menschen* (which is largely indebted to Iselin) argues that the principle of unsociability provides the foundation to Rousseau's system. *C. M. Wielands Sämmtliche Werke*, 14. Band, Leipzig 1795, p. 74: "Aber was Rousseau in der menschlichen Natur entdeckt haben könne, das ihm Ursache gegeben, nichts unnatürlicher zu finden als die Ungeselligkeit, welche die Grundlage seines Systems über den ursprünglichen Stand ausmacht, – kann ich nicht errathen." Virtually identical comments can also be found in Jens Krafft, *Die Sitten der Wilden, zur Aufklärung des Ursprungs und Aufnahme der Menschheit*, Kopenhagen 1766; G. Chr. Springer, *Natürliche Geschichte des menschlichen Geschlechts*, Lemgo 1768; and J. N. Tetens, *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung*, Leipzig 1776, as well as in a wide range of likeminded anti-Rousseauian tracts.

the *Patriotic Dreams*. However, after Rousseau's systematic attack against sociability in the second *Discourse*, this earlier position, as Iselin fully realised, had become untenable. Hence, the only way to dislodge Rousseau was to prove him wrong on his own ground. For Iselin (like Smith), this meant having to go beyond the principle of pity and, as a consequence, to adopt a position that was even more sceptical than that of Rousseau. Iselin, as we shall see, argued that pity was not, as Rousseau had maintained, a natural principle capable of regulating the behaviour of men in the state of nature. Pity, rather, was itself the product of socialisation. If Rousseau had been more stringent in his attempt to strip civilised man of the multiple layers acquired through life in society, he would have realised that there was in fact an underlying, disinterested principle natural to all men, and which existed even prior to that of pity. According to Iselin, this primary principle was man's natural ability to share others' pain and pleasure.

5.2. *Pity cannot be used as the foundation of natural morality*

Pity, Iselin explained, was based on the recognition of pain; and pain – or rather, the avoidance of pain – was the prime motivational force of man's natural desire for self-preservation. For this reason alone, Iselin claimed, it was difficult to see how pity could ever turn into an other-regarding principle. Pity remained an expression of self-preservation, which could easily be seen from the fact that every sentiment of pity or compassion ceased when the impression of pain ceased, returning man once more to a natural state of contentment. The key to broadening the natural basis of morality, according to Iselin, was to show that natural man was not just capable of sensing pain but that he was equally capable of sensing pleasure.⁸⁵ Rousseau had

⁸⁵ A different solution was put forward by Iselin's friend, Moses Mendelssohn, in his *Sendschreiben an Lessing*, where he instead presents pity as a subcategory of man's natural love for harmony. Pity hereby becomes an emotive reaction to sensorial data indicating the absence of harmony and beauty. "Das Mitleiden selbst, dieses menschliche Gefühl, das Rousseau dem Wilden noch lässt, nachdem er ihm alle übrigen geistigen Fähigkeiten geraubt hat, ist keine ursprüngliche Neigung, dafür er es angesehen hat. In uns lieget keine ausdrückliche Bestimmung, an den Schwachheiten anderer Geschöpfe Missvergnügen zu haben. Nein! Mitleiden grün-

of course vehemently rejected the idea that in the state of nature man was capable of experiencing pleasure. The sentiment of pleasure depended on the ability to form general ideas and to conduct complex mental operations that largely surpassed the cognitive capacities of savage man. Yet Iselin insisted that this could indeed be proved: natural man *was* capable of forming general ideas and, as a consequence, *was* capable of sensing pleasure. It was on the basis of natural man's ability to sense pleasure, and to participate in others' pleasure, that one could overcome Rousseau's own sceptical maxim and re-establish the positive version of the Golden Rule.

It is worth following Iselin in some detail, for it was his attempt to re-establish a minimalist version of the Golden Rule, within a Rousseauian framework, which gained him the reputation of being one of Rousseau's most insightful critics. Iselin himself never claimed any originality for his own account of moral psychology, and in Book One and Two of the *History of Mankind* he indeed makes no attempt to downplay the influence of the works of Sulzer, Levesque de Pouilly, Kames, or Smith. While some of his contemporary readers were strongly critical of his eclectic approach, most

det sich auf Liebe, Liebe gründet sich auf die Lust an Harmonie und Ordnung. Wo wir Vollkommenheiten erblicken, da wünschen wir sie wachsen zu sehen; und sobald sich ein Mangel bey ihnen äussert: So entspinnet sich bey uns darüber eine Unlust, die wir Mitleiden nennen." p. 83. See also Jean de Castillon, *Discours*, p. 88: "On accorde à notre nature la commisération. C'est lui accorder la sociabilité. Rousseau même convient que la commisération est la source de toutes les vertus sociales, que la bienveillance même & de l'amitié qui n'est qu'une pitié constante fixée sur un objet particulier. Mais toujours en contradiction avec lui-même, il refuse à l'homme la sociabilité." Also, Johann Gottlieb Steeb, *Versuch einer allgemeinen Beschreibung von dem Zustand der ungesitteten und gesitteten Völker nach ihrer moralischen und physikalischen Beschaffenheit*, Karlsruhe 1766, p. 62 where he argues that pity would compel Rousseau's natural man to protect his offspring until they had reached adulthood: "Die Eltern werden also kraft des ihnen angebohrenen Mitleidens, das Rousseau und selbst Mandeville dem Menschen einräumen, ihre Kinder wenigstens so lange bey sich behalten, bis sie erwachsen, und im Stande sind sich selbst zu vertheidigen. Ein Knabe von acht Jahren wird keinen Löwen und Bären todschlagen können, so stark auch die Kräfte im Stande der Natur immer sind." In a sequel to his *Versuch* of 1766, the *Über den Menschen nach den hauptsächlichsten Anlagen seiner Natur*, 3 vols, Tübingen 1796, Steeb points out to Iselin's *History of Mankind* as his main source of inspiration. See the preface, p. ix.

of them nevertheless considered it a genuine achievement and one of the *History's* strong points. The originality of Iselin's work in this respect was that it applied the ideas of Smith, Sulzer and others directly to the case of Rousseau and that it showed how the latter's ideas could be best understood as a highly innovative but none the less extremely marginal position *within* the Europe wide-debate on formulating an anti-sceptical natural moral philosophy.

5.3. Against the hypothetical state of nature

The obvious place to look for Iselin's reply to Rousseau's notion of pity, it would seem, is in his own account of the state of nature. Setting up a rival account of the state of nature was a common feature of many of the critical replies to Rousseau; and since Iselin himself called Book Two, *Von dem Stande der Natur* (Of the State of Nature), one might be led to assume that this was also essentially Iselin's strategy. A quick glance through Book Two, however, reveals that this is not the case. The *History of Mankind* does not contain any contract theory. Nor does Iselin have a clear-cut view of the state of nature. In fact, he remains noticeably vague about what the state of nature might mean or when it could be said to have ended. Instead, Iselin spends much energy in insisting upon the futility of the debate about the state of nature, not least on the ground that there is no way of verifying it.⁸⁶

Following Pufendorf and Rousseau's lead, Iselin suggests that "the surest and shortest way" to enquire about the state of nature "will be to follow the one traced by the natural development of human faculties. We shall return to the first principles of humanity, in order to seek man as he appears in the state of nature."⁸⁷ Iselin agreed that by stripping civil man of all his

⁸⁶ *Ueber die Geschichte der Menschheit* (1764), vol. 1, p. 81: "Ist aber der Mensch den wir in der Abstraction zu finden geglaubet haben in der Natur derselbige, oder etwas anders? und wo sollen wir uns hinwenden, um diese Prüfung anzustellen? Sollen wir den wahren Menschen in den Wäldern von Nordamerica suchen, oder sollen wir glauben, derjenige, den wir kennen, habe die Vollkommenheit noch nicht erreicht, welche in glücklichern Tagen sein Loos seyn soll?"

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83: "Der sicherste und kürzeste Weg zu dieser Untersuchung wird derjenige seyn, den uns die natürliche Entwicklung der menschlichen Fähigkeiten selbst

artificial layers one arrived at a state that more or less corresponded with the account that Rousseau had given in the second *Discourse*. Incapable of forming general ideas, man would be caught in an eternal present; unable to appreciate beauty or harmony, his most elevated state of mind would be that of mere contentedness. Devoid of any "common sense", man would be equally "unable to express even the most elementary forms of wisdom, virtue or just reasoning". And because man would lack artificial needs, he showed no desire for society.

Property, morality, duty and all that is connected to this, are terms which such men would be incapable of forming. Equally unknown to them would be the idea of duration, time, number, beginning, end, life, and death, and language would be considered a most useless invention. The present would be everything to them, the past and future in its true sense, on the other hand, would mean nothing.⁸⁸

This, Iselin claimed, "would be more or less the state which a great man finds so enviable."⁸⁹ What made Rousseau's state of nature theory so difficult to deal with was that it could not be simply dismissed out of hand, even though there were several arguments that seemed to speak against it. One of them was that Rousseau's theory was strictly incompatible with the idea of creation by design.⁹⁰ For if Rousseau was correct in assuming that nature had intended man to live outside of society and remain in his animal state of nature, one would be forced to conclude that that nature had failed to achieve its aim. Another argument that could be made against Rousseau's

vorzeichnet. Wir wollen bis auf die ersten Elementen der Menschheit zurückgehen, um den Menschen in dem Stande der Natur zu suchen."

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87: "Eigenthum, Sittlichkeit, Pflicht und alles was davon abhängt, sind Begriffe derer solche Menschen unfähig seyn würden. Eben so unbekannt wären ihnen die Gedanken von Dauer, Zeit, Zahl, Anfang, Ende, Leben und Tod und eine Sprache wäre für sie eine sehr überflüssige und unbrauchbare Erfindung."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88: "Dieses wäre ungefähr der Stand welchen ein grosser Mann so beneidungswürdig findet. Dieses wäre der wahre Stand des Menschen; seine ganze Bestimmung; Alles was denselben weiter führen könnte, würde ihn in unausweichliche Abgründe verleiten."

⁹⁰ See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 97: "Wenn wir aber der Gottheit, welche alles so weislich beherrscht, nicht widersprechende Absichten zuschreiben wollen: so müssen wir zugeben, dass der Mensch nicht zu einem unveränderlichen Stande bestimmt sey, indem ihm die Natur einen Trieb eingeflößet hat, der ihn mit einer unabsehbaren Macht zur Veränderung anspornet."

thesis, directly linked to the previous one, was that natural man, due to his strictly limited mental capacity, was necessarily less happy than social man.⁹¹ Moreover, Rousseau's theory seemed to go against what was being said in Scripture, and other ancient religious texts, where the first humans were shown to have been created or to have emerged from the soil with their faculties already fully developed. These were amongst the standard arguments wheeled out against Rousseau, and we can also find them in the *History of Mankind*.⁹² Yet they only play a very minor role in Iselin's critique of Rousseau.

The point in question, according to Iselin, was not whether Rousseau's theory of the state of nature was, in fact, possible, or whether he was right in arguing that, at some point in time, man's mental capacities did not exceed those of common animals. Iselin made it clear that "the strict possibility of such a limited creature is not subject to any doubt. There is no inherent inconsistency in this idea. It thus belongs to the category of possible things."⁹³ The observation of very young children clearly showed that the notion of time was not a concept that men were born with but was something that developed very slowly and gradually. Nor did it seem a good strategy to question the coherence of Rousseau's account on the grounds that he had failed to back up his state of nature thesis with reliable historical evidence, especially since Rousseau himself did not consider it important whether this state of nature had actually happened. In fact, Rousseau had even insisted that the state of nature "should be considered as a state which no longer exists, which most likely has never existed, and which in all likelihood will

⁹¹ See for example p. 99: "Wenn also der Mensch des Herrn Rousseau ein wirkliches Ding wäre: so würde dennoch seine Glückseligkeit nichts weniger als wünschenswert seyn. Sie würde den Namen der Glückseligkeit nicht verdienen, welche eine reife und kostbare Frucht der Tugend und der Weisheit ist."

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 92: "Die H. Schrift lehret uns, dass die ersten Menschen mit weit grössern Fähigkeiten begabet aus den Händen des Schöpfers hervorgekommen sind, und die Beobachtungen einer gesunden Philosophie bestätigen nicht weniger die Meinung, dass nur zufällige Ursachen die mannigfaltigen Verschiedenheiten in den Arten und in den Trieben der Menschen verursacht haben".

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 93: "Die unbedingte Möglichkeit eines so eingeschränkten Wesens ist keinem Zweifel unterworfen. Es ergibt sich in dem Begriffe desselben kein Widerspruch. Es gehöret also mit in die Reihe der möglichen Dinge."

never exist in the future."⁹⁴ What many critics of Rousseau failed to notice, Iselin claimed, was that his insistence on the purely imaginary character of the state of nature was by no means an attempt to cover up some deficiency in his theory but rather constituted one of its core arguments. It was precisely *because* the existence of state of nature could not be verified that it could be presented as a neutral and ahistorical vantage point from which to evaluate (or respectively condemn) the teleological assumptions that the Moderns had made about the history of society.

5.4. *History versus hypothesis*

The only way to counter Rousseau's thesis effectively was to refute his claim about the purely imaginary, ahistorical character of the state of nature and to re-integrate it into the sphere of documented history. The way to achieve this was to show that any healthy, adult human, even one that roamed the virgin forest, could attain the level of mental development which historians and anthropologists had been able to observe in the most primitive tribes known to man. This appeared to be only a small adjustment to Rousseau's position, yet Iselin insisted that it in fact amounted to a key move in his anti-Rousseauian strategy.

The most decisive and most important point here is without doubt this: whether we can assume the first mental capacity of all of mankind to correspond to that of those humans known to us through experience and history. The rest will follow easily.⁹⁵

History, experience, and travellers' accounts of exotic primitive tribes, confirmed that men had lived (and in some cases continued to live) in a state of "near animal stupidity".⁹⁶ What distinguished the most primitive humans

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89; Iselin here paraphrases from the Introduction to the *Second Discourse*, p. 130.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93-94: "Der entscheidenste und der wichtigste Punct hiebey ist ohne Zweifel, ob wir bey dem ganzen menschlichen Geschlechte die erste Anlage der Seelenvermögen so voraussetzen können, wie wir dieselben bey denjenigen Menschen finden, welche uns die Erfahrung und die Geschichte bekannt machen. Die fernern Folgen werden sich ohne Mühe ergeben."

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

known to man from Rousseau's savage was not that they were moral agents, that they lived in stable societies, or were capable of reasoning, but simply the fact that they had a vague understanding of time (meaning, a vague recollection of past events and a vague anticipation of those to come), and were capable of forming at least some rudimentary general ideas.⁹⁷ According to Iselin, this was the mental level that any healthy adult could reach even left on his own. What Rousseau had described was merely the cognitive state of a child or an un-healthy, mentally retarded adult.

The fact that any healthy adult human could form general ideas and develop a rudimentary understanding of time, Iselin argued, could be proven without recourse to an argument about sociability or natural marriage. It was the imperative of self-preservation that required savage man to acquire a sense of time. Without a basic knowledge of the past and the future, he would be incapable of learning which fruits to eat, and which to avoid, which animals to pursue, and which to flee. What Rousseau had called savage man's acquired 'artificial instincts' in reality described a process of learning that could not have taken place if the latter was caught in an eternal present.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ On page 90-92 Iselin does point out to a few cases, especially those provided in the travel accounts of Garcilasso della Vega or Benjamin of Tudela, which would seem to confirm the existence of a Rousseauian animal man. In his history of Peru Vega, for example, "thut [...] solcher Menschen Meldung welche weder durch ein Haupt beherrscht wurden noch den Verstand hätten sich selbst zu beherrschen. Sie brachten sagte er, ihr Leben in einer unschuldigen Dummheit zu. Sie lebten unter einander wie Schaaf, und thaten einander weder Gutes noch Böses, mehr aus Unwissenheit und aus Mangel der Bosheit als aus Tugend." Benjamin of Tudela in turn reported about a tribe from around Assuan, and which lives entirely like common animals. "Sie nähren sich von Kräutern, welche sie an dem Ufer des Flusses Pison finden; Sie gehn überall nackt herum, und scheinen von allen Empfindungen anderer Menschen entblösset. Sie vermischen sich ohne Scheu, ohne Auswahl, ohne Rücksicht auf Verwandtschaft, auf Alter, oder auf Ordnung." Iselin insists that such sightings are not only extremely rare, but also highly improbable. "Dise Beyspiele sind indessen sehr selten und sehr vielen Zweifeln unterworfen." (p. 93) The most likely explanation of these occurrences is that these tribes had lost their prior civilisation either because of some widespread illness or because they had been forced to seek refuge in an alien, inhospitable environment.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84: "Es ist aber höchst wahrscheinlich dass der Mensch durch denselben [i.e. die Empfindung des gegenwärtigen Zustandes] allein nicht bestehen

Having shown that human survival itself required that natural, solitary man could form some general ideas, Iselin next had to explain why the human psyche did not continue simply to perform these simple operations, but managed slowly and continuously to increase its activity. Iselin suggested two main reasons. The first was an external one. In contrast to what had been claimed in the second *Discourse*, Iselin insisted that even the Rousseauian natural habitat, the virgin forest, presented more than just a scene of monotonous regularity, void of any possible source of stimulation. Even the virgin forest with its abundance of food was varied enough and held sufficient surprises to awaken man's curiosity and provide his mind with a continuous stream of new sensory impressions.⁹⁹ More importantly, Iselin maintained that men had developed simultaneously all over the globe, in different environments and climates, each of which provided different degrees of stimulation. This, he believed, basically explained why some peoples had developed faster than others.

5.5. *The active soul*

Besides being exposed to a continuous stream of external stimuli, man himself, or rather his soul, had a natural craving for new sensory impressions. Iselin developed this argument in great detail in Book One of the *History*. Book one, entitled *Psychological considerations of Man*, is without doubt the most tedious and driest part of Iselin's entire written work, a fact that did not go unnoticed by his contemporary readers. Julie Bondeli, for good reasons, complained that it was written in a "vrai stile psychologique".¹⁰⁰ Iselin must have been aware of this for, to his second edition, he wisely

könne. Wir können deshalb nicht anders als bey einem jeden erwachsenen Menschen zum mindesten den nidersten Grad der Erinnerung des Vergangenen und der Erwartung des Zukünftigen, und also von Begirhden und von Abscheu damit vereinigt voraussetzen."

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 95-96: "Indessen ist kein Zweifel, dass es der Natur der menschlichen Seele unmöglich sey stille zu stehen, sobald sich ein Anlass zum Fortgange darbeut und an disen löst es ihr die immer beschäftigte und unruhige Natur, deren Spiegel sie ist, selten fehlen."

¹⁰⁰ Letter to Zimmermann (8 May 1764), *Bondeli*, p. 285.

added a cautionary comment urging those readers who had little patience for lengthy and abstract "metaphysical enquiries" to simply skip the entire first section and start immediately with book two.¹⁰¹ In order to understand the philosophical foundations of both his critique of pity and his argument in favour of sociability it is, however, imperative to briefly follow at least some of the steps of Iselin's discussion of the human mind.

Iselin starts his account with a description of the soul (which he seems to derive mainly from the later works of Christian Wolff and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten).¹⁰² Man's soul, he argued, should be thought of as a black box, "a thing containing large amounts of darkness" which collected the objects that were being transmitted via the various senses.¹⁰³ The soul was thus not just a passive receptacle that was gradually being filled with incoming sensory data, but was in itself active. Connected to the soul, or rather part of it, was man's faculty of imagination or *Einbildungskraft*. At its most basic level, imagination simply compared incoming objects to those it had already received and judged whether they were alike or different. Since general ideas were nothing but stored and processed sensory information of single objects, that the mind had received over a period of time, imagination could also act as a memory, hence providing man with an elementary sense of time.

But man's imagination could perform a second trick: it could also create entirely new objects that had no direct link to the ideas it received via the senses. Iselin called this ability *Dichtungskraft* (which he distinguishes from mere *Einbildungskraft*) and which roughly translates as inventiveness. By uniting the faculty of memory with that of inventiveness, imagination could then produce a third faculty, namely *Vorhersehung* or the ability to

¹⁰¹ "Leser, welche, keine Liebhaber metaphysischer Untersuchungen sind, werden ersucht, zum wenigsten die erste Hälfte dieses Buchs zu übergehen, weil es über die Kräfte des Verfassers, das Licht und den Reitz über so trockene Gegenstände auszugiessen, welche er erwünscht hätte." *Über die Geschichte der Menschheit*, Zürich 1770, p. 18.

¹⁰² For a recent account of Wolff's moral philosophy, see Clemens Schwaiger, *Das Problem des Glücks im Denken Christian Wolffs. Eine quellen-, begriffs- und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Studie zu Schlüsselbegriffen seiner Ethik*, Stuttgart - Bad Cannstatt 1995.

¹⁰³ *Geschichte der Menschheit* (1764), vol. 1, p. 10.

foresee: the ability to create objects which the soul thought were likely to be confirmed by the senses at some point in the near future. It was from the combination of these three sub-faculties, memory, inventiveness, and the ability to foresee, Iselin argued, that ultimately all further faculties of the soul developed, such as common sense, reason, and wisdom.¹⁰⁴

Iselin attached great importance to the fact that every act of human imagination was at the same time also an act of judgement. This judgement could take two forms, according to whether the new objects that needed evaluating were sense impressions or ideas created by man's inventiveness. In the former case it took the form of a *sinnliches Urtheil*, a sensual judgement; in the latter case that of an intellectual judgement.¹⁰⁵ In either of these two cases the verdict was positive if the new object corresponded to or refined the already established notion of harmony; the verdict was negative if the object did not correspond to, or directly went against, the already established harmony.

The same capacity for judging new objects, Iselin claimed, was also the basis of the distinction between agreeable and disagreeable sentiments. Any incoming object that lead to the formation of a new general idea, or

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 4-7, see also p. 102-103 where Iselin gives the following summary: "Die Seele vergleicht in diesem Zustande ihre Vorstellungen. In dem vorhergehenden scheint sie nur ein ganz verwirrtes Gefühl der Ganzen Summe der gegenwärtigen Gegenstände und der Lust oder der Unlust welche daraus flossen, gehabt zu haben. Nun unterscheidet sie die gegenwärtigen Vorstellungen von einander, und die vergangenen von den gegenwärtigen. Aus verschiedenen Empfindungen setzt sie die Bilder von solchen zusammen, welche sie nie geföhlet hat. Sie fängt an diejenigen zu bemerken, welche ordentlich oder zufälliger Weise oft widerkommen. Sie verlangt oder verabscheuet diejenigen welche ihr Vergnügen oder Verdruss verursacht haben, und dähnet dises Gefühl nach und nach auf diejenigen Gegenstände aus welche sie wirklich noch nie empfunden hat. So verbinden sich ihre vergangenen, ihre gegenwärtigen und ihre zukünftigen Vorstellungen in ein Ganzes; so gewöhnet sie sich allmählich dieselben zu messen, zu erwegen und zu vergleichen: und so entstehet in ihr die schätzbare Eigenschaft welche man den gemeinen Verstand nennet; und welche man billig als die Grundlage des Unterschiedes zwischen dem Menschen und den Thieren ansieht."

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 7: "Schon die Wirkung des Gedächtnisses, der Dichtungskraft, der Erwartung, ja im Grunde ein jedes Bewusstseyn ist ein Urtheil, und wenn es sich nicht auf allgemeine Begriffe, sondern nur auf einzelne Empfindungen gründet, ein sinnliches Urtheil."

developed an already existing one, increased the activity of the soul and hence prompted an agreeable sentiment, whereas any idea that slowed down the activity of the soul caused a disagreeable sentiment. Objects that merely confirmed already existing general ideas were neither agreeable nor disagreeable but simply indifferent.¹⁰⁶ It was the consciousness of an agreeable sentiment that constituted pleasure, that of a disagreeable sentiment, displeasure (Iselin uses the term *Unlust*, rather than *Schmerz*, which would be the proper German translation of pain).

Moreover, if the agreeable sentiment was due to an idea transmitted by the senses, it was called *sensual pleasure* or displeasure, whereas if the sentiment was due to an idea created by inventiveness, it was called *intellectual* or *reasonable pleasure* or *displeasure*:

[W]hatever causes man pleasure does so only by enhancing the activity of his thoughts. Whatever causes him displeasure does so only in hindering or slowing down the latter's activity. Hence all of man's needs consist of nothing but ideas. Without [new ideas] the entire mechanism of his soul comes to a standstill.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11: "Einer jeden Vorstellung entspricht in der Seele eine Empfindung von Zufriedenheit oder von Unzufriedenheit, nachdem sie dadurch in der Entwicklung ihrer Fähigkeiten auf eine ihr merkliche Weise gefördert oder gehindert wird. Diejenigen welche die Wirksamkeit der Seele befördern und erhöhen erzeugen die angenehmen Empfindungen. Diejenigen welche dieselben hemmen oder schwächen verursachen die unangenehmen, und diejenigen welche weder das eine noch das andere thun, und also ih ihr keine merklichen Aenderung verursachen sind ihr gleichgültig." Here, Iselin seems to have followed chapters one and nine of Kames' *Elements of Criticism* (which Iselin referred to on page 25, note* of the *History*) which give an almost identical account of the origin of agreeable and disagreeable sentiments. See *Elements of Criticism*, vol. 1, (Third Edition) Edinburgh 1765, p. 23-25 and 326: "It appears then that we are framed by nature to relish order and connection. When an object is introduced by a proper connection, we are conscious of a certain pleasure arising from that circumstance. [...] Every work of art that is conformable to the natural course of our ideas, is so far agreeable; and every work of art that reverses that course, is so far disagreeable." Also, "Congruity and propriety, wherever perceived, appear agreeable; and every agreeable object produceth in the mind a pleasant emotion: incongruity and impropriety, on the other hand, are disagreeable; and of course produce painful emotions."

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25: "[A]lles was dem Menschen Vergnügen gewähret thut es nur dadurch, dass es die Wirksamkeit seiner Gedanken unterhält. Alles was in ihm Missvergnügen erwecket, thut nichts anders als dass es den Lauf derselben schwächt oder

Like Sulzer in his *Recherches sur l'origine des sentimens agréables et désagréables*, Iselin insisted on a strict hierarchy among the different categories of pleasure. Pleasure that merely derived from sensual ideas presented the lowest category; they were "very limited" and, when extended too far, soon lost their attraction. "They [lost] much of their original value", because "habit rendered them indifferent". Intellectual pleasures, on the other hand, were "infinite in their variety and thus inexhaustible".

With each and every [intellectual] pleasure man's soul reaches a higher plane; with each pleasure his taste, his ability to recognise and appreciate the beautiful and sensually perfect is being increased. While his physical forces are constrained: those of his mind, whose purpose it is to continue on its limitless path to perfection, are not.¹⁰⁸

The fact that intellectual pleasures were infinite, both in number and degree of refinement, did not yet fully explain why man would necessarily want to pursue and experience higher forms of pleasure. What was missing was a proper motivational force. Iselin claimed that its origin could be found in the interplay of man's ability to foresee with his awareness of agreeable or disagreeable sentiments. Imagining future agreeable or disagreeable sentiments itself generated new forms of pleasure and displeasure. According to Iselin, this pleasure (generated by imagining a future possible good) was always accompanied by the "wish of wanting to see the latter become real".¹⁰⁹ Iselin called this wish 'inclination' or 'liking' [*Neigung*]. Finally, if an inclination concerned the sensuous part of the soul, it became a desire and the desire (when it became stabilised) in turn became a passion; while an inclination that concerned the intellectual part of the soul, namely his reason, generated man's will.

Iselin's dual insistence on the fact that man's 'inclination' prompted him to seek agreeable sentiments, as well as on the hierarchy between sensuous

hemmet. Daher bestehen alle Bedürfnisse des Menschen in Begriffen. Ohne dieselbe stehet das ganze Triebwerk seiner Seele still."

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14: "Mit einem jeden Genusse wird dem Geiste des Menschen ein neues Feld eröffnet; Mit jedem Genusse wird sein Geschmack, seine Fertigkeit das Schöne, das sinnlich vollkommne zu empfinden erhöht. So sehr die Kräfte des Leibes eingeschränket sind: so wenig sind es die von dem Geiste, dessen grosse Bestimmung einen unbegrenzten Fortgang zur Vollkommenheit erheischet."

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

and intellectual pleasures, seemed to imply that human mental development followed a natural trajectory, leading from the realm of sensuousness and the passions to the sphere of reason and a well-formed will. Since intellectual pleasures were longer lasting than merely sensuous ones, men would have a natural motive to cultivate the former. Furthermore, since the continuous development of his mental faculties, the better understanding of the external world, and the rise of a critical reason, would allow man to revise previously established erroneous general ideas, he also had the tools to overcome the influence of the passions. Man, it seemed, had a natural tendency to become virtuous.

The most enlightened and most regulated reason must also naturally produce the most noble and ordered will. It is [the latter] that generates virtue, this divine faculty to will and to execute the Good in the highest possible degree that man is capable of. The greatest mind will hence also be the wisest and most virtuous, and at the same time enjoy the highest degree of happiness.¹¹⁰

History and experience, Iselin emphasised, presented a very different picture. Rather than following the path of a successive development from the sphere of the senses to that of reason, the trajectory of man's mental faculties was almost immediately brought to a near standstill under the overwhelming weight of the passions. The main reason for this, Iselin argued, resided in the inability of early man's judging faculty in the imagination to establish correct general ideas. Anyone who had ever observed how small children tried to make sense of the external world, Iselin maintained, would see that the mind of savage man, just like that of infants, was unable to establish correct relations between objects. Instead, savage man's imagination "often associated random causalities [and] false as well as phantastic ideas with objects which had nothing in common with them."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 22-23: "Der erleuchtetste und der regelmässige Verstand muss also natürlicher weise auch den edelsten und den bestgeordneten Willen zeugen. Durch diesen entsteht in dem Menschen die Tugend diese göttliche Fertigkeit das Gute in der grössten einem Wesen möglichen Vollkommenheit zu wollen und auszuüben. Der grösste Geist wird also auch der weiseste und der tugendhafteste seyn, und zugleich den höchsten Grad der Glückseligkeit geniessen."

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 49.

The history of individual man shows how much he is prone to error and how easily he can adopt an entire chaos of imagined and chimerical terms under the guise of truth. Moreover, if we consider how naturally he takes a liking to these [erroneous] terms, and how quickly they can enhance the activity of his soul: we will then easily see how such an erroneous way of thinking becomes an insurmountable habit.¹¹²

Hence,

Even before the principles of reason are able to acquire some strength within the soul, both sensual desires [and passions] and habit have already become almighty.¹¹³

The soul of savage man would still continue slowly to develop its intellectual faculties; it would also still be sensitive to higher forms of pleasure; yet once false general ideas had affected man's sensuous desires, and the desires had turned into habits and passions, none of his intellectual faculties could have any effect on his actions. Moreover, since savage man's sensuous ideas were almost exclusively determined by his desire for self-preservation, he would be profoundly selfish.

Iselin insisted that his discussion of the faculties of the soul was of immediate relevance for Rousseau's theory of savage man in at least two respects. First of all, it contradicted Rousseau's claim that man was born with a free will. If, as Iselin suggested, man's will was nothing but the *Neigung*, the 'liking' or affective side of reason, it was difficult to see how pre-rational man could be the possessor of a will, in the proper sense. It was even more difficult to see how he could have a *free* will, since its existence presupposed not just the prior establishment of reason but the establishment of a highly developed critical reason that could grasp the true relation between objects with such clarity and force that it could neutralise the habits and desires prompted by the soul's sensuous faculties. The concept of free will thus understood was the "late fruit of an enlightened mind": it was not something men were born with. The free will had to be acquired. To argue, as Rousseau

¹¹² Ibid., p. 52: "Diese Geschichte des einzelnen Menschen zeigt, wie leicht derselbe in den Irrthum geräht, und wie leicht dem selben ein ganzes Chaos eingebildeter und chimärischer Begriffe unter der Gestalt der Wahrheit eigen werden kan."

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 55: "Ehe noch die Grundsätze der Vernunft in der Seele einige Stärke haben können, sind die sinnlichen Triebe durch die Gewalt der Gewohnheit darinn bereits allmächtig."

had done, that savage man in the state of nature differed only from common beasts on the grounds of his potential perfectibility and his free will was thus simply nonsensical. This implied further that there was no basis from which to argue that pity could be classified as a 'virtue'.

5.6. *Pity does not establish regulative behaviour*

A similar misunderstanding of the forces acting within the soul, Iselin continued, was at the basis of Rousseau's erroneous belief that pity in the state of nature could serve as a regulative mechanism that moderated man's 'ardent desire for self-preservation'. Iselin fully agreed with Rousseau, that man with the help of his imagination, could participate in others' sentiments of pain. What he rejected was the idea that this sentiment of pity could have any bearing on the behaviour of savage man. Given the way in which the desires and passions prevented the soul from forming more refined and correct general ideas it was inconceivable that 'the voice of pity' could have any moderating effect on savage man's overwhelming desire for self-preservation. Savage man acted the way he did "not so much out of wickedness, than because of a certain insensitivity caused by ignorance."¹¹⁴

In this state man would not be insensitive to others' suffering, but his own present enjoyment would suppress all other ideas. The desire for self-preservation would be almighty. He would not hesitate to force another person into a state of utmost misery if this would shield him from even the smallest annoyance or procure him the smallest of pleasures. He would be incapable of foreseeing how his action would affect himself, let alone how it would affect some other person.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 115: "Dises geschiehet nicht so sehr aus Bösartigkeit, als aus einer gewissen Unempfindlichkeit, davon der Grund in der Unwissenheit der Folgen ligt."

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 105: "In disem Stande würde der Mensch bey fremdem Leiden nicht unfühler seyn, aber sein eignes gegenwärtiges Vergnügen würde alle andern Gedanken unterdrücken. Die Selbstliebe wäre bey ihm allmächtig. Um sich selbst den geringsten Verdruss zu verhüten, um sich die geringste Lust zu verschaffen, würde er sich nicht scheuen einen andern in das grösste Unglück zu stürzen. Für sich selbst würde er eine nur wenig entfernte Folge einer That nicht vorher sehen, vielmehr also für andre."

Still less acceptable than Rousseau's argument that pity moderated man's 'ardent desire for self-preservation', was his claim that the sentiment of pity in the state of nature could establish principled behaviour. Rousseau's negative version of the Golden rule, he argued, was just as metaphysical as those which had been suggested by the Moderns; and it was with no little satisfaction that Iselin could point out that Rousseau, the great critic of the Moderns, had committed the same mistake as his adversaries.

After having reduced all of [savage man's] desires to that of food, rest and a female, he then attributes to him an instinct the perception of which requires not only the faculty of reason but even a mathematical calculation. The maxim, *do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, is according to [Rousseau] far too difficult for him. But this one: *Do your good with the least possible harm to others*, is in his eyes very simple and entirely natural to his animal man.

However, if we think about it carefully: we will be forced to admit that the latter is incapable of following either of these principles. He is clearly unable to perform such operations of critical reasoning.¹¹⁶

In a footnote he developed this point even further:

The natural sentiment, which Rousseau links to the principle of his calculating morality does not lead anywhere near this. The gentle voice of nature, he says, will prevent any sturdy savage from robbing a defenceless child or weak old man of his painfully collected food as long as he can hope to find his own somewhere else. It is a very big step from this sentiment which even in animal man, is easily suffocated by the smallest of occurrences, to this moral calculation; and even this sentiment is far too selfish and uncertain. I simply cannot see how it could serve as the basis of a reasonable system of ethics.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 126-127. "Nachdem er alle desselben Begierden auf die Nahrung, auf die Ruhe, und auf ein Weibgen eingeschränket hat, schreibt er ihm einen Grundtrieb zu, dessen Empfindung nicht nur Ueberlegung, sondern so gar eine mathematische Berechnung erfordert. Der Satz, *thue andern, was du gern hast, dass sie dir thuen*, ist nach ihm für denselben gar zu tiefsinnig. Diser aber: *Befördere dein Wohl mit so wenig Nachtheil deines Nächsten als es möglich ist*, ist in seinen Augen ganz einfältig, und seinem thierischen Menschen ganz natürlich. Wenn wir es indessen genau überlegen: so ist dieser unfähig sowohl die eine als die andre diser Regeln auszuüben. Er ist zu solchen überlegten Gedanken gewiss nicht geschickt."

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 127, note *. "Das natürliche Gefühl, welchem Herr Rousseau den Grundsatz seiner berechnenden Morale an die Seite setzet, führet noch lang nicht so weit. Die sanfte Stimme der Natur sagt er wird einen jeden starken Wilden abhalten einem schwachen Kinde oder einem kraftlosen Greise seine mit Mühe erworbene

Because of the negligible impact of the sentiment of pity on the soul of savage man, as well as the latter's inability to grasp the consequences of his future actions, it was highly implausible, Iselin concluded, that savage man could appreciate, let alone implement, either version of the Golden rule. The different versions of the Golden rule, as they had been formulated by scripture or the natural jurists, were metaphysical principles, established (or confirmed) by reason. Rousseau's own version was no exception, despite his claim to the contrary.

5.7. *Pain and pleasure*

Having ruled out Rousseau's attempt to ground ethics in pity, Iselin then proposed an alternative way to establish the natural foundations of morality; a foundation which, as he put it, was even more minimalist than what had been suggested in the second *Discourse*:

Instead of these two principles [the positive and negative versions of the Golden rule] we can accept an unspecified feeling of pleasure at others' pleasure and of pain at others' sorrow as a fundamental driving force [Grundtrieb] of the human soul and as the source of all sociable sentiments.¹¹⁸

All of man's moral potential could be reduced to his ability to participate in other's pleasure and pain. According to Iselin, this was going back even further than Rousseau's radical dismemberment of civil man. Showing man's capacity for fellow-feeling – Iselin also calls this man's *sympathetic* soul – did not amount to an argument in favour of man's natural virtuousness in any strict sense. Lacking a functioning will (let alone a *free* will),

Nahrung wegzunehmen, wenn er selbst hoffet die seinige anderswo zu finden. Es ist von diser Empfindung die auch bey einem thierischen Menschen noch manchen Abfall findet und durch eine jede Kleinigkeit ersticket werden kan, noch ein starker Schritt bis zu der moralischen Berechnung; und selbst dises Gefühl ist gar zu eigennützig und zu unsicher. Ich sehe einmal nicht wie man es als die Grundlage einer vernünftigen Sittenlehre ansehen könne."

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 128: "Anstatt diser zwo Regeln können wir ein dunkles Gefühl von Vergnügen bey andrer Vergnügen und von Mitleid bey andrer Betrübnis als einen Grundtrieb der menschlichen Seele und als die Quelle aller gesellschaftlichen Empfindungen ansehen."

savage man at this stage of his mental development was entirely amoral. And yet with this capacity for sympathy man already possessed the necessary mechanism that set off the long and complex process of socialisation and the acquisition of moral knowledge.

Nor was Iselin's argument a classical restatement of the idea that men were naturally sociable in the sense that they were immediately drawn to one another on the basis of love. Iselin was quite explicit about what he considered to be the futility of the long-standing debate about whether man's sociability could ultimately be reduced to some self-seeking motive. It was of little importance whether men first associated, as Rousseau had maintained, for the temporary purpose of hunting large animals, or whether they did so for some other reason. The crucial point was to show that once men came together, even temporarily, they would immediately experience a special kind of pleasure in each others' company.

As soon as the smallest natural need compels man to enter into a sentimental relationship with another being of his species: these sensations will soon become all the more powerful the less they are overshadowed by other sentiments. Nothing heightens the activity of the soul as much as social relations.¹¹⁹

Nothing could contribute more to men's mental activity than the presence of other human beings. Men would immediately and automatically share others' feelings of pleasure and pain and as a consequence increase their own sentiments.

The example of others' pleasure automatically prompts the soul, unless it is governed by other motivations or sensations, into a pleasant activity. The misery and suffering that it witnesses on the other hand naturally slows down its activity, if it is not being stimulated and entertained by stronger objects.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 115: "So bald das kleinste natürliche Bedürfnis den Menschen mit einem andern Wesen seiner Art in eine [sic] Verhältnis von Empfindungen treten machet: so werden auch dieselben desto mächtiger, je weniger sie durch andre Gefühle entkräftet werden. Die Wirksamkeit der Seele wird durch nichts so sehr in Bewegung gebracht als durch den gesellschaftlichen Umgang". See also p. 38: "Nichts hat in den Menschen einen grössern Einfluss als der Mensch selbst."

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 129: "Das Beyspiel fremder Freude setzet ohne ihre besondere Wahl die Seele die von andern Absichten und Empfindungen nicht beherrschet wird in eine angenehme Bewegung. Das Elend und das Leiden dessen sie Zeuginn ist, hemmet hingegen natürlicher Weise den Lauf ihrer Wirksamkeit, wenn nicht stärkere Vorstellungen denselben unterhalten und befördern."

Through communication men could share each other's pool of ideas and refine their own general ideas. They would gradually improve their appreciation of order and harmony.

Man is thus the richest source of pleasure and happiness for man. Each and every sociable sentiment carries the fruit of an infinitely pleasant sensation. Every friendly word that one man speaks to another man is an act of goodness that heightens and exercises the activity of the soul.¹²¹

The same principle applied to communications of an earlier, pre-rational and non-linguistic kind. Even savage men could observe and imitate each other's behaviour and skills, and in doing so acquire a degree of practical experience which they would have found impossible to gain had they remained strictly solitary creatures.

The simple sight of man provides the other with an occasion to please the nobler instincts of his soul. The power of example consists only in the fact that man cannot learn something from another [man] without sensing a particular pleasure and learning new ways to employ the forces of his mind and body.¹²²

"It is this sweet feeling of pleasure at [the sight of] others' pleasure", Iselin concluded, "that unites man with another man without any further ties or needs. Even if they had nothing to say to each other, if they had nothing to demand from one another: they would still feel this special sweetness of being together."¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 39: "Der Mensch ist also für den Menschen die reichste Quelle von Vergnügungen und von Glückseligkeit. Ein jedes gesellschaftliches Gefühl ist an unendlichen angenehmen Empfindungen fruchtbar. Ein jedes freundliches Wort, das der Mensch zu dem Menschen redet, ist eine Gutthat, durch welche die Wirksamkeit seiner Seele erhöht und geübet wird."

¹²² Ibid., p. 40: "Ein jeder Anblick eines Menschen gibt dem andern einen Anlass die feinern Triebe seiner Seele zu vergnügen. Die Macht des Beyspiels besteht nur darinn, dass ein Mensch von dem andern nicht ohne eine besondere Freude eine neue Weise ablehret die Kräfte seiner Seele oder seines Leibes wirksam zu machen."

¹²³ Ibid., p. 130: "Eben dises süsse Gefühl des Vergnügens bey andrer Vergnügen vereinigt Menschen mit Menschen ohne andre Bande und Bedürfnisse. Wenn sie einander nichts zu sagen, wenn sie von einander nichts zu verlangen hätten: so würden sie doch eine besondere Süssigkeit finden bey einander zu seyn."

Once again, it is important to realise that Iselin's position, despite its open critique of Rousseau, remained firmly committed to a social interpretation of morality. Man's understanding of moral rules and principles of justice was the result of a slow process of socialisation; it was not something he was born with. Morality started once men began judging one another; once they tried to avoid being censured by others and complied with what they thought were others' ideas of conformity. The point of establishing man's natural ability to share the pleasure and pain of others was to ensure that this history of morality did not necessarily have to lead to sceptical conclusions; that there was an underlying principle which guaranteed that the development of moral man was more than just the result of human selfishness and concupiscence. Likewise, showing that man felt 'this special sweetness of being together' did not imply that man followed an inevitable trajectory from selfish savagery to enlightened benevolence, that modern men were actually good Christians and convincing moral agents; all it aimed to show was that, in a perfect world, man would have developed behavioral patterns that fully corresponded to the principles of the positive version of the Golden rule. Confirming the idea of natural sociability, Iselin claimed, meant establishing a normative vantage point from which it became possible to analyse why it was that man had deviated from his natural trajectory, why certain societies had shown such a promising start, and why they had suddenly collapsed. It was only from this perspective that it became possible to view the history of mankind as something more than simply the history of man's continuous self-alienation and, instead, as a vast field of information that held the answers to the crucial question of how mankind could be gradually brought back to its natural trajectory and set up a more reliable and durable regime of natural liberty.