

**THOMAS ABBT'S *VOM TODE FÜR DAS VATERLAND* (1761)  
AND THE FRENCH DEBATES ON MONARCHICAL  
PATRIOTISM<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract.** Thomas Abbt's *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* (*On Dying for the Fatherland*) (1761) is a central text of eighteenth-century German patriotism. This article explores its philosophical and political content against the backdrop of the French debates of the 1750s on modern monarchical patriotism. Montesquieu launched these debates by describing the moral life of modern commercial monarchies in Mandevillian terms as a quagmire of materialist selfishness. Civil and military service, he argued, could only be entrusted to the privileged non-commercial estate of nobility, which had preserved its distinct pre-modern principle of noble honour. Patriotism was the motivating principle only of the populace of republics. Its content was self-renunciation in the name of political and social equality. A number of thinkers, including Abbt, criticised Montesquieu's theory of modern monarchy. French critics of Montesquieu based patriotism on men's self-interest and desire for distinction, but disagreed with each other about the political implications of this analysis. Abbt's solution was to develop a novel theory of aesthetic patriotism as the foundation of modern monarchy.

**Keywords:** patriotism, honour, monarchy, German Enlightenment, Montesquieu, Helvétius, Abbt

### **1. Introduction**

At the height of the Seven Years War (1761) when Frederick the Great's Prussia was facing military defeat, a small treatise entitled *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* (*On Dying for the Fatherland*) was published in Berlin. In this treatise

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Thomas Abbt (1738–1766), the twenty-two-year-old mathematics tutor of the Prussian University of Frankfurt/Oder, invited Prussians to commit the ultimate civic act – to die for the fatherland. He presented a series of arguments to demonstrate that modern monarchies in general and Prussia in particular deserved such a sacrifice and that monarchical subjects were capable of it. In Abbt's vision, Prussia was to experience substantial moral rebirth, if the readiness for such sacrifices really emerged within its populace.

Abbt's treatise is generally appreciated as a central text of eighteenth-century German patriotism. Particularly during the last quarter of century it has been the focus of historical interest. The main issue of controversy is whether Abbt's text exemplifies Enlightenment ideas or points to substantially new ideological developments. The scholars of the 1980s emphasised its fundamentally universalistic, individualistic and rational analysis of patriotism. They presented Abbt as a typical 'bourgeois' thinker, one of the first Germans to voice the enlightened demands of social emancipation and political participation (see e.g. Vierhaus 1980, Bödeker 1981, Prignitz 1981, Batscha 1989, cf. also Redekop 2000). Recently a number of commentators have challenged this view and started to draw attention to the particularistic, collectivistic and emotional elements in Abbt's argument. Assuming that these features are uncharacteristic of mainstream Enlightenment political philosophy and typical of 'nationalistic' political theory instead, these commentators have disputed Abbt's status as an 'enlightened patriot'. Some scholars have suggested that the new *Sturm und Drang* or pre-Romantic ideas are manifest in Abbt's ground-breakingly 'nationalistic' treatise (see e.g. Burgdorf 2000). Others have more tentatively begun to stress the 'instability' of the individualistic Enlightenment ideal of patriotism. Abbt's text, according to them, exemplifies this instability, as the collective entity (fatherland) has fully submerged the individual there. This way the Enlightenment discourse of patriotism has been identified as the breeding-ground of the emerging nationalism (Herrmann 1996, Hellmuth 1998, Blitz 2000).

These different modern interpretations have generally taken little interest in the contemporary philosophical context of Abbt's treatise. Yet such a contextualisation is indispensable for reconstructing his philosophical argument with the necessary precision and for establishing the original aspects of his work. In particular, the wider European context of *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* has received almost no attention. The aim of the present article is to begin to remedy this shortcoming. I shall show that Abbt's treatise is to be seen as a contribution to pan-European debates on monarchical patriotism. It proposed a distinctive type of political reform programme within these debates, and with a view specifically to Prussia. These debates were re-launched in France in the 1750s and thus I shall set Abbt's ideas against the French ideas in particular. Thereby we shall also gain a new perspective on its status as an 'enlightened' or 'nationalistic' treatise and may even begin to see a distinctive way to transcend this putative dichotomy altogether.

There were two general topics in the French and European debates on monarchical patriotism that Abbt picked up in particular in *Vom Tode für das*

*Vaterland*. The first concerned the legacy of Machiavelli in modern monarchical politics. Following Frederick the Great's own commitment to 'anti-Machiavellian monarchy,' Abbt argued that modern absolute monarchy, in which the king upheld the rule of law by his enlightened will was a legitimate state form and thus qualified as a 'fatherland.' This argument was premised on the idea that fundamental transformations had occurred in modern politics. Modern hereditary monarchies were stable and large – they could not easily be overthrown by internal tyrants or external aggressors. Moreover, following the example of the commercial republics of England and the Netherlands, modern monarchies, too, had embarked on the pursuit of economic growth as the basis of national military power. Commerce flourished in the conditions of peace and the rule of law, and thus severe constraints were placed on monarchs' actions in modern times. Modern monarchs were increasingly aware of the coincidence of their well-understood private interests with those of their people. At the same time they retained significant power to 'shape the laws according to the new circumstances-'. (Abbt 1996:602)<sup>2</sup> Abbt attempted to show that Frederick the Great was committed to following such ideals in his governmental policies.<sup>3</sup>

Second, Abbt's pamphlet was a contribution to the contemporary debates on the possibility of patriotism as the principle of popular behaviour in a monarchy.<sup>4</sup> In this article I shall focus on these debates in particular. Fundamentally, they concerned the relationship between the economic and moral preconditions of national security and greatness. It was widely accepted by the 1750s that modern economy was based on a certain degree of inequality and luxury concomitant with it.<sup>5</sup> Wars – especially the Seven Years War – forced the philosophers to focus particularly on the problem of military valour. Were modern, increasingly economically oriented men capable of patriotic fighting? Which passion could be relied on as their motivation? Under which conditions could this passion be sustained or cultivated?

I shall discuss Abbt's treatise against the background of the three most important French theories of patriotism of the 1750s. First, Charles de Montesquieu presented a highly original comparative theory of the socio-economic and moral foundations of different forms of government in his *De l'esprit des lois*. He denied the possibility of popular patriotism in modern monarchies, associating it with republican self-renunciation. Gabriel François Coyer in *Dissertation sur le vieux mot 'Patrie'* (1755) and *La Noblesse Commerçante* (1756) and Claude-Adrien Helvétius in *De l'Esprit* (1758) suggested distinct alternatives to Montesquieu's analysis of

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<sup>2</sup> All translations from *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* are mine.

<sup>3</sup> I elaborate this interpretation of Abbt's theory of monarchy in detail in my PhD dissertation 'Thomas Abbt and the Philosophical Genesis of German Nationalism' (in progress). For Frederick the Great's notion of 'anti-Machiavellian politics' see Hont (2005:29f.). For a different recent interpretation of the origins of Abbt's theory of monarchy see Zurbuchen (2002) and Zurbuchen (manuscript).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kapossy (2003:108–110, 113).

<sup>5</sup> For the central issues in the luxury debates of the first half of the eighteenth century see Hont (forthcoming).

monarchical sociability and searched for a form of patriotism that would not require self-renunciation. Abbt shared much of their critique of Montesquieu, but came up with a very different solution to the problem of monarchical patriotism.

## 2. Montesquieu on patriotism and monarchical honour

In the ‘Tale of the Troglodytes’ in his *Persian Letters* (1721) Montesquieu distanced himself clearly from ‘Epicureanism,’ the view that sensual pleasure and self-interest were men’s only concerns. Humans had self-regarding and other-regarding passions. They were also capable of a disinterested love of virtue and justice. However, Montesquieu also made clear that such other-regarding passions were naturally weaker than self-interest. Particularly in the conditions of economic and social inequality the selfish passions of ambition, avarice and envy began to dominate the human soul and interactions in the society at large (Montesquieu 1993:52–61, 162f.).

### 2.1. Republican patriotism

Montesquieu’s famous classification of state forms in *De l’esprit des lois* rested on the same foundations.<sup>6</sup> Republican regimes, forms of government in which sovereignty resided in the people or part of the people, required pervasive virtue in the population and thus could only be based on a substantial degree of socio-economic equality. The initial legislative frameworks in republics regulated the citizens’ property accumulation and transfer and restrained or prohibited their engagement in commerce. The laws regulated also their spending in general, teaching the republicans to renounce themselves so as to preserve social equality.<sup>7</sup> Self-renunciation set free men’s natural ‘passion for general order,’ one that in conditions of inequality was stifled by self-interest. This passion led to ‘goodness of mores’ and was supported by the ‘goodness of mores’ in turn.<sup>8</sup> Republican virtue was identical to patriotism, since its essence was nothing but the love of the laws of one’s native republic (Montesquieu 1989:43).

### 2.2. Sociability in modern monarchies

Montesquieu defined monarchy (the dominant state form in Europe) as a form of government in which one man rules the state through the laws. Montesquieu argued that modern monarchs were beginning to be ‘cured from Machiavel-

<sup>6</sup> See particularly books V and VII of *The Spirit of the Laws*.

<sup>7</sup> For republican political economy see (Carrithers 2001).

<sup>8</sup> There is a long-standing debate on the connection between republican virtue and moral virtue for Montesquieu, and the status of virtue in Montesquieu’s politics in general. A good discussion of this issue can be found in Keohane (1980 and 1972). For recent views see Carrithers (2001) and Nelson (2004:163–176).

lianism' thanks to the triumphal progress of commerce in modern times, but emphasised that the crucial guarantee of moderate government in modern monarchy was the subordinate, intermediate and dependent powers, particularly the hereditary nobility (Montesquieu 1989:10, 18, 349).

According to Montesquieu, monarchies were based on inequality, and thus could not have virtue and patriotism as their principle. Monarchical social interaction was animated by 'honour,' an inegalitarian principle in itself. Honour was part of the cultural heritage of Germanic nations. Physical strength and death-scourning courage had been the criteria of honour and the instruments of justice for these warrior nations (Montesquieu 1989:552f., 559f.). In the feudal (Gothic) monarchy that emerged after the conquest of the Roman imperial territories by those tribes, each rank developed its own laws of honour, while cowardice and single-minded pursuit of material gain were scorned by all of them. The laws of honour were more important than any other laws, even those of their country. Honour was highly useful for regulating human affairs and motivating ambitious actions (within the limits set by its own code). Nevertheless, it was fundamentally a principle of false morality, because it was based on an elevated notion of self and not on benevolence or love of virtue (Montesquieu 1989:26–28, 34).

Modern monarchies were undergoing a great transformation. Thanks to the opportunities provided by the modern commerce of luxury, a particularly dynamic system of economy, fervent avarice and envy had become the dominant passions of the monarchical people: 'nobody likes to be poorer than somebody whom he recently saw just below him. [---] This attitude is spreading through the nation: the scene is one of universal industry and ingenuity' (Montesquieu 1993:195). People's competitive passions were increasingly firmly locked in the transactional structures of reciprocity in such a system: 'And happily, men are in a situation such that, though their passions inspire in them the thought of being wicked, they nevertheless have an interest in not being so' (Montesquieu 1989:390f.).

The most important modern development was that wealth or property was becoming directly convertible into social prestige. This new kind of honour created a further 'distress' necessary for a thriving economy, because everyone could now pursue it. Following Bernard Mandeville,<sup>9</sup> Montesquieu argued that in large cities men had begun to make use of their anonymity and to counterfeit status by relying simply on the visual representation of ranks in clothing, equipage and housing. Although they thereby became even more similar and as a result were not noticed at all, everyone received pleasure from imagining what others (might) think about him. Utility (greed) and honour had now joined hands with each other (Montesquieu 1989:97).

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<sup>9</sup> In his scandalous *Fable of the Bees* (1714, 1723) Mandeville argued that private property connected men's desire for luxury (utility) and distinction (pride). In particular, modern fashion industries provided pride with its lifeblood. The larger and richer society became, the more it relied on the visibility of ranks. The anonymity of large cities created the possibility of counterfeiting social standing by simply appearing with the appropriate ornaments of rank (Hont forthcoming: 13f).

### 2.3. Noble honour in modern monarchy

Montesquieu endorsed the beneficial secondary order in modern society, but he was convinced that public service could not be entrusted with the men whose property was at the mercy of the dynamism of commerce and who were obsessed with money and social prestige based on it. Financial independence and security as well as reliable principled motivation and loyalty to the king were the indispensable qualities of a civil servant and military officer. This was one of the main reasons why Montesquieu claimed that hereditary nobility pertained to the 'essence' of monarchy. Noble land-estates guaranteed a secure economic basis for the nobles to provide public services, while nobility's pre-modern principle of honour excluded trading honour for wealth. The nobles therefore stood outside the power of the monarch and could constrain his government.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, only the noble officer corps had a distinctive spirit and willingness to risk their lives, as their principle of honour led them to regard military service as their duty of honour as well as the best chance to acquire distinction and renown (Montesquieu 1989:351). Although monarchical people increasingly saw noble honour as a historical curiosity, they could be expected to defer to the time-honoured authority of the nobles who continued to submit themselves to such high requirements (Montesquieu 1989:227).

The nobility was thus to be kept in isolation from the rest of the society engaged in the pursuit of wealth and false honour based on financial success. Montesquieu pleaded with the French reformers to discard all their plans of undermining the legal status of nobility in society<sup>11</sup> and rejected also categorically the idea of 'commercial nobility', advocated by Voltaire and many others. As he put it, in France 'this would be the way to destroy the nobility, without being of any use for the commerce' (Montesquieu 1989:350).<sup>12</sup> It was by no means contingent that 'over the past two or three centuries, the kingdom ha[d] endlessly increased its power,' because such things 'must be attributed to the goodness of its laws and not to fortune, which does not have this sort of consistency' (Montesquieu 1989:351). France had found an ingenious way of combining the economic and moral sources of military power.

### 3. The abbé Coyer's response to Montesquieu and the debate on 'commercial nobility'

One of the first and most cogent critics of Montesquieu's theory of modern monarchy was the abbé Coyer, a member of the circle of political economists around Vincent de Gournay, the Superintendent of Commerce in France from

<sup>10</sup> For noble honour as a constraint upon the power of the monarch see Mosher (2001).

<sup>11</sup> 'In monarchy [the laws] must work to sustain that nobility for whom honor is, so to speak, both child and father' (Montesquieu 1989:55).

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed reconstruction of Montesquieu's defence of non-commercial hereditary nobility see Adam (2003:144–146).

1751. In 1755 Coyer anonymously published a treatise *Sur le vieux mot de patrie* in which he set out to refute Montesquieu's antithesis between inequality and patriotism.<sup>13</sup> According to Coyer the absence of patriotism in modern monarchies resulted from misguided monarchical absolutism, which treated the people as the means for the aims of the king and the state (Coyer 1755:12–13). The nation was polarised into the rich and the poor because of the absolutist government's enduring neglect of the interest of the people at large. The people so oppressed were resigned, rather than competitive and industrious. No wonder they regarded ancient patriots as 'illustrious fools' (Coyer 1755:25f.).

Coyer insisted that the situation would change if governments treated the people as mothers their children – with equal love, but with attention to their special needs and capacities. He referred to the example of the Antonine emperor Trajan, who had succeeded in restoring patriotism in a society based on luxury (Coyer 1755:38, 31; 41). The example of ancient patriotism showed that if the citizens identified their own private interest with that of the fatherland, they could promote both their own interest and that of the country with real zeal. The poor and oppressed needed help from the government, while the talented needed to be praised and rewarded for their achievements.<sup>14</sup> Since these measures appealed fundamentally to man's self-interest and desire of distinction and recognition, they were applicable also in modern commercial monarchies (Coyer 1755:30).

In 1756, Coyer published another book in which he attempted to refute another central idea of Montesquieu's theory of modern monarchy – the need to preserve non-commercial nobility as the main support of monarchy. He denied any constitutional significance to the modern hereditary nobility and saw no possibility for their comeback as a political class. Monarchy could have a democratic, non-elitist basis.<sup>15</sup>

The participation of nobility in commerce, at the same time, was beneficial for the monarchy both economically and militarily. On the one hand, commerce was the main source of wealth, which was essential for military power. Nobility's participation in commerce could raise the general prestige of trade, and thereby increase wealth in general. On the other hand, the impoverished non-commercial

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<sup>13</sup> *Dissertation pour être lue: Sur le vieux mot de Patrie*. Chevalier de Jaucourt's article 'Patrie' in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* was a close paraphrase of this :144-146dissertation.

<sup>14</sup> 'C'est [fatherland] une terre que tous les habitans sont intéressés à conserver, que personne ne veut quitter, parce qu'on n'abandonne pas son bonheur, et où les étrangers cherchent un azile. [...] C'est une mère qui chérit tous ses enfans, qui ne les distingue qu'autant qu'ils se distinguent eux-mêmes, qui veut bien qu'il y ait de opulence et de la médiocrité, mais point de pauvres; des grands et des petits, mais personne d'opprimé; qui même dans ce partage inégal, conserve une sorte d'égalité, en ouvrant à tous le chemin de premières places; [...] C'est une puissance aussi ancienne que la société, fondée sur la nature et l'ordre, une puissance supérieure à toutes les puissances qu'elle établit dans son sein, *Archontes, Suffètes, Ephores, Consuls* ou *Rois*; une puissance qui soumet à ses loix ceux qui commandent en son nom, comme ceux qui obéissent' (Coyer 1755:19–20).

<sup>15</sup> On the debate on commercial nobility (mainly from the constitutional perspective) see Adam (2003).

nobility lacked even the means to fulfil their military duty (Coyer 1756:178). Coyer also made a plea for the usefulness of ‘commercial spirit’ for the nobility in general and attempted to demonstrate its positive moral effects, particularly its support to industry and frugality. Commercial spirit and meritocratic honour were compatible and could animate patriotic actions (Coyer 1757).

Coyer’s ideas set off a heated debate in France and Germany. Many authors referred to the example of Britain, arguing that the ‘commercial spirit’ was no more compatible with patriotism than monarchical luxury. For them, Coyer’s theory of patriotism failed to show how true military valour, the readiness to fight and risk one’s life for defending the fatherland, could be preserved in a nation immersed in luxury (D’Arc 1756). Why would modern self-interested men prefer the patriotic honour of a soldier to the patriotic honour of a merchant, the less demanding form of honour that brought with itself also the private benefits of riches and comfort (Grimm 1878:175)? For the critics of Coyer, this unanswered question confirmed the wisdom of Montesquieu’s theory of monarchy. Commerce needed no encouragement, while military honour, in itself a ‘fancy’ or ‘chimerical principle,’ certainly depended on the protection of laws (Grimm: 1878:173ff.).<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. Helvétius’s theory of patriotism in *De l’Esprit*

Coyer’s theory of honour-based monarchical patriotism was greatly shaken by Claude-Adrien Helvétius’s analysis of patriotism in his notorious *De l’Esprit* (1758). Accepting the same psychological foundations of patriotism, Helvétius showed that patriotism was ‘rational’ only in poor military republics. This argument was part of his general proto-utilitarian moral system derived from sensationist premises.<sup>17</sup>

According to Helvétius, self-interest or physical sensibility (the experience of pleasure and pain) was the only principle on the basis of which men naturally judged each other’s talents, actions and ideas. However, as soon as men had united into societies (out of self-interest), they began to evaluate each other also from the viewpoint of common utility or ‘public interest.’ Although entirely conventional,

<sup>16</sup> Some of the authors developing this line of argument, however, expressed doubts as to whether luxury had not grown too extensive in the monarchies thanks to commerce, having begun to undermine the principle of noble honour even in the non-commercial, landed, nobility. They called for measures to reform noble honour into something like meritocratic class honour. Chevalier d’Arc for example called the French king to follow the example of the Prussian king who was propagating the virtue of austerity with his own example among his noble officers. D’Arc also argued that more emulation and attention to personal merit was needed in the army, particularly within the noble officer corps, but also among the soldiers (D’Arc 1756: passim).

<sup>17</sup> Helvétius’ work was condemned by almost all religious bodies in France, mainly for undermining the foundations of political authority (Wootton 2000:316f.; cf. Smith 1965). Nowadays it is appreciated as an important inspiration for Bentham’s classical utilitarianism (Rosen 2003), and as an early theory of radical ‘agrarian’ republicanism (Wootton 2000). For the wider reception and significance of Helvétius see Wootton (2000).



‘public interest’ was the true principle of justice. Helvétius therefore also tended to apostrophise ‘the public’ as an independent metaphysical entity (see Helvétius 1988:250f., 163f.). Teaching men to adopt this principle of judgement, nevertheless, was a demanding task even in civil societies, since men tended also to form smaller (non-political) societies, which in turn had their own particular interests, different from, and generally contradictory to, the public one (Helvétius 1988:77–80).

‘Virtue’ (*vertu*) or ‘probity’ (*probité*) was action conducive to public utility (Helvétius 1988:128). Even if men could educate their moral judgement properly, ‘nothing but personal interest, or desire of happiness could move [them] to act virtuously’ (Helvétius 1988:217f.).<sup>18</sup> For Helvétius physical sensibility was the root of all passions. Passions could be divided into two classes – natural and artificial. The former were immediately directed to sensual pleasure, while the latter were developed through language and other artificial institutions. Avarice, ambition, pride, patriotism and friendship were all artificial passions, directed to the goods that constituted a gateway to sensual pleasure in the future. Artificial passions were enhanced through the mediate pleasure of anticipation (Helvétius 1988:313, 322). They could develop into ‘strong passions’ that were capable of motivating difficult actions and generating great ideas. Thanks to such passions, men did not fear ‘dangers, pain, death, and even heaven’ (Helvétius 1988:269, 272, 394).

Ethics was essentially the ‘science of the legislator.’ Only the forms of government that attached great rewards to virtue could arouse strong passions conducive to virtue (Helvétius 1988:251, 331). It was amply proven by history, Helvétius claimed, that poor military republics had given rise to the most virtuous men. There were several reasons for that. First, everyone had a share in the republican government, thanks to which a general understanding of the public interest and justice was sustained (Helvétius 1988: 184). Second, honours were administered according to public esteem in poor military republics. Public esteem was identical to ‘glory’ there. It was directly based on great and difficult actions (Helvétius 1988:369). Honours flattered men’s pride and promised future pleasures. The legislators of poor military republics had wisely associated public esteem with the strongest pleasure of all – the one of being loved by beautiful women (Helvétius 1988:324–329). Third, poor military republics had a very urgent interest in that the honours would be administered justly and sparsely, since their survival depended entirely on men’s passion for glory (Helvétius 1988:371).

The despotic form of government, by contrast, was the nemesis of virtue. The despot punished virtue and rewarded vice; he set up viziers who had no interest in enlightening themselves about the public interest or justice. The people had neither the motivation nor the means to enlighten themselves about these objects either, and had only contempt and ridicule for virtue (Helvétius 1988:356). Honours in such countries were debased, having no connection with public esteem. The people thus desired riches only and services to the state had to be paid for with money (Helvétius 1988:374).

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<sup>18</sup> All translations from *De l’esprit* are mine.

Helvétius conceded to Montesquieu that monarchies were different from despotisms, since justice in them was placed in the hands of a body of magistrates. From such a body the people could obtain ideas of justice and equality (Helvétius 1988:343). Thus ‘ancient admiration’ for great actions was preserved, but it was a ‘hypocritical’ and ‘sterile’ kind of admiration that had no impact on men’s actions or spontaneous sentiments (Helvétius 1988:357). The ‘route of ambition’ and ‘honour’ was open only to a tiny segment of men (nobility), while the opulent classes in general were busy warding off boredom (*ennui*) by shallow civilities and *bel esprit*. Women, further, were poorly educated and could best be pleased by frivolities (Helvétius 1988:190).

Moreover, modern monarchical nations were succumbing to luxury.<sup>19</sup> Although Helvétius ostensibly avoided taking a clear position in the luxury debate, he summarised the arguments of the critics of luxury with great sympathy and attention to detail. Commerce of luxury brought great riches to the country, but it could not contribute to the military power of the nation, which depended not so much on money, but the size, spirit and physical vigour of the population. The luxurious nations were polarised into a handful of rich people and the mass of the poor. The peasants (the majority of the population) in a rich country were poorer than the peasants of poor countries. They had no incentive to multiply. Moreover, the great inequality corrupted both the rich and the poor. Even the artists and scientists desired riches and therefore matched their art to the taste of the rich (Helvétius 1988:186–191). The peasants and artisans, in their turn, were exhausted and demoralised by hard work and indigence. Barbaric nations could easily subdue such people (Helvétius 1988:36–40).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Quel remparts opposeroit à ces Nations [pauvres] un Pays livré au luxe et au mollesse? Il ne peut leur en imposer ni par le nombre, ni par la force de ses habitans. L’attachement pour la Patrie, dira-t-on, peut suppléer au nombre et au force des Citoyens. Mais qui produiroit en ces pays cet amour vertueux de la Patrie? L’ordre des Paysans, qui compose à lui seul les deux tiers de chaque Nation, y est malheureux: celui des Artisans possède rien; transplanté de son Village dans une Manufacture ou une Boutique, et de cette Boutique dans une autre, l’Artisan est familiarisé avec l’idée du déplacement; il ne peut contracter d’attachement pour aucun lieu; assuré presque par tout de sa subsistance, il doit se regarder non comme le Citoyen d’un Pays, mais comme un habitant du monde’ (Helvétius 1988:38).

<sup>20</sup> In *de l’Esprit* Helvétius did not suggest any definite economic reforms as a solution, although he hinted that the division of land into ‘numerous small possessions,’ the abolition of luxury trade and the promotion of the trade of the products of land could considerably slow down the increase of inequality among the population, and thereby curb the worst effects of luxury. The proprietors of land would also cultivate their own land and sell its products. The number of land-workers would be diminished radically, and those who were left would be in a position to demand an adequate salary for themselves. In this way, everyone would be able to participate in the riches produced by commerce, while no one would be corrupted by excessive riches or miserable poverty (Helvétius 1988: n35f.). David Wootton takes a different view, arguing that Helvétius did not want to ‘interfere with commerce’ and regarded reform as impossible because the military power of the modern state was based on luxury trade (Wootton 2000:232). As far as I see, Helvétius instead radically criticised this view (Helvétius 1988:35–41), even if he posed as merely summarising the arguments of the opposing parties in the luxury debate.

Helvétius also argued that the monarch alone would not be able to dispense honour according to public esteem, since he could not in all cases reliably establish whether merit was real or faked. Furthermore, his private interest guided him to award honours to those who were most useful to him or his court, and not to the public at large. Only an independent jury examining men's merits profoundly and publicly could be able to carry out this task. Its proceedings could be expected to cause a remarkable transformation in the passions and enlightenment of the people (Helvétius 1988:373ff.). It remained unclear, however, whether and how this jury could be instituted in a modern monarchy.

The French authors agreed thus that there was almost no patriotism in modern monarchies. In Montesquieu's vision, the unequal and Mandevillian modern society could be stabilised by noble honour as a political principle. The two alternative models envisioned a society based on enlightened self-interest and meritocratic honour. Coyer suggested that a patriot king could restore men's trust in monarchical government and that enlightened commercial spirit was compatible with patriotism based on the desire of distinction. Helvétius shared Coyer's psychological foundations, but rejected the idea that strong passions could be activated outside the specific legislative framework of republics. His system had strong republican implications.

## 5. Abbt's theory of monarchical patriotism

### 5.1. *Abbt's rejection of Montesquieu's theory of modern monarchy*

In his *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* Abbt picked up the themes of the French debates and attempted to find a way out from the stalemate that he believed these debates had reached. His aim was to shore up Coyer's vision of modern democratic and commercial monarchy against the challenges of Montesquieu and Helvétius.

Abbt aligned himself with the view that material progress had contributed to the waning of patriotism in modern monarchies. Prussians no less than other monarchical nations were characterised by 'a certain softness, a certain amnesia of the great duty of patriotism ... wives are begging their husbands to avoid the dangers of military service, ... diadems are more valued in our eyes than battle scars...' (Abbt 1996:595). Against Montesquieu, Abbt made clear that nobility as the top rank in society had first been corrupted by luxury. The establishment of the modern standing army was a clear proof of it. The nobility began to feel the discomforts of war, which the insecure prospect of military honour could not overshadow (Abbt 1996:603f.). Monarchical government had attempted to respond to the situation by reserving the high positions in the army exclusively to the nobility. Since a number of noble families continued to teach their children to regard honour and position as highly desirable goods, this measure secured that there was always a certain number of noblemen willing to risk their lives for the country. However, the majority of nobles had succumbed to the pleasures of a comfortable and peaceful life on their land-estates (Abbt 1996:603f., 634–636).

A new kind of prejudice was spreading through the nation. It was widely held that it was ‘ridiculous to sacrifice oneself for the good of the other, and ... to risk one’s life for the sake of anything else than one’s own private advantage’ (Abbt 1996:606). The corruption had been universalised when the great nobility (particularly in France) was drawn to the court and the capital.<sup>21</sup> They were thereby exposed to even greater riches and sensual pleasure, but they also rendered themselves more ‘visible’ and thus needed to justify their behaviour to the rest of society. They started to deny the possibility of patriotism and ridiculed those who thought differently. Most men were not capable of refuting their ideas rationally. Since no one, at the same time, could suffer being considered ‘stupid,’ the new ‘fashion’ spread rapidly also among men of lower classes, and not only in France:

*even the mob does not lack a finer feeling of shame about something improper. One only has to make an effort to notice it. How long has it taken for a shoemaker in Paris to accept that it is shameful to love his own wife, following the example of the aristocrats? The distance of the aristocrats from the lowest mob is not as great as one commonly imagines* (Abbt 1996:608).

Modern literary wits, in their turn, also widely ridiculed sublime and heroic actions. It was tempting to do so since they were presented in an outdated decorous style in literature. Even if justified in that respect, the excessive and unspecific ridicule destroyed all admiration for heroism (Abbt 1996:607). As a result of these developments, Abbt concluded provocatively, the military estate (*Waffenstand*) in Prussia had altogether ceased to be an ‘estate of honour’: it consisted mainly of ‘impoverished noblemen, bourgeois mercenaries and peasant conscripts’ (Abbt 1996:640).<sup>22</sup>

### 5.2. Abbt’s rejection of Epicureanism

Blaming the nobility for the general modern corruption, Abbt implied that the desire for sensual comfort and sensual pleasure, especially if aided by the principle of ‘rational’ self-interest, was stronger than the desire of honour. If honour could not sway the nobility, what power could it have over the people at large who had no special reasons for desiring honour? The reform of the system of honour in monarchies, as proposed by Coyer, could not be expected to bring the expected results. Like Helvétius, Abbt therefore argued that it was necessary first to revive men’s genuine esteem for great and extraordinary deeds. Yet he rejected Helvétius’s theory that sensual pleasure and self-interest (the anticipation of such pleasure) was the basis of heroic virtue, as of all morality. He sought to show that

<sup>21</sup> This was the policy of Louis XIV which was followed widely by other European monarchs. Abbt seems to have had in view the European process in general.

<sup>22</sup> This argument suggests that the intellectuals of the 1760s refused to see or accept the emerging ‘Prussian military state’ in which the re-militarised nobility enjoyed a dominant social and political position. For the recent discussions of the gradual development of such a regime see Schulze (2000) and Scott (2000).

patriotism was a natural duty and natural sentiment. Thereby he hoped also to escape Helvétius' republican radicalism.

Abbt's refutation of 'Epicureanism' was highly schematic, but it revealed his fundamental allegiance to the theories of 'aesthetic morality' that originated in the work of the third Earl of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury had set up 'moral beauty' as a counter-concept to utility and self-interest, emphasising the role of disinterested love and pleasure in human motivation, including moral motivation (hence the label 'aesthetic' morality, which I use). Virtue entailed a balance of self-regarding and other-regarding (aesthetic) affections. There was nothing wrong with taking care of the self and following self-regarding affections (e.g. the desire for comfort and of honour) as long as it did not interfere with the more rewarding aesthetic affections directed to other human beings, communities and moral ideals. Different situations called for different actions. Patriotic death in the situation of a just war was the action of the greatest kind of moral beauty, which could arouse noble 'enthusiasm' in men. Shaftesbury was adamant that disinterested love of moral beauty (virtue) was not only the foundation of moral judgement, but had the strongest motivating power for men.<sup>23</sup> It guaranteed also the greatest happiness to them. Enthusiasm was in itself supremely pleasurable. In regulating and moderating men's self-affections it also precluded that these affections would become too strong and thereby psychologically oppressive and self-defeating.<sup>24</sup> In the 1750s, a number of Swiss authors developed a theory of modern republican patriotism on

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<sup>23</sup> Shaftesbury's view of moral enthusiasm in a particular situation is best summarised in the following passage: 'Even virtue itself he [Shaftesbury himself] takes to be no other than a noble enthusiasm justly directed and regulated by that high standard which he supposes in the nature of things. He seems to assert that there are certain moral species or appearances so striking and of such force over our natures that, when they present themselves, they bear down all contrary opinion or conceit, all opposite passion, sensation or mere bodily affection. Of this kind he makes virtue itself to be the chief since, of all views or contemplations, this, in his account, is the most naturally and strongly affecting. The exalted part of love is only borrowed hence. That of pure friendship is its immediate self. He who yields his life a sacrifice to his prince or country, the lover who for his paramour performs as much, the heroic, the amorous, the religious martyrs who draw their views, whether visionary or real, from this pattern and exemplar of divinity – all these, according to our author's sentiment, are alike actuated by this passion and prove themselves in effect so many different enthusiasts' Shaftesbury (1999:353, 191). For a discussion see Piirimäe (forthcoming).

<sup>24</sup> Consider Shaftesbury's description of a corrupt human *psyche* dominated by fear of death: 'The abhorrence of an insensible state makes mere vitality and animal sensation highly cherished. [...] It is no wonder if luxury profits by the deformity of this spectre-opinion. [...] She invites him to live fast, according to her best measure of life. [...] Who would not willingly make life pass away as quickly as was possible, when the nobler pleasures of it were already lost or corrupted by a wretched fear of death? The intense selfishness and meanness, which accompanies this fear, must reduce us to a low ebb of enjoyment and, in a manner, bring to nothing that main sum of satisfactory sensations by which we vulgarly rate the happiness of our private condition and fortune' Shaftesbury (1999:141).

the premises of aesthetic morality.<sup>25</sup> Abbt's *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* specified the role of aesthetic affections in monarchical politics.

He professed his commitment to the standard ideal of world order, as expressed for example in Alexander Pope's immensely popular *Essay on Man* (1733–1734) and accused Helvétius and all other advocates of the Epicurean principle of self-interest of falsifying human nature and man's true place in the cosmos. Man was part of the general natural order and his duty was to make himself more perfect by serving the good of all. Historical observations about human nature confirmed that he was designed to act in this way. Comfortable living was not man's only concern. Devoted patriots prepared to give their lives for their fatherland could be found in the history of both monarchies and republics. It could be shown that they were neither fanatics nor fools, but 'wise enthusiasts' who achieved maximal pleasure (Abbt did not specify whether pleasure was the object or only the by-product of their actions).

Abbt referred to two kinds of pleasures (*Vergnügen*) contained in love of fatherland. First, the 'fatherland' guaranteed one's own and one's fellow citizens' enjoyment of liberty and security. One loved these goods precisely because they were enjoyed generally, and thus love of fatherland was 'the precise opposite of selfish love.' The thought that one's compatriots would continue to enjoy the 'fatherland' even in the case of one's own death, strengthened one's motivation to defend these goods (Abbt 1996:632). Second, dying for the fatherland was in itself an act of supreme pleasure, greater than the sum of pleasures provided by a long life (Abbt 1996:631). Abbt invited his contemporaries to consider the ancient Romans' understanding of happiness and pleasure:

*Were they [the Romans] fanatics who did not know the pleasure of life? They knew it, but they knew also the pleasure of – death. Not the pleasure of the death that paralyses the body that has been exhausted through sensual pleasures on a soft sofa, and from which man is unable to escape only because of his animalistic stupidity, but the one of the death that offers itself to our soul in defending the fatherland, and calls the soul from its prison, and, if I may express myself so boldly, gives the blood that is flowing in our veins to the sighing fatherland, in order to revive it again (Abbt 1996:610).*

With these pungent figurative images, Abbt attempted to make clear that despite enjoying life, the Romans understood that man was truly a man, a higher being, only if he could command his own body for the sake of the good of the whole (fatherland), and if necessary, face death voluntarily. Dying for the fatherland was thus an act of supreme human benevolence as well as of self-liberation (the liberation of soul from the body). Furthermore, those who yearned for this supreme and noble pleasure were not likely to indulge in an excess of sensual pleasure, which was detrimental to the body in the long run. Instead of becoming

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<sup>25</sup> On the Swiss theories of modern republican patriotism see Zurbuchen (2003) and Kapossy (2003). The qualification of these theories as 'aesthetic' is mine. I present and substantiate this interpretation in my PhD dissertation.

‘exhausted on a soft sofa,’ the Romans cultivated strong bodies and thus preserved the ability to enjoy the pleasures of life – as long as they were called to do their duty to the fatherland.

### 5.3. Patriot king

Abbt did not believe that mere preaching about the dignity of human nature and the true order of pleasures could revive patriotism among corrupt men. Something extraordinary was required to achieve such an aim. Abbt’s argument was that the virtue of a patriot king was exactly such a phenomenon.

A similar claim had recently been advanced by Henry St John Viscount Bolingbroke in his *Idea of a Patriot King* (1738). In this work, Bolingbroke engaged directly with the fundamental problem of modern patriotism – the tension between the economic and moral preconditions of national power. The preservation of a free monarchical constitution (such as Britain’s) required the preservation of the ‘spirit of liberty’ or patriotism among the people. This very spirit, however, was being undermined by modern commercial economy (luxury), which was essential for national power. Bolingbroke believed that a virtuous king would provide a solution to this dilemma: establishing a connection of love with the people, he could restore the necessary spirit in the corrupt nation without undermining the economy (Bolingbroke 1997:251).

According to Bolingbroke, the people loved the king out of gratitude for his enlightened reforms and approved of his personal conduct in terms of the ‘grace’ or ‘beauty’ it showed (Bolingbroke 1997:280). A truly sublime ‘beauty’ was inherent in the character and actions of a Patriot King and indeed, his reign in general:

*Let us consider again, what the sure, the necessary effects of such principles and measures of conduct must be, to the prince, and to the people. On this subject let the imagination range through the whole glorious scene of a patriot reign: the beauty of the idea will inspire those transports, which Plato imagined the vision of virtue would inspire, if virtue could be seen. What in truth can be so lovely, what so venerable, as to contemplate a king on whom the eyes of a whole people are fixed, filled with admiration, and glowing with affection?* (Bolingbroke 1997:293).

With the ‘transports’ excited by beauty, Bolingbroke referred to the famous place in Plato’s *Phaedrus* in which Socrates argues that he who encounters beauty in bodily form will also recollect true beauty, so that the ‘wings of the soul,’ its drive towards ‘the beautiful and the good,’ will grow again (Plato 1990:483ff. (250 E)). Appropriating this idea for the political context, Bolingbroke suggested that the sublime beauty of a patriot king could revive the genuine love of moral beauty in the people.

There is no clear evidence as to whether Abbt was acquainted with Bolingbroke’s ideas, but he took off from where Bolingbroke’s argument left off. Like Bolingbroke, Abbt did not want to interfere with luxury, but only to eliminate the

corrupt morality of self-interest that was trading upon the former. He, too, made clear that a patriot king could achieve this task. Such a king was a ‘sensuous’ symbol of the abstract idea of fatherland and his sublime virtue was bound to engender love, which in its turn was a proxy for the love of the fatherland (Abbt 1996:613f.). Indeed, in the person of Frederick II of Prussia, Abbt was actually able to point to an actual flesh-and-blood patriot king whose virtue could be ‘seen.’ A patriot king was the greatest exemplification of the moral principle ‘make yourself more perfect not only as the final aim, but also as the means for the whole’ (Abbt 1996:616–618) He was the greatest final aim in the state, but also the greatest means, serving the good of ‘a million of men’ (Abbt 1996:618f.). In particular, the sight of the king’s heroic virtue in the battlefield was bound to engage men’s imagination and passions in the strongest possible way:

*the more sensuous the objects that arouse our passions are, the longer these objects remain under our eyes in the flames of passion, the stronger, the more lively would be our sentiment. The Romans mourned for their fatherland after the Pharsalian Battle, but only after the miserable murder of Pompey did they weep ... What patriotic breast would not beat hard when we see the man which our century would call itself after and not only call after, but also be resplendent for, to offer himself as a sacrifice to the fatherland which he himself is representing in all his earnest majesty...* (Abbt 1996:614, cf. 633).

Abbt described the emergence of the ‘wise enthusiasm’ in the battlefield in minute detail. One would first hear the cries of the helpless members of the fatherland, and then looking around would see the king fighting for it, alone in the midst of his enemies. One would ‘wonder’ at the greatness of his soul and hence the idea would emerge that it is ‘noble’ to die for the king and the fatherland. As a next step, one would be attracted by the beautiful idea of patriotic dying, and would rush forward into battle. Simultaneously one would enjoy the consciousness of one’s contribution to the preservation of the fatherland and to the ‘world order’ in general (Abbt 1996:647f.).<sup>26</sup>

#### 5.4. Moral and cultural reform

For Abbt, a general cult of heroes was likely to arise from the noble enthusiasm engendered by the sight of the sublime virtue of the king. Fathers would become ‘moving examples’ (*rührende Beispiele*) for the children, while every striking

<sup>26</sup> In his review of *Vom Tode*, the influential Prussian philosopher and literary critic Moses Mendelssohn fully endorsed Abbt’s description of the genesis of patriotic enthusiasm: ‘What great sentiments would this sublime example that we have in front of our eyes [that of the patriot king] bring along in us!’ (Mendelssohn 1991:415). Cf. also Moses Mendelssohn’s critique of the Swiss author Johann Georg Zimmermann’s ‘variation on the same theme’ in the second edition of the latter’s *Vom Nationalstolze* (1760, I edition 1758): ‘... wenn man durch ein grosses Beispiel angefeuert, die wahre Seelengrösse kennen, lieben und selbst darnach streben lernt ... ist dieses Nachahmung, oder nicht vielmehr die uns angeborene Liebe zum Erhabenen, die jetzt durch die Macht des Beispiels, einen neuen Trieb bekommt?’ (Mendelssohn 1991:332).



example of sublime virtue, individual or collective, would become part of national memory. ‘Why do we respect our German forefathers? [--] Why do we wander in their provinces with a secret awe?’ Abbt asked. The answer was that there was ‘at every step lying someone who had died for the fatherland.’ The recent battle-grounds of Zorndorf and Kunersdorf could be expected to awaken similar reactions of ‘trembling melancholy’ and ‘respectful shudder’ in posterity (Abbt 1996:621). In a review written roughly at the same time as *Vom Tode*, Abbt argued that the entire ‘German’ national character could be changed by the ‘enthusiasm’ engendered during the war and give a new turn to the ‘taste’ in the arts.<sup>27</sup>

Love of the fatherland was the best antidote against the ‘Epicurean’ morality, which prompted men often to neglect even the most natural of duties, such as proper care for their parents, children or friends. Without requiring radical reforms in the economic sphere, it guaranteed that self-interest was not corrupted into Mandevillian false honour based on wealth. By teaching men to see everything in a ‘beautiful connection’, love of the fatherland restored their true moral dignity (Abbt 1996:617ff.). Love of the fatherland successfully replaced the principle of utility at the centre of men’s lives with that of beauty: men’s recognition of the most striking moral beauty, death for the fatherland, taught them to appreciate also the beauty of smaller virtues.

Abbt invoked also the notion of national glory. It was natural for Prussians not only to love their king, but also to take pride in him and in the international admiration that he aroused. At the same time they also had to understand that unless this pride was translated into action on their part, they became shameful in the eyes of the international public. The king could not ‘march towards the temple of immortality’ alone – in fact he was and could only be ‘standing on the shoulders of his nation’ (Abbt 1996:623). The moral reform of the nation was bound to bring all members of the nation the greatest possible glory.

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Wie können aber die Deutsche sich zu Urbildern erheben, wie können es unsere Schriftsteller? Enthusiasmus! Lieber Freund, Enthusiasmus! nichts ohne diesen, alles, wenn er sich einmal der Nation bemeistert hat. Aber freilich muss er gutartig sein. Und fehlt es den Deutschen etwa an Materie dazu? Hannibal trieb ihn vollends in die Römer hinein. O wahrhaftig, in den letzten sechs Jahren hat es auch nicht an Keilen gefehlt. Und soll die Nation, welche so oft gesiegt und deswegen verehrt worden; so oft besiegt und doch bewundert worden; die Nation die einen König hat, dessen persönliche Eigenschaften unter dem Auge der Vorsicht einen Feind zum Freund umgeschaffen; der nicht mehr als Würgegel tausende in einer Stunde niederschläget, sondern wie ein Engel Gottes sanft zum Frieden überredet, soll die Nation, die sich so vieles zu ihrem Ruhme erzählen, so viele Beispiele ihren Kindern und Enkeln überlassen kann; soll diese nicht einen allgemeinen Geist fühlen, und sollen ihre Schriftsteller alsdann nicht mit Originalzungen reden?’ (Abbt 1762:56f). The idea that the reform of manners (as well as a proper idea of the dignity of the self) is the precondition for the reform of the nation’s aesthetic taste derives from Lord Shaftesbury’s ‘Soliloquy’ in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, but Abbt is here omitting the crucial condition for the true reform of manners that Shaftesbury himself specified: the study of oneself in solitude. For Abbt, rather, it is the shared experience of moral enthusiasm that is supposed to bring about this transformation.

### 5.5. Patriotic honour

In what relationship did aesthetic patriotism stand to honour? Abbt argued that honour had been such a powerful incentive in historical republics precisely because it was combined with true love of the fatherland there. As such, it could become a 'reward for all souls' (Abbt: 1996:637). Republican experience had proven that for a man who loved the fatherland, individual glory was the greatest possible reward, because it was an expression of the nation's gratitude to her greatest benefactors. The greatest honour, glory, had accordingly been due to the greatest virtue, death for the fatherland (Abbt 1996:637).

Monarchies were different. Death for the fatherland could not be the only ground for honour in monarchies, as long as the hereditary nobility existed. Also the honours themselves were of different kind in republics and monarchies. Abbt agreed with Helvétius that poor republics had been forced to rely on symbolic distinctions and posthumous glory because of their poverty, while monarchies, being rich, had rewarded extraordinary actions with honours and positions that led also to wealth. The republican system of honour was more efficient, since republican honours ignited stronger passion than the monarchical ones. The symbolic distinctions marked out a virtuous man for emulation, but did not arouse any suspicion or envy in others towards him. The admiration for him remained pure, and so did the desire for honour. In monarchies, by contrast, one could never know whether the man who had committed certain great actions had really deserved honour or pursued it only for the wealth attached to it. Instead of emulation, wealth gave birth to mere envy and hence honour was not such a great support to patriotism in monarchies as it was in republics (Abbt 1996:599).

Monarchies had to learn this lesson. They could imitate republics in setting up posthumous rewards to the benefactors of the state, so as further to enhance people's admiration for, and emulation of their heroes. Prussians would then also be able to shed 'Roman tears' visiting the portrait galleries of heroes or statues (Abbt 1996:638). Monarchies also had to attempt to reform their system of honour for the survivors along republican lines. The Prussian monarch had to reward the heroes of whatever rank who had shown great virtue. His recognition had to be most rewarding and pleasing for the heroes who had acted for him and the fatherland (Abbt 1996:640).

Abbt emphasised first of all the impact that such a reform would have upon the military rank. A patriotic democratic monarchy should establish a new meritocratic military rank open to all estates and enjoying the highest prestige in society. Instead of being a rank for those who had no other talents or opportunities, it would become a true 'rank of honour' once again, whereby the representatives of each rank would gain new self-esteem:

*Thus the consciousness would emerge in the nobleman of earning his nobility himself by his deeds; the hope would be aroused in the burgher to acquire nobility through his actions, and the republican pride would emerge in the peasant of being able to serve his king immediately (Abbt 1996:640).*

The regenerated military was to remain a professional rank. At those times when the state was not facing any real danger of extinction in war, the other professions would continue to have their own particular usefulness and attractions (Abbt 1996:641). The main thing, however, was that the emergence of a new meritocratic and honourable military would stabilise the moral enthusiasm of the rest of the society without at the same time endangering its economic efficiency. Thus, despite their seeming dedication to utility, the members of the other ranks would remain sensitive to the beauty of the less than sublime domestic virtues and cherish a readiness to fight and even die for their country.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article I have shown that Thomas Abbt's *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* is best understood as a contribution to the debates of the 1750s on monarchical patriotism. These debates originated in Montesquieu's comparative theory of political regimes, one that explored the specific socio-economic and moral foundations of different forms of government. Montesquieu's method of analysing politics proved highly influential, but the particular models he specified were rejected by a number of thinkers, including Thomas Abbt. In contrast to Montesquieu, these thinkers denied the viability of a modern monarchy based on a combination of Mandevillian and noble honour. They searched for a form of patriotism that would not require pervasive self-negation, as in Montesquieu's theory of republican patriotism, but would be compatible with self-interest. The French critics of Montesquieu envisioned patriotism as based on men's desire for distinction. While Coyer maintained that such patriotism was compatible with modern monarchical government and economy, Helvétius showed that it had historically been engendered and sustained only in poor military republics.

Abbt suggested a novel solution to the problem of modern monarchical patriotism – he required that men's genuine, non-utilitarian or aesthetic love of the fatherland would be revived. Appropriating the key idea of aesthetic morality, the pleasure and motivating attraction of moral beauty, Abbt argued that the extraordinary character and visible moral beauty of the Prussian king gave hope for the emergence of a species of 'noble enthusiasm' for the king *qua* fatherland. Once revived, aesthetic patriotism could co-exist harmoniously with complex monarchical economy, based on well-understood self-interest. It could even secure it against the most corrupt form of social interaction, such as the modern Mandevillian sociability described by Montesquieu. Honour-based patriotism elaborated by the French depended on aesthetic patriotism as a condition of its implementation. Once implemented (and supported by a general patriotic culture), it could fulfil an important role in stabilising the values of aesthetic patriotism in modern society.

Abbt's *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* thus voiced an evocative vision of a modern monarchy based on the aesthetic patriotism of the people at large. My analysis of Abbt's ideas shows that Abbt's puzzling 'emotionalism' and putative 'collectivism'

can well be explained within the framework of Enlightenment idioms of thought. All authors discussed here were interested in how their nation could do best in conditions of international rivalry. All of them assumed that passions were the main motivating powers of men. There was a highly polarised debate within the mainstream Enlightenment on human nature and the psychological foundations of patriotism in different kinds of society. Abbt's emphasis on love of the fatherland as a natural sentiment and his exhortation to aesthetically pleasurable patriotic self-sacrifice was novel in the context of the originally utilitarian French debates on monarchical patriotism. Yet he only drew upon the immensely popular Enlightenment theories of aesthetic morality, which had not so far been invoked in these debates. Abbt explored how it was possible for individuals to transcend their self-interest under certain conditions and demonstrated at the same time that this capacity was essential for the preservation and success of a modern nation like Prussia. Yet it would be incorrect to argue that he developed a fundamentally new, 'collectivistic,' type of social and political theory in which the individual's perspective would have been lost altogether. Does this mean that his political theory was not 'nationalistic'? The answer to this question depends on whether we see 'collectivism' as the defining element of the 'nationalistic' political theory. Perhaps the emphasis on the crucial importance of popular patriotism for national success in the conditions of international rivalry would already be sufficient for a political theory to qualify as 'nationalistic'? In this case, much of the mainstream Enlightenment political theory, whether utilitarian or aesthetic, would appear a great deal more nationalistic than has previously been assumed.

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