

# THE DUBLIN SOCIETY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY IRISH POLITICAL THOUGHT

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**ABSTRACT.** *Through an analysis of the debate between Charles Davenant in England, and Arthur Dobbs, Thomas Prior, and Samuel Madden in Ireland, it establishes that the founders saw the society as a response to Ireland's dependent status in the emerging British empire. The Dublin Society distinguished itself from other improving societies in the British Isles because it explicitly represented a new principle of sociality. The article describes the cultural origins of that principle arguing that a diverse set of groups converged on the ideal of association as a new form of order. The article concludes with a consideration of Madden's understanding, derived from his commitment to improving associations, that Irish national life was best understood as the pursuit of happiness rather than justice or virtue.*

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The manner in which Ireland experienced and negotiated the emergence of the new British empire at the turn of the eighteenth century is not well understood.<sup>1</sup> As the polity ceased to be a multiple monarchy the roles played by the political nation, corporate bodies, and the state changed. The Dublin Society founded in 1731, the royal was added in 1750, was one of the most important institutions through which the Irish political nation adapted itself to the new environment.<sup>2</sup> The society pursued many of the activities we normally associate with states and was the principal agent of economic development in the country. Its core interest lay in improving agriculture and to that end it ran experimental farms, a testing ground for agricultural implements in Poolbeg Street, and latterly financed a factory for implements in Celbridge. It sponsored the collection of statistical data very much in the manner of the states of Germany. It was also central to the provision of education. By the late eighteenth century it ran a school of minerology and geology, one that employed Richard Kirwan, the most important Irish chemist of the eighteenth century. All these activities were in addition to the

<sup>1</sup> David Armitage, 'The political economy of Britain and Ireland after the Glorious Revolution', in Jane Ohlmeyer, ed., *Political thought in seventeenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Dublin Society (RDS) Minute Book 1, organizational meeting of 25 June 1731. The meeting was organized by Thomas Prior. For accounts of the foundation see Henry F. Berry, *A history of the Royal Dublin Society* (London, 1915), pp. 3–14; Terence de Vere White, *The story of the Royal Dublin Society* (Tralee, 1955), pp. 7–13.

construction of its library, which eventually provided the seed for the National Library, the direction of its art school, and the development of a botanical garden. Even as the state enhanced its interest in these areas in the nineteenth century it tended to recruit its agents from the ranks of the Dublin Society. Robert Kane, the first president of Queen's College Cork, developed his ideas on Irish industrial development within the society and Richard Griffith, of Griffith's valuations fame, was also a member. The Dublin Society was an instrument of governance in Ireland for at least two centuries.<sup>3</sup>

The activities of the society that mimicked that of a state eventually became a direct inspiration for states seeking to improve their governance. In 1761 Bertin, the head of the *maison du Roi*, tried to inspire a network of societies in the French provinces based on the model of the Dublin Society.<sup>4</sup> In Britain the Board of Agriculture and the Royal Agricultural Society admitted their inspiration from the Dublin exemplar. Yet this perceived originality of the Dublin Society is difficult to explain or to account for. Ireland did not invent associations. Britain, and England especially, experienced the first flowering of civic association at the same time that the Dublin Society was founded. As Peter Clark reports, during the eighteenth century only churches and drinking houses drew more members than clubs and societies.<sup>5</sup> Associations performed many of the functions that had been performed by privileged corporations before the eighteenth century. This was not restricted to providing contexts for urban sociability and the construction of a renewed urban identity, associations also acquired political roles. *Ad hoc* committees to create charitable hospitals, build roads, or reform morals confidently petitioned parliament for regulatory and other powers.<sup>6</sup> A new kind of urban elite was created that exerted itself in an alliance with parliament, an alliance cemented by the membership of MPs in the plethora of new associations.<sup>7</sup> The results of this kind of urban institution were impressive. Liverpool had its first voluntary hospital, the Westminster, as a result of a local committee's efforts by 1748. By the 1770s another novel form of association, the Chamber of Commerce, was engaged in the interests of local commerce, without making claims for trading privileges, in a manner that had proved impossible for the old privileged guilds. The happy embrace of parliament with urban associations allowed English towns and cities to negotiate a period of intense social and economic change without having to generate a range of new values and new ideas.

<sup>3</sup> See Mark Bevir and Frank Trentmann, 'Markets in context: ideas, practices and governance', in Mark Bevir and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Markets in context: toward a post-marxist critique of markets* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 5–32. For the classic account of governance see M. Foucault, 'Governmentality', in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller, eds., *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality* (London, 1991), pp. 87–104.

<sup>4</sup> André Bourde, *Agronomie et agronomes en France au XVIIIe siècle* (3 vols., Paris, 1967), II, pp. 1031, 1101.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Clark, *British clubs and societies: the origins of an associational world* (Oxford, 2000), p. 430.

<sup>6</sup> Joanna Innes and Nicholas Rogers, 'Politics and government, 1700–1840', in Peter Clark, ed., *The Cambridge urban history of Britain*, II: 1540–1840 (Cambridge, 2000), p. 536, for a table of petitions to parliament for improving acts.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, *British clubs and societies*, p. 177.

As Clark again notes England produced no extended philosophical justification for the importance and freedom of voluntary associations in society.<sup>8</sup> Even as urban communities transformed themselves, representations of the community could remain stable. The Dublin Society was explicitly indebted to these associations, and particularly the Royal Society, for its structures and aspirations.<sup>9</sup> What therefore marked out the Dublin Society from any other British provincial gathering of improving gentlemen enjoying enlightened sociability while developing their town or region?

We can begin to answer this question if we address ourselves to the writings of the founders of the society, particularly those of Arthur Dobbs, Thomas Prior, and Samuel Madden.<sup>10</sup> These three writers envisaged the society as a response to the curious position of Ireland within the emerging British empire. As David Armitage argues, a 'Protestant, commercial, maritime and free' North Atlantic empire emerged in the late seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup> The provincial, that is Scottish, Irish, Caribbean, or North American, members of this fundamentally new polity all faced a similar problem of explaining how local elites contributed to and participated in the imperial enterprise. The case for reading developments in Scotland as a response to such an influx from the centre has been made most persistently by Nicholas Phillipson. In a sequence of articles Phillipson has delineated the 'Scottish Enlightenment' as a critical and creative response to the importation of English political languages inaugurated by the Act of Union of 1707.<sup>12</sup> Phillipson sees the writers and thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment as a local elite engaged in the project of redefining their social role in the face of English expansion. The Scottish tradition utilized what lay closest to hand: 'These ... languages were of value, not because they were English, but because they were usable, if highly imperfect, resources for understanding the political

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Madden, *A letter to the Dublin Society on the improving their fund and the manufacture, tillage etc. in Ireland* (Dublin, 1734), p. 20. Sir Thomas Molyneux, another of the founders, was a friend of Newton and Evelyn.

<sup>10</sup> RDS Minute Book 1, 16 Sept. 1761. Prior b. 1682 in Rathdowney in King's county (modern Laois) was educated at Kilkenny College and was close to Berkeley. He was also one of the founders of the Rotunda lying-in hospital with Bartholomew Mosse. Dobbs b. 1689 in Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim was an Irish MP, surveyor-general of Ireland and eventually governor of North Carolina. Madden b. 1686 in Dublin was a nephew of Molyneux. Dobbs and Prior were on the first committee of the society, organized before the society drew up its constitution in December 1731. Madden never formally joined the society but was an active collaborator and contributed funds.

<sup>11</sup> David Armitage, *The ideological origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Phillipson, 'Towards a definition of the Scottish enlightenment', in P. Fritz and D. Williams, eds., *City and society in the eighteenth century* (Toronto, 1973), pp. 125–47; Nicholas Phillipson, 'Culture and society in the eighteenth-century province: the case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment', in Lawrence Stone, ed., *The university in society* (2 vols., London, 1975), 1, pp. 407–48; Nicholas Phillipson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment', in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in national context* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 19–40; and Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politics, politeness and the anglicization of early eighteenth-century Scottish culture', in Roger Mason, ed., *Scotland and England, 1286–1815* (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 226–46.

problems of a pluralistic, extended monarchy like that of Britain.<sup>13</sup> A similar process of adaptation was necessary in Ireland.

Importing English languages without participating in English political institutions generated particular paradoxes and called for creative responses. For Dobbs, Prior, and other politically aware Irishmen the writings of Charles Davenant articulated those problems in a particularly provocative way.<sup>14</sup> Dobbs concluded his *Essay on the trade and improvement of Ireland* with a peroration against Davenant, accusing him of misunderstanding the political and economic interest of both Britain and Ireland.<sup>15</sup> Prior developed the same argument, adding that in Britain's strategic contest with France Ireland should be seen as its most reliable trading partner as well as its military ally.<sup>16</sup> The very acuity and insight of Davenant's definition of the Irish predicament absorbed Irish writers. Henry Maxwell, for instance, deplored Davenant's identification of Irish dependency but was completely captured by his ideal of a high-wage commercial empire and sought to redefine Ireland's place in it.<sup>17</sup> Davenant's ideas entrapped Dobbs, Prior, and Madden in the same way. His articulation of the consequences of Irish dependency within commercial empire became their own, even as they combated it. Their inability to define the place of Ireland in terms other than Davenant's drove them to seek to transform Ireland. Their instrument for national salvation became the Dublin Society.

This article analyses why Irish political writers were particularly anxious to refute Davenant, the reasons for their failure to arrive at a compelling refutation of his argument for Ireland's place in the empire, and their responses to that failure. It argues that the response to Davenant was found within Davenant himself, that his idea of a citizenry enjoying a plenitude of rights in a non-sovereign state was the template from which they developed a workable idea of the community. The Dublin Society was the model for a nation organized neither around virtue, the core notion of citizenship for the civic humanists, nor justice, the equivalent for the natural jurisprudential tradition. Instead the society incarnated an ideal of a community self-consciously organized around utility. The

<sup>13</sup> Phillipson 'Definition of Scottish Enlightenment', p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> On Davenant see Shelly Burt, *Virtue transformed: political argument in England, 1688–1740* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 4–9; Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's past: Scottish whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-British identity, 1689–1830* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 49–50; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition* (Princeton, NJ, 1975), pp. 436–46; Istvan Hont, 'Free trade and the economic limits to national politics: neo-Machiavellian political economy reconsidered', in John Dunn, ed., *The economic limits to modern politics* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 50–89. For Davenant's relevance beyond the 'Anglo-Dutch moment', see Richard Whatmore, "'A gigantic manliness": Paine's republicanism in the 1790s', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young, eds., *Economy, polity, and society: British intellectual history 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 140.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Dobbs, *An essay on the trade and improvement of Ireland*, 1 (Dublin, 1729), pp. 66–8.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Prior, *A list of the absentees of Ireland and the yearly value of their estates and incomes spent abroad with observations on the present state and condition of the kingdom* (Dublin, 1729), pp. 62–3.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Maxwell, *Reasons offer'd for creating a bank in Ireland; in a letter to Hercules Rowley* (Dublin, 1721), pp. 4, 40–3.

novelty of this idea was matched by the heterogeneity of its sources. The efforts of Irish political thinkers were rewarded with the scattered seeds of a new language of politics and a flourishing institution.

## I

Davenant redescribed English political culture in two vital areas. His 'Essay upon universal monarchy' of 1701 was the culmination of the efforts over the previous half-century to understand English national interests outside an ideological commitment to Protestantism.<sup>18</sup> England's national goal, he argued, was to deny any power the 'universal monarchy', that is, preponderant power on land and sea. To do this it should strive to maintain a multi-centred world of small states, or in other words a balance of power.<sup>19</sup> He also offered a new analysis of why and how it could do so. The world had been divided into trading republics, such as the United Provinces or ancient Athens, and military empires, such as Spain or Persia.<sup>20</sup> This balance was inherently unstable, since the preponderant military force of the empires continually threatened successful commercial republics. Even if republics successfully defended themselves, as Athens had against Persia, the price paid was transformation into another empire and loss of its trading role. In either case the wealth gathered by the republic was dissipated in war. England could escape this dynamic because it was neither republic nor territorial empire, but a new style of commercial monarchy, one that could escape the cycle of despotism and corruption.

William Temple, in the 1660s, had already argued that the cycle of rise and fall of centres of wealth would be broken by commercial monarchies.<sup>21</sup> However, Temple saw a commercial monarchy as fundamentally a monopolistic enterprise, which would unite the virtues of both republic and empire in order to engross trade and so develop its military. Davenant had a far wider vision. A commercial monarchy would not be a trading port with a larger hinterland and therefore a bigger army, it would be an essentially novel kind of polity, one that could refashion the nature of trade itself. The strength of such a polity would lie not in its monopoly of trade, but in the industry, creativity, and work of its population:

A nation may be supposed, by some accident, quite without the species of money, and yet, if the people are numerous, industrious, versed in traffic, skilled in sea affairs, and if they have good ports, and a soil fertile in a number of commodities, such a people will have trade and garner wealth, and they shall quickly get among them a plenty of gold and silver; so that the real and effective riches of a country is its native product.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Charles Davenant, *The political and commercial works of that celebrated writer Charles D'Avenant*, ed. Charles Whitworth (5 vols., London, 1771), 'An essay upon universal monarchy', IV, pp. 1–42, for the intellectual context of this intervention, Steven C. A. Pincus, *Protestantism and patriotism: ideologies and the making of English foreign policy* (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Hont, 'Free trade and the economic limits to modern politics', p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Davenant, 'That foreign trade is beneficial to England', in *Political and commercial works*, I, p. 349.

<sup>21</sup> Hont, 'Free trade and the economic limits to modern politics', p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Davenant, 'That foreign trade is beneficial to England', p. 354.

This 'native product' was what differentiated the necessarily small trading republic from a commercial monarchy. Davenant argued that wealth was not based on dominance of the carrying trade, but that the carrying trade depended on a local basis in a staple commodity that could sustain a numerous population. England's staple was wool, which underpinned English military and commercial strength:

The woollen manufacture is a wealth in a manner peculiar to us. We have besides the product of other countries subject to dominion, the West Indies. The East Indies are an inexhaustible mine of vanities of other countries, which a rich nation will always covet. We have ports and situation, and everything that contribute to make us the foremost people of the whole commercial world.<sup>23</sup>

While England might reasonably aim for pre-eminence in the new commercial world it was not a potential monopolist. Instead England was the first of a new species of industrious, commercial states whose common interest lay in halting the expansion of the new contender for universal monarchy, France, and in defending commercial liberty.<sup>24</sup> From this ground Davenant could denounce war as a waste of the national wealth while supporting the particular war against France: as the contender for universal empire France was the instigator and cause of war.<sup>25</sup> To defeat France was to defeat war. In principle, in a future, properly balanced, Europe even France would find its place in the system of comparative advantage.

Davenant defined England as a commercial monarchy in a world of commercial states. In such an order England's comparative advantages should give it pre-eminence. This idea of England's role in the world generated a transformation in the notion of English liberty. Freedom was now understood as commercial liberty, the liberty that underpinned the prosperity of the country: 'for it has been ever seen that men abound most where there is most freedom, ... it must follow that people will in time desert those countries whose best flower is their liberties, if those liberties are thought precarious or in danger'.<sup>26</sup> As Shelley Burt points out, this articulation of liberty with prosperity allowed Davenant to argue for a new series of civic virtues to replace the martial virtue of civic humanism.<sup>27</sup> The key virtue was work; poverty and especially begging were not simply unfortunate accidents but signs of decadence. For Davenant those who did not contribute to the productivity of the country were bad citizens: 'and it may be

<sup>23</sup> Charles Davenant, 'An essay upon the probable methods of making a people gainers in the balance of trade', in *Political and commercial works*, II, pp. 227–8.

<sup>24</sup> John Robertson, 'Universal monarchy and the liberties of Europe: David Hume's critique of an English whig doctrine', in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Political discourse in early modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 358. Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (London, 1992), pp. 24–5.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Davenant, 'Discourse on the public revenues and on the trade of England', in p. 134; Davenant, 'That foreign trade is beneficial to England', *Political and commercial works*, I, p. 371.

<sup>26</sup> Davenant, 'An essay on the probable methods of making a people gainers in the balance of trade', p. 187.

<sup>27</sup> Burt, *Virtue Transformed*, pp. 8–9.

more truly affirmed that he who does not some way serve the commonwealth, either by being employed or by employing others, is not only a useless, but a hurtful member to it'.<sup>28</sup> Politics were to be understood with reference to this ideal of national flourishing. Prosperity depended on good governance, and poverty revealed a bad government:

where a nation is impoverished by bad government, by an ill-managed trade, or by any other circumstance, the interest of money will be dear, and the purchase of lands cheap; the price of labour and provisions will be low; rents will everywhere fall, lands will lie untilled, and farm houses will go to ruin; the yearly marriages and births will lessen, and the burials increase.<sup>29</sup>

Commercial liberty, civic virtue, and good governance were a virtuous triad that made England not only happy but free.

Ireland was the great exception to Davenant's vision of a free commercial empire.<sup>30</sup> Ireland's comparative advantage made it a competitor to England in the one sector where it could not allow competition, the woollen trade.<sup>31</sup> Ireland had exactly the same climatic conditions, and so could raise wool equivalent to England's, ports that were as good as England's, and cheaper labour.<sup>32</sup> The reality of competition drove publicists for west-country interests to a sustained campaign for restriction of Ireland's trade.<sup>33</sup> The strategic imperative to retain the staple industry drove Davenant from initial opposition to the Navigation Acts to a reluctant acceptance that the Irish freedom to trade would have to be restricted.<sup>34</sup> Yet restricting Ireland posed a considerable intellectual problem for Davenant. Ireland was not a possession, like the plantations in the West Indies, it was a separate kingdom, one with an undoubted right to a parliament and to tax itself.<sup>35</sup> On what basis should the parliament of England restrict Ireland's trade with foreign countries? Why should Ireland be an exception to the vision of a Europe of trading states, especially when it shared a monarch with England?

Davenant solved his problem by adhering to the argument that Ireland was different because Ireland was dependent.<sup>36</sup> The comparison with Scotland brought this out: 'Scotland to England (as Aragon to Spain) is a distinct state,

<sup>28</sup> Davenant, 'An essay on the probable methods of making a people gainers in the balance of trade', p. 203. <sup>29</sup> Davenant, 'That foreign trade is beneficial to England', p. 358.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Kennedy argues this strategic vision emerged through England's wars against the Dutch, see Paul Kennedy, *The rise and fall of British naval mastery* (London, 1976), pp. 65–7.

<sup>31</sup> Hont, 'Free trade and the economic limits to modern politics', pp. 78–89, for a full discussion of the economic problems posed by Ireland.

<sup>32</sup> For the debate on the acts see Patrick Kelly, 'The Irish woollen export prohibition act of 1699: Kearney revisited', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 7 (1980), pp. 22–44.

<sup>33</sup> John Cary, *An essay on the state of England in relation to its trade, its poor and its taxes* (Bristol, 1695); John Cary, *A vindication of the parliament of England* (London, 1698). See also William Atwood, *The history and reasons of the dependency of Ireland upon the imperial crown of the kingdom of England* (London, 1698).

<sup>34</sup> Davenant, 'An essay on the probable methods of making a people gainers in the balance of trade', pp. 236–7. <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>36</sup> Armitage, *The ideological origins of the British Empire*, p. 148, stresses the political and institutional debate around this fact. See also J. H. Baker, "'United and knit to the imperial crown": an English

governing itself by different laws, though under the same Prince, and is truly but a state confederated with the realm of England, though subject to our King.<sup>37</sup> Scotland's was an imperial crown, and while Ireland's had been, the community to whom such a crown had been given by Henry II had lost it through their fifty-two rebellions: 'they might have continued an independent kingdom, and the old Irish might have preserved both their land, and the immunities thereon depending, if they had not themselves altered their own constitution'.<sup>38</sup> The defeat of the Irish rebels had brought an end to the Irish constitution. Davenant directly denied that the colonists inherited the ancient constitution of Ireland:

but the old inhabitants having lost the greatest part of their property, have lost so much of their share in the constitution which is now devolved upon those colonists which England has from time to time sent to conquer and possess the land, who are now properly the body politic of the kingdom.<sup>39</sup>

The rights enjoyed by Irish Protestants, the body politic, were not conferred by the Irish constitution, but were carried with them by the colonists into Ireland. They were the rights of free-born Englishmen, enjoyed not in England, but in a dependent kingdom. While Scots were the political brothers of the English, Irish Protestants were their political children and so in their care, 'they are not our descendants, and they are but politically our brethren; whereas the English-Irish, who are the chief lords of that soil, are naturally our offspring'.<sup>40</sup> Davenant did not rely on this genetic metaphor, which had unfortunate associations with theories of absolute rule, to describe the political condition of Ireland. He was far more specific, arguing that the Irish rebellions had destroyed the Irish constitution, not offended against a primordial paternal right of monarchs: 'we would not be thought here to insinuate, that a people may lose their natural rights by an insurrection, but certain privileges not fundamental they may forfeit by non-use or misuse'.<sup>41</sup> The consequence of Irish dependence was that the population enjoyed a set of rights but was not sovereign, it had civil rather than political rights: 'to be a state not subordinate to any legislative authority on earth, is a privilege that may be forfeited by a subject country, and yet leave to the people their natural rights unhurt'.<sup>42</sup> Davenant solved his intellectual problem by defining the Irish body politic in a genuinely novel way, as a political community that did not

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view of the Anglo-Hibernian constitution in 1670', in D. S. Greer and N. M. Dawson, eds., *Mysteries and solutions in Irish legal history* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 73–95.

<sup>37</sup> Davenant, 'An essay on the probable methods of making a people gainers in the balance of trade', p. 248.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 244. For the medieval discourse of the 'community of the realm' see James Lydon, 'Ireland and the English crown, 1171–1541', *Irish Historical Studies*, 29 (1995), pp. 281–94. For the Tudor reinvention of Irish political discourse see Brendan Bradshaw, *The Irish constitutional revolution of the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, 1979); and Ciaran Brady, 'England's defence and Ireland's reform: the dilemma of the Irish viceroys, 1541–1641', in Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill, eds., *The British problem c. 1534–1707: state formation in the atlantic archipelago* (London, 1996), pp. 89–117.

<sup>39</sup> Davenant, 'An essay on the probable methods of making a people gainers in the balance of trade', p. 245. <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248. <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243. <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.



participate in sovereignty. The Irish were neither slaves nor citizens, in effect they enjoyed a kind of political life for which there was as yet no name.

## II

Davenant's definition of Irish dependency, and its institutional reflection in the Declaratory Act of 1720, posed difficult problems for the Irish body politic. Dependency would be contested by the 'patriot' party, inspired by William Molyneux, after it emerged in Charles Lucas's campaigns in the 1740s.<sup>43</sup> Yet it would be a mistake to take the patriot position as representative of majority political opinion. In fact, of his three arguments, the contention that Ireland was a dependent kingdom found the most support. Pamphleteers regularly announced that 'the Protestant interest of Ireland has thus grown under the wings of England, and does now and must ever exist by her protection, consequently Ireland is a dependent kingdom'.<sup>44</sup> Dependency could even generate a consensual ground for debate. Henry Maxwell acknowledged that 'the circumstances of Ireland, by reason of her dependency, are such that she cannot always obtain those advantages she aims at when she would' and so argued for a central bank as an institution which would give the country more control over its economic future.<sup>45</sup> His uncle, Hercules Rowley, drew the opposite conclusion from the same premise:

As Ireland is a dependent kingdom and can neither make laws, nor repeal them, when it pleases, without the consent of other people not so much interested in the welfare of this country as I could wish, we ought (in my humble opinion) to be very cautious, how we pin any thing upon ourselves, the consequences whereof are at least very doubtful.<sup>46</sup>

While patriot opinion would contest the justice of Ireland's dependency the fact of it could not be denied.

Davenant's twinned ideas that Irish interests were essentially opposed to those of England and that the members of the Irish body politic still enjoyed their natural rights, even if the body politic itself was subject to a foreign legislature, were much more controversial.<sup>47</sup> These were the arguments that Dobbs, Prior, and Madden were most anxious to refute. Dobbs's counter-argument was that Davenant drew false economic conclusions from misconceived political premises.<sup>48</sup> Dobbs entirely accepted Davenant's novel definition of the nation as a productive, trading community. To exercise civic virtue in Ireland, as in England,

<sup>43</sup> Patrick Kelly, 'William Molyneux and the spirit of liberty in eighteenth-century Ireland', *Eighteenth-century Ireland: iris an dá chultúr*, 3 (1988), pp. 133–48.

<sup>44</sup> Anon., *An inquiry into some of the causes of the ill situation of the affairs of Ireland* (Dublin, 1731), p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Maxwell, *Reasons offer'd for creating a Bank*, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Hercules Rowley, *An answer to a book intitled: Reasons offered for erecting a bank in Ireland. In a letter to Henry Maxwell esq.* (Dublin, 1721), p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> See Patrick Kelly, 'The politics of political economy in mid-eighteenth-century Ireland', in S. J. Connolly, ed., *Political ideas in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 105–29, for an overview of this literature.

<sup>48</sup> Dobbs, *An essay on the trade and improvement of Ireland*, 1, p. 68.

was to contribute to the well-being of the community, but industry needed an outlet:

It is every man's duty more immediately to promote the happiness of the nation where he lives, and by such means as are honest and lawful to encrease its power and wealth ... This cannot be done without industry, and the produce of such industry will be poor and mean, and its usefulness of limited extent if it is not improved by the well ordered assistance of many heads and hands in contriving and executing; and if these fruits of human labor and industry be not dispersed over the world by means of traffic and commerce.<sup>49</sup>

As a commercial monarchy, similar to England, Ireland needed the same trading conditions if the distinctive virtues of the citizenry were to flourish. Of course Davenant accepted this, and in consequence argued that cattle exports should not be impeded and that the linen trade should be positively encouraged, but he feared that a low wage Ireland would undermine England in the vital textile trade. Dobbs argued that on the contrary a low wage, freely trading Ireland was a necessary element of the British empire.<sup>50</sup> The Wool Acts, which were supposed to defend English interests, and in particular English dominance of the textile market in Germany, were self-defeating. They could not make English exports cheaper and so had achieved nothing other than removing a competitor to France, which was the source of cheap labour in Europe.<sup>51</sup> By restricting Irish trade England surrendered resources to its main international competitor. Davenant made this elementary economic mistake, they argued, because he did not recognize the converging political interests of Ireland and England. An Ireland free to determine its own interests would naturally form part of a virtuous British commercial empire: 'we will by our industry and labours provide them with many necessaries to carry on their trade, and for their home consumption, which they must now necessarily have from foreigners: by this means we would have returns to give them'.<sup>52</sup> Dobbs saw the possibility of an internally free trading commercial empire, rather than an English commercial monarchy surrounded by more or less dependent satellites.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand an Ireland which was denied the means to develop itself would be a genuine threat to the peace and safety of the 'British dominions' since its poverty would produce rebelliousness.

Dobbs conceived of Ireland as an equal partner in a commercial empire understood as a federation. The same ideal inspired Henry Maxwell, who Jim Smyth identifies as a federative unionist.<sup>54</sup> The attractiveness of this way of conceiving of the emerging British empire was not restricted to Irishmen and was supported by theorists such as Defoe. Defoe argued that England had no interest in a low wage economy, and would necessarily lose its position in those sectors

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4–7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66–7.

<sup>53</sup> This was later to be a view taken up by Smith. See Adam Smith to Henry Dundas, 1 Nov. 1779, in E. C. Mossner and I. S. Ross, eds., *Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Indianapolis, 1987), pp. 240–2.

<sup>54</sup> Henry Maxwell, *An essay upon the union of Ireland with England* (London, 1703). For an analysis of Maxwell, Jim Smyth, "'No remedy more proper": Anglo-Irish unionism before 1707', in Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts, eds., *British consciousness and identity: the making of Britain, 1533–1707* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 301–20.

that demanded low wages in any case. Rather than regret this he celebrated it, because a high wage economy was a high value economy, one in which the work of the poor was worth more to themselves, and to the nation:

the English poor earn more money than the same class of men or women can do for the same kind of work, in any other nation ... Nor will it be deny'd, but that they do more work also: so then, if they do more work, and have better wages too, they must needs live better.<sup>55</sup>

Defoe had a particularly sharp appreciation of the social effects of what he called 'the revolution of trade' within England, which had allowed the poor 'to work, not for cottages and liveries, but for money and to live, as we say, at their own hands', that is independently.<sup>56</sup> His transformation of the idea of virtue into a commercial key was even more absolute than that of Davenant. Defoe had a model of commercial empire to match this ideal of a highly productive, innovative England. England's interest lay not in dependent provinces but in creating a whole new order of states as partners: 'there are new countries, and new nations, who may be so planted, so improved, and the people so managed as to create a new commerce and millions of people shall call for our manufacture, who never called for it before'.<sup>57</sup> Defoe's ideas exactly matched those of Irish Protestants who wished to be partners rather than subjects in a new kind of imperial endeavour.

William Petty had canvassed a union as the solution to all the problems of Ireland: 'there would be no danger such a Parliament should do any thing to the prejudice of the English interest in Ireland; nor could the Irish ever complain of partiality when they shall be freely and proportionally represented in all legislatures'.<sup>58</sup> Dobbs agreed, but thought that a union would only be granted once Ireland had become prosperous: 'they would then find it their interest to enlarge their foundation, as they have already done with Scotland, and to incorporate us with themselves by an equitable union'.<sup>59</sup> There was no assumption that geography or history made an Anglo-Scottish union more obvious than an Anglo-Irish union. The notion that Scots Presbyterians were somehow closer in identity to Englishmen than Irish Anglicans was strongly contested by Swift in his first pamphlet, the unpublished *The story of an injured lady, being a true picture of Scotch perfidy, Irish poverty, and English partiality*.<sup>60</sup> Swift's irritation that impious Presbyterian Scots were now rewarded with union, and its concomitant easy terms of trade, was based on the argument that Ireland had subsumed the English constitutional tradition and so was effectively English, while Scots were foreigners, an argument that had been common in the 1680s and 1690s.<sup>61</sup> During the union debate in

<sup>55</sup> Daniel Defoe, *A plan of the English commerce* (London, 1728), p. 37. <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix. <sup>58</sup> William Petty, *The political anatomy of Ireland* (London, 1691), p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> Arthur Dobbs, *An essay on the trade and improvement of Ireland*, II (Dublin, 1731), p. 77.

<sup>60</sup> See Jim Smyth, 'The communities of Ireland and the British state, 1660–1707', in Bradshaw and Morrill, eds., *The British problem c. 1534–1707*, p. 254.

<sup>61</sup> See R. Lawrence, *The interest of Ireland* (Dublin, 1682); and J. Howell, *A discourse on the woollen manufacture of Ireland* (Dublin, 1689). For a full treatment of these themes see Jim Smyth, "'Like

Scotland Defoe had even suggested that there was less popular resistance to union with Ireland than with Scotland among Englishmen.<sup>62</sup> In Dublin it seemed unimaginable that the English Irishmen could be refused the same terms of political life as Scots since not only did they share the same religion and origin but ‘his majesty’s British subjects in Ireland are separated from his British subjects in Britain, by a little gutt of water of six hours sail’.<sup>63</sup> In 1703 the Irish House of Commons proposed either a union or annual parliaments, in effect legislative independence, as appropriate remedies for Irish grievances.<sup>64</sup> In either case they would enjoy their rights. The problem faced by articulate Irishmen, as opposed to articulate Scots, was that these arguments had not been accepted and so they lacked a union as the institutional basis through which to negotiate their relationship to the empire.<sup>65</sup>

However intellectually attractive, the idea of the British empire as a federation organized under a loose notion of sovereignty was obviated by the terms of the Scottish Act of Union of 1707 and the Declaratory Act of 1720. The idea of federation was rejected in favour of an incorporating union that claimed supremacy for the now British parliament in the British empire. The circumstances of the Scottish union, which was accompanied by levels of bribery and influence peddling beyond even the flexible norms of eighteenth-century politics, evacuated any real effort to create a principled argument for the new arrangement.<sup>66</sup> The union ushered in what J. G. A. Pocock has termed ‘a whig experiment in empire, and ... the golden age of aristocratic parlementarism’.<sup>67</sup> In neo-Roman, or Machiavellian, terms, Ireland was ‘Panoepa, the soft mother of a slothful and pusillanimous people, ... anciently subjugated by the arms of Oceana’, to be ordered as the interests of Oceana demanded.<sup>68</sup> Panopeans and Marpesians were not partners but provincials. John Toland, protesting at the Declaratory Act, indicted precisely the neo-Roman ideology that motivated the act:

I know certain folks have it very much in their mouths, that the out-provinces of a government, can never be held under too severe a rein; when the very contrary of this is true. History cannot afford one example, where any out-province, or remote colony,

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amphibious animals”, Irish Protestants, ancient Britons 1691–1707’, *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 785–97.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel Defoe, *An essay at removing national prejudices against a union with Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1706), p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Anon., *An inquiry into some of the causes of the ill situation of the affairs of Ireland* (Dublin, 1731), p. 13.

<sup>64</sup> Smyth, “‘No remedy more proper’: Anglo-Irish unionism before 1707”, p. 308.

<sup>65</sup> James Kelly, ‘Political and public opinion in Ireland and the idea of an Anglo-Irish Union, 1650–1800’, in D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall, and Vincent Geoghegan, eds., *Political discourse in seventeenth and eighteenth century Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 110–44.

<sup>66</sup> William Ferguson, ‘The making of the treaty of union 1707’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 43 (1964), pp. 89–110; Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s past*, p. 50.

<sup>67</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The limits and divisions of British history* (Glasgow, 1979), Studies in Public Policy No. 31, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> James Harrington, *The commonwealth of Oceana* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 6.

ever rebelled against the mother country, or chief seat of government, but through unsupportable rigor and oppression.<sup>69</sup>

A letter from Margaret Campbell to her husband Hugh, third earl of Loudon and a strong supporter of the Hanoverian succession, exemplifies the frustration such provincial elites faced. Writing from a London preparing to celebrate the king's birthday to her spouse gone to fight the Jacobites during the '15, she wrote:

There is nothing worth writing from this abominable place, for wherever one goes, there is nothing talked of, but news from Scotland, or Berth-day cloathes; they are very different subjects, the one concerns no less than the lives and fortunes of half a nation, and the other a meer trifle, and yet I believe the last takes up more peoples' heads, than the other.<sup>70</sup>

Even a whole-hearted commitment to the new British state could not disguise the limitations of the newly formed British institutions.

Political realities severely constrained the possible responses to Davenant's conception of the Irish situation. The various institutional remedies for its dependent status, incorporating union or federation, were politically impossible. A third constraint was the cultural construction of Irishness in England. Irish Protestants had no difficulty in negotiating complex identities. Their social position as landowners integrated Irish Protestants into local societies governed by norms of deference, influence, and privilege.<sup>71</sup> At the same time they unproblematically asserted their Englishness: 'the Protestants of Ireland are a worthy part of the king of Great Britain's subjects, and that in no respect should be thought a people different from the English, ... I think they should ever be considered as the same people'.<sup>72</sup> The events of 1641, as interpreted through Temple's *Irish rebellion*, provided a founding narrative of danger and redemption for the community, one which was re-enacted every 23 October, the particular festival of Irish Protestantism.<sup>73</sup> The numerical inferiority of the Protestant inhabitants of Ireland, which was once held to present a particular challenge to Protestant identity, was if anything an element of it.<sup>74</sup> The biblical figure of the justified remnant, set apart amidst danger and providentially delivered, was a powerful representation of the community. It was even capacious enough to be extended to Dissenters when the

<sup>69</sup> John Toland, *Reasons why the bill for the better securing the dependency of Ireland upon the crown of Great Britain should not pass into law* (London, 1720), p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Margaret Campbell to Hugh Campbell, 20 Oct. 1715, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, Loudon papers, LO 7384.

<sup>71</sup> For a compelling account of Irish Protestant society in these terms see S. J. Connolly, *Religion, law and power: the making of Protestant Ireland, 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>72</sup> Anon., *Some remarks occasion'd by the Revd Mr Madden's scheme and objections raised against it, by one who is no projector* (Dublin, 1732), p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> T. C. Barnard, 'Crises of identity among Irish Protestants, 1641–1685', *Past and Present*, 127 (1990), p. 50; idem, 'The uses of the 23 October 1641 and Irish Protestant celebrations', *English Historical Review*, 105 (1991), pp. 889–920.

<sup>74</sup> For an overview of changing views on this, and other questions in eighteenth-century historiography, S. J. Connolly, 'Eighteenth-century Ireland', in D. G. Boyce and Alan O'Day, eds., *The making of modern Irish history: revisionism and the revisionist controversy* (London, 1996), pp. 15–33.

later events of the Williamite wars demanded interpretation.<sup>75</sup> After the siege of Derry Dissenters could, if necessary, be comprised within the central mythic narrative of identity. In Ireland, argued John Toland, even Dissenters are Hanoverian.<sup>76</sup> The core narrative could be and was supplemented by other elements. Figures like Ussher had been sufficiently confident of this identity to look to embed it in the Gaelic past, seeking a Protestant Patrick.<sup>77</sup> The identity was even rich enough to encompass very different ideologies and attitudes to the Catholic population, from the conciliatory ideas of a Gookin to the more conflictual attitudes of a Lawrence or an Orrery.<sup>78</sup> The flexibility of Irish Protestant ideas about themselves was well suited to the complexity of the polity.<sup>79</sup>

The Irish understanding of the political options open to the Protestant community in Ireland was not shared in England. The local capacity to integrate Irish and English identity in one culture was not understood and instead Protestant Irishmen were taken to be primarily Irish. The agency of Irish Protestants was frustrated not because of any doubts they might have had themselves about their role, but because that role was constrained within the cultural model of Irishness developed in England.<sup>80</sup> This culturally embedded constraint was fully apparent to Irish Protestants:

unfortunately for this kingdom, it still keeps the name of Ireland, and the Protestant inhabitants the denomination of Irish, with old ideas annexed to them of opposition to the interest of England, and altho' these ideas are so strongly associated, like sprights and darkness, that many generous Britons find it difficult on the plainest conviction to separate them, yet in reality, the scene is quite changed from what it was.<sup>81</sup>

William Petty thought it 'absurd that *Englishmen* born, sent over into *Ireland* by the commission of their King, and there sacrificing their lives for the King's interest, and succeeding in his service, should therefore be accounted aliens, foreigners, and also enemies'.<sup>82</sup> To the contrary James Harrington determined identity from geography, 'but, (through what virtue of the soil, or vice of the air soever it be) they come still to degenerate'.<sup>83</sup> Irishness was a degenerative disease. James Arbuckle found worth noting someone 'who said, that he had the honour to be

<sup>75</sup> Ian McBride, *The siege of Derry in Ulster Protestant mythology* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 12–13; A. T. Q. Stewart, *The narrow ground: the roots of conflict in Ulster* (London, 1989), pp. 49–52.

<sup>76</sup> Toland, *Reasons why the bill ... should not pass*, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Alan Ford, 'James Ussher and the creation of Irish Protestant identity', in Bradshaw and Roberts, eds., *British consciousness and identity*, pp. 185–212.

<sup>78</sup> Barnard, 'Crises of identity', pp. 63–80.

<sup>79</sup> Jane Ohlmeyer, 'Seventeenth-century Ireland and the new British and Atlantic histories', *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), p. 454.

<sup>80</sup> For an overview of English models of Irishness in the period see Joop Leersen, *Mere Irish and fíor-ghael: studies in the idea of Irish nationality, its development and literary expression prior to the nineteenth century* (Cork, 1996), pp. 32–76.

<sup>81</sup> Anon., *An inquiry into some of the causes of the ill situation of the affairs of Ireland* (Dublin, 1731), p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> William Petty, 'The political anatomy of Ireland', in Charles Henry Hull, ed., *The economic writings of Sir William Petty* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1899), I, p. 159.

<sup>83</sup> Harrington, *The commonwealth of Oceana*, 6.

born in Ireland' when to be Irish 'is usually looked upon as a misfortune'.<sup>84</sup> The manner in which Irish cultural representations and modes of action developed at home was irrelevant to their reception in Britain. While it might be in the interests of England to incorporate Ireland within the polity the representation of Ireland's incivility was too foundational to English national discourse for arguments of interest to be determinative. Dobbs again was clear on this, pointing out that

we can't expect an enlargement of Trade (however rational it may appear here when nothing but public spirit prevails) unless we can make it appear that what we desire is not only beneficial to that whole of which we are a part, but also not detrimental to those who have a power to obstruct it.<sup>85</sup>

Irish dependency was inscribed into the terms of the emerging empire.

The local tradition of political thought was already sensitive to the problems of dependency, prosperity, and political independence. Robert Molesworth was particularly alert to the relationship between liberty and prosperity. His study of Denmark was designed to illustrate the difference between the states of Europe that had maintained their 'Gothic' constitutions (England, Poland, and Ireland) and those who had fallen under tyranny.<sup>86</sup> Denmark served this purpose because it had only lost its liberty in the previous generation and the effects of absolutism were therefore new and obvious. The observed effect of tyranny was to destroy confidence in the rule of law and so in the enjoyment of property, 'the difficulty of procuring a comfortable subsistence and the little security of enjoying what shall be acquired through industry, is a great cause of prodigality'.<sup>87</sup> In particular Molesworth was impressed by the difficulties faced by the peasantry who might have anything they created expropriated by unrestricted landlords,

if any one of these wretches prove to be of a diligent and improving temper, who endeavours to live a little better than his fellows, ... it is forty to one but he is transplanted from thence to a naked and uncomfortable habitation, to the end that his griping landlord may get more rent.<sup>88</sup>

Molesworth observed exactly the same lack of incentive to productive labour in Ireland.<sup>89</sup> Molesworth had recommended political liberty and extensive trade to the Danes as the means of creating prosperity. Ireland, being a special case, neither free nor bound but dependent, needed special remedies to solve its problems.

Dependency threatened to distort and undermine the particular virtues of commercial empire. In Davenant's account modern liberty was based on industry, work made Englishmen free. However, labour had exactly the opposite effect on

<sup>84</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *A collection of letters and essays, on several subjects, lately published in the Dublin Journal* (2 vols., London, 1729), I, p. 259. <sup>85</sup> Dobbs, *An essay on the trade and improvement of Ireland*, II, p. 13.

<sup>86</sup> Robert Molesworth, *An account of Denmark as it was in the year 1692* (London, 1694), p. 43.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>89</sup> Robert Molesworth, *Some considerations for the promoting of agriculture and employing the poor* (Dublin, 1723), p. 4.

Irishmen. In his efforts to explain the utility of Irish labour to the British comity of nations Prior unwittingly defined Ireland as a slave society. Prior, like Dobbs, derived his explanatory categories from Davenant and sought to use those tools to undermine the conclusions he had reached. Both Prior and Davenant agreed that the plantations were one basis of English strength because ‘the labour of the Negroes, about 20,000 in number, costs little, and the profit thereof is great, and centres at last in England’.<sup>90</sup> The plantations, as possessions worked by slaves, were supposed to be a special case without general political significance. However, Prior could not sustain the difference between this kind of work of slaves, which nobody pretended was to the benefit of the slave, and the work of free men that was ideally to be the basis of their freedom. Irish work ‘is much the same with the plantations, the produce and profit of all our labour issues constantly to the people of England, and therefore ‘tis in its interest to give the people of Ireland full employment’.<sup>91</sup> The dependent nature of Ireland even turned trade and labour into slavery. A kingdom dependent on another could pervert the incentives to work offered to its population. Even Prior acknowledged this and concluded that if the kingdom of Ireland was not allowed to trade freely then the people should not work. In either case they would remain poor and ‘tis better to enjoy poverty with ease’.<sup>92</sup>

Irish claims to contribute and participate in commercial empire as a nation ended in paradox and immobility. The commercial polity that escaped the paradoxes of European history perversely condemned one nation to poverty or slavery. Only Ireland, among European nations, could not benefit from the beneficial effects of commerce:

trade, in the body politick, makes the several parts of it contribute to the well-being of the whole, and also to the more comfortable and agreeable living of every member of the community. Every nation, every climate from the Equinox almost to the very poles, may partake of the produce of all the rest, by means of a friendly intercourse and mutual exchange of what each has to spare.<sup>93</sup>

Irish citizens did not enjoy the beneficial effects of this commercial world because trade was restricted and the nation dependent. The challenge was to find a mechanism other than unrestricted trade whereby a community other than the nation could create conditions where ‘the several parts of it contribute to the well-being of the whole’. Political constraints governed the extent to which Ireland could participate in this commercial world, just as they constrained the African trade.<sup>94</sup> However, the Irish political community did enjoy a residual freedom that African slaves did not. While they might not have much chance of persuading England to redescribe itself in such a way that Irish Protestants could be acknowledged

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Prior, *A list of the absentees of Ireland and the yearly value of their estates and incomes spent abroad with observations on the present state and condition of that kingdom* (Dublin, 1729), p. 65. <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>94</sup> Tim Kiern, ‘Monopoly, economic thought, and the Royal African Company’, in John Brewer and Susan Staves, eds., *Early-modern conceptions of property* (London, 1996), pp. 427–66.



as full partners in the polity, they could, potentially, find a manner of redescribing themselves that eliminated or reduced the baleful effects of dependency. Some other way of imagining and describing the community would have to be found if it was to be able to act. Irish nationhood might be a curse, given its historical associations, but if another Irishness could be created then the curse could be dispelled. In effect, despite all their efforts to resist it, Irish Protestant thinkers and writers were driven back on to Davenant's formulation of their situation. They had to find a way of explaining how one might enjoy all one's rights without sharing in sovereignty, a way of describing a community in which identity was not political. Irish thinkers were being invited to discover and describe civil society.

### III

The practical challenges posed by participation in the economy of the North Atlantic world were not peculiar to Ireland. Martin Martin argued that the poverty of the Western Isles of Scotland was because 'by reason of their distance from trading towns, and because of their language which is Irish, the inhabitants have never had any opportunity to trade at home or abroad'.<sup>95</sup> Access and the accompanying stimulus to trade was the core issue for development. Martin saw clubs and associations as the mechanism for stimulating such development for Scotland just as Dobbs and Madden did for Ireland. Martin's scheme was quite constrained, asking only that the government of Scotland 'give encouragement for it to publick spirited persons or societies'.<sup>96</sup> Madden had a more capacious understanding of an improving society, arguing it should operate for Ireland much as the Board of Trade in England or even the government did in Holland, being 'little more than a great council of merchants'.<sup>97</sup> Dobbs portrayed the most utopian version of the improving society and envisioned it as a national organization co-ordinated by a general board in Dublin, drawing in every trade and economic function.<sup>98</sup> The Irish versions carried a heavier burden of expectation not because their economic task was harder but because their political problem was more acute. Martin thought a Royal Burgh on Skye to govern a sheriality of the Western Isles the obvious sponsor for improvement.<sup>99</sup> Irish local government could not play this role. Dependency was also reflected in the 'new rules' of 1672 that had emasculated Irish urban corporations. In Ireland the role of the improving society would have to be invented out of new sources rather than developed from older traditions.

Dobbs, Prior, Madden, and the other founder members of the Dublin Society would develop its characteristic intellectual sociability from a variety of heterogeneous sources. The interest generated by 'patriot' discourse and particularly

<sup>95</sup> Martin Martin, *A description of the Western Isles of Scotland* (London, 1703), p. 336.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2. <sup>97</sup> Madden, *A letter to the Dublin Society*, p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> Dobbs, *An essay on the trade and improvement of Ireland*, II, pp. 98–9.

<sup>99</sup> Martin, *A description of the Western Isles of Scotland*, p. 348.

the dominating figure of Molyneux, has obscured most of these less well-known traditions. Indeed the influence of Molyneux, and of Lockianism generally, has probably been exaggerated. Locke's radical rights theory was useless in Ireland since he explicitly stated that rights were not secure without political freedom.<sup>100</sup> The Protestant community, in particular, was too committed to a theory of passive obedience to embrace Locke.<sup>101</sup> To entertain discussion of Lockian ideas of rights threatened the status of dependency, and this was politically impossible.<sup>102</sup> Even when political life became reanimated by the Money Bill dispute in the 1750s, a rationalization of the nature of the nation in terms of natural right remained a dangerous option.<sup>103</sup>

Outside the natural jurisprudential tradition four local intellectual resources existed out of which a new model of community might be constructed in Ireland. The tradition of political economy, which spoke directly to the condition of dependency, comprehended explicitly novel categories for the description of civic life. Within the Anglican community the moral reform movement, inspired by figures such as Bishops Wetenhall and Browne, sought to bring the population to a new understanding of itself. Presbyterian social and political thinkers were a particularly important source of new ideas. Disenfranchised by the 1704 Test Act, their situation within Ireland mirrored that of the political community as a whole within the British polity. Finally the Catholic community, whose educational institutions were now wholly located on the continent, gave access to the novel ideas of Fénelon and of the Jansenist opposition to the French absolute monarchy. None of these traditions had the resources to perform a revolution in the conception of the polity in and of themselves; however, in their interaction they created substantial new categories for self-understanding.

It would difficult to over-estimate the importance and novelty of the local tradition of political economy to the evolution of a new model of community.<sup>104</sup> Foucault has identified Petty as one of the key figures in the emergence of a new principle in the seventeenth century: governmentality.<sup>105</sup> Foucault argues that governance, the promotion of the several ends and goods of the elements of the

<sup>100</sup> John Locke, *Two treatises of government* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 413.

<sup>101</sup> S. J. Connolly, 'The Glorious Revolution in Irish Protestant political thinking', in S. J. Connolly, ed., *Political ideas in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), p. 37.

<sup>102</sup> Patrick Kelly, 'Perceptions of Locke in eighteenth-century Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 89c (1989).

<sup>103</sup> Thomas Bartlett, 'The origin and progress of the Catholic question in Ireland, 1680–1800', in T. P. Power and Kevin Whelan, eds., *Endurance and emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the eighteenth century* (Dublin, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>104</sup> Though it has been largely ignored. For overviews see Kelly, 'Politics of political economy', and Salim Rashid, 'The Irish school of economic development: 1720–1750', *The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, 54 (1988), pp. 345–69.

<sup>105</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault effect: essays in governmentality* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 87–104. Ian Hacking thinks Petty may have developed his ideas from John Graunt, see Ian Hacking, *The emergence of probability* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 105.

polity, generated an alternative horizon of political judgement to sovereignty in the late seventeenth century. Governance developed from the model of the community as family, with the governor in the place of the father, to a new and more abstract model of population understood and guided by the science of political economy. The techniques and strategies of governance became more complex than the practices of paternal power. Governance proposed ends outside the functioning of the institutions of the state, the state and its existence being the horizon within which the notion of sovereignty worked. Petty illustrates the contrast of the values of sovereignty to governance well. His *Political anatomy of Ireland* operates through a double vision. On the one hand he analyses Ireland in terms of the political struggles for sovereignty between opposed political groups. His particular contribution here was to turn a rather jaundiced eye on the opposing claims to legitimacy, commenting of the victors in the wars of the seventeenth century: ‘upon the playing of this match upon so great odds, the English won and have (among and beside other pretences) a gamester’s right at least to their estates’.<sup>106</sup> Petty’s realist vision understood sovereignty as power, primarily political power; however, he also argued that the acquisition of sovereignty could not pacify Ireland: ‘declining all military means of settling and securing Ireland in peace and plenty, what we offer shall tend to the transmuting one people into the other, and a thorough union of interests upon natural or lasting principles’.<sup>107</sup> The thrust of the *Political Anatomy* was to analyse Ireland not as a political community or series of communities, shaped by a particular historical experience, but as a series of human and natural resources to be exploited. He systematically separated the political significance of particular institutions and events from their social and economic significance. He argued, for example, that short leases and the fear of discovery among Catholic landowners were not useful political safeguards but impediments to economic development.<sup>108</sup>

The most important feature of Petty’s work was his use of mathematical descriptions of Irish resources. This allowed him to collapse all differences of culture and community by describing their elements as part of a common productive system. Petty conceived of political analysis as the calculation of probabilistic dynamics, rather than as the perception of essential qualities.<sup>109</sup> As Mary Poovey points out, the fact that many of Petty’s numbers were at best conjectural is beside the point: ‘by using numbers to expunge the affiliations that most of his contemporaries considered signs of partiality – religion and politics – Petty tried to argue that numbers were impartial’.<sup>110</sup> Petty’s analysis, literally decomposition of economic life into its constituent elements, was the first step in an eventual reconstitution of the polity in new terms. There was an ironic circularity in the

<sup>106</sup> Petty, *Political anatomy of Ireland*, p. 24.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>109</sup> Hacking, *Emergence of probability*, p. 110.

<sup>110</sup> Mary Poovey, *A history of the modern fact: problems of knowledge in the sciences of wealth and society* (Chicago, 1998), p. 135.

centrality of Davenant to later Irish efforts to understand their position: Petty was identified by Davenant as the originator of the political arithmetic that laid the basis for his own economics.<sup>111</sup>

The redescription of social relations in terms of the mathematical quantities of economics was supported by changes in the economy itself. Much of the country became commercialized, that is to say that an integrated market emerged for a series of commodities, between 1660 and 1710.<sup>112</sup> Commercialization was particularly rapid and profound in those regions and around those commodities that formed part of the new Atlantic trade network. David Dickson shows in his account of the evolution of the butter market in Cork that by 1700 brokers had emerged who set markets and worked as intermediaries between primary producers and exporters.<sup>113</sup> These brokers operated as active agents of market principles and intruded them into the lives of the primary producers, setting up future contracts and setting prices for the whole region. Louis Cullen has illustrated how profound the effects of this penetration of new values into society could be. The Irish poor were driven to abandon the dairy products that had acquired a market value in favour of the potato as their staple food.<sup>114</sup> The socially transformative effects of the imposition of market norms could have disturbing effects. Airt Uí Laoghaire was murdered at least in part because the profits he derived from the cattle and butter trade threatened the social position of some of his Protestant neighbours.<sup>115</sup> Land, like butter, was a true commodity, unencumbered by legally enforceable customary rights or a more diffuse set of customary relations that might restrain the profit-seeking of landowners. The individualistic precepts of political economy and the realities of Irish economic life matched one another and this made the mathematical, quantitative language of political arithmetic attractive to Irish commentators. Ireland could be thought of and analysed as a space to be governed according to the interests of its inhabitants rather than as a sovereign community expressing itself in a set of political institutions.

#### IV

It was one thing to decompose the warring tribes of Ireland in terms of the interests of the individuals making up the traditions; it was another to recompose those individuals within a novel language of community. There was something

<sup>111</sup> Davenant, 'On the use of political arithmetic, in all considerations about the revenues and trade', in *Political and commercial works*, p. 128.

<sup>112</sup> David Dickson, *New foundations: Ireland, 1660–1800* (Dublin, 2000), p. 115.

<sup>113</sup> David Dickson, 'Butter comes to market: the origins of commercial dairying in county Cork', in Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer, eds., *Cork: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1992).

<sup>114</sup> Louis Cullen, *The emergence of modern Ireland, 1600–1900* (London, 1981), pp. 141–9.

<sup>115</sup> L. M. Cullen, 'The contemporary and later politics of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 8 (1993), pp. 7–38.

inherently paradoxical in even trying to imagine a community of individuals. One important source of new ideas of community came from the moral reform movements within the Anglican communion.<sup>116</sup> The inspiration for the reform societies was not indigenous, they were modelled on the English societies for the reformation of manners. However, they were particularly important to the established church in Ireland because of the numerical inferiority of the Anglican population. The reformation of manners extended the mission of the Anglican clergy outside their immediate flock to the disciplining of the society as a whole. The campaign also fostered a self-critical attitude toward its own ideas in the Anglican community itself, particularly in Bishop Browne's campaign against the cult of William of Orange.<sup>117</sup> As David Hayton points out the campaign targeted all the institutions of social life, particularly those of the poor: churches, hospitals, schools, libraries, and workhouses, and sought to regulate a variety of behaviours from swearing to the profanation of the sabbath.<sup>118</sup> The campaign for the reformation of manners fostered institutions in which an individualistic, disciplined, productive community could be created.<sup>119</sup> These institutions formed one model for a community of individuals, if a particularly highly structured model based firmly on Protestant ideals of asceticism.<sup>120</sup> The campaign was a failure, since the necessary institutions of discipline did not exist and there was considerable social resistance to the practice of informing that would have undermined popular practices, such as playing hurling on Sundays.<sup>121</sup> However, the campaign was intellectually and culturally important because it reinforced the model of the community as a productive unit and it gave clergymen a new role. They were not just to have the care of souls, they were also to be the agents of something called improvement. Early versions were highly marked by evangelizing ambitions and were articulated not in the context of specifically Irish conditions but in millenarian style.<sup>122</sup> Latterly, moral improvement and economic improvement could become indistinguishable; Robert Howard, bishop of Elphin, practised his ministry largely through the improvement of his estates, while Francis

<sup>116</sup> David Hayton, 'Did Protestantism fail in early eighteenth-century Ireland? Charity schools and the enterprise of religious and social reformation c1690–1730'; and Toby Barnard, 'Improving clergymen, 1660–1760', both in Alan Ford, James McGuire, and Kenneth Milne, eds., *As by law established: the Church of Ireland since the Reformation* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 166–86, and 136–51; T. C. Barnard, 'Reforming Irish manners: the religious societies in Dublin during the 1690s', *Historical Journal*, 35 (1992), pp. 805–38. <sup>117</sup> Peter Browne, *Of drinking to the memory of the dead* (Dublin, 1713).

<sup>118</sup> Hayton, 'Did Protestantism fail', p. 167. <sup>119</sup> Barnard, 'Improving clergymen', p. 136.

<sup>120</sup> On Protestant asceticism, Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, trans. R. H. Tawney (London, 1930), pp. 95–154. For a friendly critique of Weber see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: the making of modern identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), pp. 511–12.

<sup>121</sup> On the problems facing all such disciplinary campaigns in the period, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979), p. 113.

<sup>122</sup> Gerard Boote, *Ireland's natural history* (London, 1652), see T. C. Barnard, 'The Hartlib circle and the cult and culture of improvement in Ireland', in Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor, eds., *Samuel Hartlib and universal Reformation: studies in intellectual communication* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 281–97.

Hutchinson, bishop of Down and Connor, was an enthusiast for the literal emulation of Peter the fisherman.<sup>123</sup>

The model of the nation as a body of men and women disciplined by the established church was not attractive to Francis Hutcheson nor to his friend James Arbuckle: 'all the open attacks which have been made upon religion and virtue by their declared enemies, have not been capable to do near the harm which has been done either thro' the indiscreet and intemperate zeal, or the wrong and intemperate notions of some men'.<sup>124</sup> This veiled critique of the enthusiasm of the members of the established church for attacking wrong-doing was supplemented with Hutcheson's clear sense that the project of improvement might be more efficiently prosecuted if the population were conceived of in some way other than as a body of sinners. Hutcheson proposed a new idea of the population understood not as a group of atomized individuals, nor as a body of downfallen hurlers, but as a society, an assembly of moral equals governed not by discipline but by the search for happiness.

For that cannot be called society, where there is not a participation in rational delight, and an interchange of sentiments and passions; and without society no being can be happy, that is sensible of either wants or defects. Beings of different or opposite natures one to the other are no more capable of holding society together, than a train of discords in music is of producing that wonderful combination of sounds, which we call by the name of harmony. And for this reason it is necessary to our happiness, that we should have communication with our equals.<sup>125</sup>

Hutcheson retained the productive individualism of the Anglican reformers, their ideal of the nation as a fundamentally moral community, and the emphasis on the institutions that constituted that community. He abandoned their obsession with discipline, however, and argued that society was fundamentally self-ordering and structured by free communication not hierarchical control. Through Hutcheson, New Light Presbyterianism bequeathed a tolerant and rational model of society to the Irish discussion of the possibilities of community.<sup>126</sup> Hutcheson also forged the vital link between Irish and Scottish contexts for the discussion of the possibilities of commercial empire. The clarity of Hutcheson's formulation of the utilitarian principle, that the good of society comprised the happiness of the greatest number, was to be crucial for moderate divines and men of letters seeking to challenge the authority of traditional Calvinism.<sup>127</sup>

Catholicism was possibly a surprising source of new ideas for representing a society of individuals in Ireland. It would seem unlikely that Catholics would

<sup>123</sup> Toby Barnard, 'Improving clergymen, 1660–1760', in Ford, McGuire, and Milne, eds., *By law established*, pp. 146–8. Francis Hutchinson, *A second letter to a member of parliament recommending the improvement of the Irish fishery* (Dublin, 1729), pp. 3–6, 21.

<sup>124</sup> Hutcheson, *Letters and essays*, 1, p. 160.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>126</sup> Ian McBride, *Scripture politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish radicalism in the late eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1998), p. 51.

<sup>127</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue in two treatises* (2nd edn, London, 1726), p. 87.

be enthusiasts for the new commercial empire since elite Catholics suffered a crippling series of impediments to participation in society, particularly political society.<sup>128</sup> Papal support for the Jacobite claim to the throne of Britain until the death of the young pretender was particularly unhelpful to Catholics who sought to integrate themselves into the new British polity.<sup>129</sup> However, two aspects of Catholic life served to encourage Catholic participation in the search for new models of community. As Louis Cullen has argued, the dispossession of landed Catholic families drove them into novel activities and forced them to participate in trade, the church, medicine, and market-orientated farming.<sup>130</sup> There was even a Catholic, Jacobite Petty, arguing for a project of improvement.<sup>131</sup> The most obvious aspect of this transformation lay in the conditions of landholding. The ‘underground gentry’ who operated as middlemen, brokering leases on large estates, had to be conscious of market conditions if they were to survive and maintain their social position.<sup>132</sup> They could not adopt a rent-seeking attitude. Their sub-tenants, the farmers, were even more defiantly commercial, inscribing a rational, accumulative individualism into strategies of family promotion across generations.<sup>133</sup> The commercialization of Catholic life had a clear trajectory from the accumulation of a surplus in the countryside to establishing family members in the towns. While it took some time for a significant Catholic trading community to arise, outside of Galway where Catholic capital still had a foothold, Catholic social life in the towns was commercialized very early in the century.<sup>134</sup> It is unsurprising therefore that the issue that provoked the creation of the Catholic Committee in 1756 was quarterage payments, the levy by the guilds on non-members who followed the trades in Irish towns.<sup>135</sup> The nature of Catholic social and economic life drove that community to engage with the new commercial world.

Ian McBride has remarked that when these new Catholic political institutions emerged after mid-century they expressed themselves through the rhetoric of

<sup>128</sup> The best overview of penal legislation remains Maureen Wall, ‘The penal laws, 1691–1760’, in Gerard O’Brien, ed., *Catholic Ireland in the eighteenth century: collected essays of Maureen Wall* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 1–60, but see also L. M. Cullen, ‘Catholics under the penal laws’, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 1 (1986), pp. 23–36.

<sup>129</sup> Tadhg O hAnnrachain, ‘“Though hereticks and politicians should misinterpret their goode zeal”’: political ideology and Catholicism in early-modern Ireland’, in Ohlmeyer, ed., *Political thought in seventeenth-century Ireland*, pp. 155–75.

<sup>130</sup> L. M. Cullen, ‘Catholic social classes under the penal laws’, in Power and Whelan, eds., *Endurance and emergence*, p. 73.

<sup>131</sup> Patrick Kelly, ‘The improvement of Ireland’, *Analecta Hibernica*, 35 (1992), pp. 47–53.

<sup>132</sup> Kevin Whelan, ‘An underground gentry? Catholic middlemen in eighteenth-century Ireland’, in *The tree of liberty: radicalism, Catholicism and the construction of Irish identity 1760–1830* (Cork, 1996), pp. 27–33.

<sup>133</sup> Cullen, ‘Catholic social classes under the penal laws’, p. 62.

<sup>134</sup> David Dickson, ‘Catholics and trade in eighteenth-century Ireland: an old debate revisited’, in Power and Whelan, eds., *Endurance and emergence*, pp. 85–110.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas Bartlett, *The fall and rise of the Irish nation: the Catholic question, 1690–1830* (Dublin, 1992), p. 50; C. D. A. Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant kingdom: a study of the Irish ancien regime* (London, 1994), pp. 67–85.

whiggery. He goes on to note that the process through which the community acquired that language remains 'a mystery'.<sup>136</sup> While social life might promote Catholic integration into the new order of things, the main Catholic political tradition, Jacobitism, would seem to have precluded acquisition of novel political ideas.<sup>137</sup> While there is a dearth of work on the cultural and intellectual life of Catholics in eighteenth-century Ireland that would allow us to overturn this view completely, we can already see that Catholic political consciousness cannot be restricted to traditional Jacobitism and some notions borrowed from the Protestant tradition. C. D. A. Leighton has already pointed out many of the Catholic contributions to the modernization of Irish political discourse, especially the promotion of the secularization of debate.<sup>138</sup> He has also identified Gallicanism as the tradition within Catholicism which allowed Catholics to argue for a place within the structure of the Irish state.<sup>139</sup> Gallicanism refers to a broad variety of movements within Catholicism, in fact to any phenomenon that questioned ultramontane orthodoxy in the name of the local or national body of the faithful. It also comprised some of the most innovative thinking within that faith, particularly Jansenism. For our purposes, though, the most relevant Gallican tendency was the mixture of mystical optimism and belief in economic progress represented by Fénelon.<sup>140</sup> The most important interpreter of Fénelon was a Jacobite Scot, and convert to Catholicism, Alexander Ramsay. Ramsay's biography of Fénelon, along with the eight hundred editions and translations of the *Aventures de Télémaque*, created the image of Fénelon as a rationalist precursor of the Enlightenment. Ramsay in turn was highly integrated into the circles of émigré Irish; the translator of his life of Fénelon into English was Nathaniel Hooke, a member of a substantial military-clerical family from Dublin.<sup>141</sup> Fénelon offered a useful model of Catholicism to Irish readers. He emphasized the internal, mystical element of religious life, that least likely to lead to conflict with the authorities. His politics were anti-absolutist, against universal monarchy and in favour of what Lionel Rothkrug has called 'Christian agrarianism'.<sup>142</sup> His repeated insistence that the good life included economic well-being promoted by the widest participation in productive, especially agricultural, labour, was compatible with the demands of political economy.

Dissenters, Protestants, and Catholics all developed new languages for describing the community in the early eighteenth century. All of these new languages converged on the idea of the community, or nation, as a productive unit created

<sup>136</sup> McBride, *Scripture politics*, p. 25.

<sup>137</sup> On Jacobitism see Breandán Ó Buachalla, 'Irish Jacobitism and Irish nationalism: the literary evidence', in Michael O'Dea and Kevin Whelan, eds., *Nations and nationalism: France, Britain, Ireland and the eighteenth-century context* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 103–16.

<sup>138</sup> Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant kingdom*, p. 94.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145–60.

<sup>140</sup> See Lionel Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV: the political and social origins of the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 234–97.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas O'Connor, *An Irish theologian in Enlightenment France: Luke Joseph Hooke 1714–96* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 18–19.

<sup>142</sup> Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV*, p. 234.



out of the labour of its members. The various models of the community – morally reforming institution, communicative society, and Christian commonwealth – all served to create a context for the rational individual idealized by political economy. Improvement was to perform in Ireland the same function that trade performed elsewhere. Social mechanisms of emulation and discipline would inculcate the distinctive virtues of commercial liberty in a population that was not allowed fully to participate in the system of trade. The institution that would direct this organization of the life of the nation was to be the Dublin Society.

## V

The writings of the founders reflected these various sources for the notion of an improving society. Dobbs recognized the possibility that Catholics could be productive members of society, even if they were excluded from citizenship. He thought that the penal laws should not be applied to Jansenists and Gallicans:

I would freely give my vote for a toleration of them and their religion, and distinguish the laity, who adher'd to this less erroneous part of the Church of Rome, by giving them tenures, and an interest in their country, sufficient to promote their being industrious and assisting to increase the wealth of the country.<sup>143</sup>

In this context the productive, or welfarist, values of society were more relevant than the confessional identities of politics. Hutcheson was also present in Dobbs's writing. Where Hutcheson had developed his notion of society from the disinterested discourse of literati, Dobbs saw society as discourse toward the furtherance of self-interest. In Dobbs's proposed network the collective interaction created individual utility

the general board ought to have corresponding members in each county by way of clubs, to consider their wants, and what improvements are proper for the several counties. And these county clubs may again be subdivided and have monthly meetings among themselves, to put every farmer they can influence upon the most advantageous improvements his land is capable of.<sup>144</sup>

The individualism of this organizational idea was reflected in the terms of the meeting held on 26 June 1731 that laid the basis of the society as a free association of members committing themselves to work for 'improving husbandry, manufactures and other useful arts'.<sup>145</sup>

Madden more clearly understood the significance of the new idea of society they were creating than anyone else. Madden saw that the ideal toward which they were working, that of the individual benefit of all the constituent members, implied a new set of values. Where the ancients might seek to create virtue, or a modern nation respect justice and liberty, the members of Irish society instead furthered utility. There was a note of nostalgia in Madden's praise for this new

<sup>143</sup> Dobbs, *An essay on the trade and improvement of Ireland*, II, p. 92.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>145</sup> RDS Minute Book I, 26 June 1731.

orientation, 'next to being eminently good and virtuous, to be truly and generally useful to others, is the great and honest glory of the man and the citizen'.<sup>146</sup> Virtue was preferable, but virtue was not applicable to the situation. Madden and his critics even agreed that Ireland was remarkable for its lack of civic virtue. Madden stated that 'there is hardly a spot of earth on the globe where it seems to have less influence than here in Ireland' while his anonymous critic asserted that 'he who sets himself to recommend the giving up of a private advantage to the publick good, must expect to be laughed at or look'd upon as a hypocrite'.<sup>147</sup> Madden's originality was to perceive that an unvirtuous, self-interested, society could still have a set of distinctive moral qualities. By 'our growing better oeconomists, ... though we cannot be a great, we shall be what is infinitely more desirable, a contented and happy people'.<sup>148</sup> Happiness, which Saint-Just would later declare the great discovery of the eighteenth century, was the antidote to the Irish condition. He was also acutely aware that too strong an insistence on virtue might threaten happiness. He very early discerned the challenge of Rousseau's critique of commercial society to the ideal of happiness. In replying to Rousseau's 'Discourse on the arts and sciences' he perceived that in criticizing the sciences Rousseau was undermining the validity of the ideal of happiness. He defined a science as 'the knowledge of such things as constitute or contribute to the happiness and comfort, or the misery and discomfort of our nature'.<sup>149</sup> To attack science was to discredit happiness. For Madden, indeed, the Dublin Society did not adequately represent the possibilities of the free association of utilitarian individuals guided by science. He saw it as only one of a plethora of projects, from a national bank to a mint to a chamber of commerce that should be established on this principle.<sup>150</sup>

To return to the question posed at the outset, the Dublin Society distinguished itself from other improving societies in the British Isles because it explicitly represented a new principle of sociality. Its founders consciously sought to find a manner of explaining Ireland's role in the emerging British empire in dialogue, or indeed dispute, with one of its most acute theorists. They failed to achieve this but through the very attempt they identified a set of values that could animate Irish civil society. The idea of utility and the improving society were genuine innovations in Irish life that offered alternatives to national and sectarian languages of politics.

<sup>146</sup> Samuel Madden, *A letter to the Dublin Society on the improving of their fund and the manufacture, tillage etc. in Ireland* (Dublin, n.d.), p. 6.

<sup>147</sup> Samuel Madden, *Reflections and resolutions proper for the gentlemen of Ireland as to their conduct for the service of their country* (Dublin, 1738), pp. 12–13; Anon., *Some remarks occasion'd by the Revd Mr Madden's scheme*, p. 7.

<sup>148</sup> Madden, *Reflections and resolutions*, 19.

<sup>149</sup> Samuel Madden, *A reply to the discourse which carried the premium at the academy of Dijon in 1750, on the question proposed by the said academy, hath the re-establishment of arts and sciences contributed to purge or corrupt our manners?* (Dublin, 1751), p. 5.

<sup>150</sup> Madden, *Reflections and resolutions*, pp. 178–81.