

Ambivalent patriotism: Jacob Aall and Dano-Norwegian identity before 1814

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ABSTRACT. Like many Norwegian elite, Jacob Aall (1773–1844) lived between two national identities – Norwegian and Danish. On the one hand, he was a subject of the Danish crown, educated in Denmark in the refinements of European knowledge and high culture; on the other he was a loyal provincial son of Norway, engaged in building the political and economic autonomy of his homeland. This article examines the two sides of national identity in Jacob Aall's life and work by focusing on the evolution in his understanding of the concept of the Norwegian nation. It argues that the patriotism central to Aall's understanding of modernity and the coming-to-age of Norway contains two disparate, but equally necessary sides. The one is characterised by an abiding sentiment of national romantic cultural belonging, the other is a learned commitment to the Enlightenment utilitarian principles that gave force to the Norwegian national movement.

Introduction

From the early High Middle Ages until the end of the fourteenth century, when it entered into a political union with Denmark and Sweden, Norway was an independent political unit. By the sixteenth century Norway had become a province of the Danish kingdom, politically, economically and culturally subordinated to Denmark. Its written language receded, replaced by Danish as the language of culture, education, wealth and power. However, like elsewhere in Europe in the late eighteenth century a process of cultural and political awakening took hold in Norway, accompanied by the formation, among Norwegian elites, of a distinct national identity. This process accelerated after Denmark-Norway's involvement in the Napoleonic wars in 1807, and was an important background for the formation of an autonomous state in 1814, and the adoption of a Norwegian constitution the same year. Among the instrumental Norwegians to take part in these political transformations was Jacob Aall.

Jacob Aall was born in Porsgrunn, Norway in 1773, the son of a local merchant, and member of a prominent and well-to-do family. Aall was gifted

and ambitious, and like all Norwegians who sought and could afford higher education under the Dano-Norwegian kingdom he was sent to Denmark for schooling, first to Latin school in Nyborg, later to the University of Copenhagen, where he studied theology. He passed his state exam in theology in 1795, and returned home to Porsgrunn to an unfortunate debut as a minister. Realising he might be better suited for a different trade, he set his sights on the natural sciences, undertaking an study tour of the Continent with a focus on Germany. Upon his father's death in 1798 he returned to Norway, and with the fortune left him he in 1799 bought an ironworks in Nes, not far from Arendal, which he ran until his death in 1844.¹

Aall was unusually engaged in the social and political questions of his time. In addition to his business activities he served six different terms as representative to the national Parliament that was established in 1814, and was present at the drafting of the Norwegian constitution in 1814. He was also an active author, producing works on Norwegian economics, culture and politics, as well as a translator and commentator of the Nordic sagas.²

Like many members of the Norwegian elite, Aall navigated between two national identities – Norwegian and Danish. On the one hand, he was a subject of the Danish crown, educated in Denmark in the refinements of European knowledge and high culture; on the other he was a loyal provincial son of Norway, engaged in building the political and economic autonomy of his homeland. He embodied these two disparate identities and the intertwined loyalties they created throughout his life. Evolving in time, his political self-consciousness followed the changing political winds and economic realities of his era and the evolution of his own understanding of the nature of national belonging. This article examines the changes in national political self-understanding by focusing on the evolution in his understanding of the concept of the Norwegian nation from his return to Norway in 1799 until 1814, the year that ended the Danish union. We will attempt to show that the patriotism central to Aall's understanding of modernity and the coming-of-age of Norway contains two disparate, but equally necessary sides. The one is born out of a national romantic sense of cultural or ethnic belonging, based on experience, education and an abiding allegiance to the Danish crown. The other grows out of a belief in the Enlightenment utilitarian principles that gave force to the Norwegian national movement. By charting the intellectual biography of a significant cultural figure like Jacob Aall at a turning point in Norwegian political history, our aim is to form a picture not only of a Norwegian patriot but of the ambivalence inherent in the very notion of Norwegian patriotism that characterised that era.

Aall's national consciousness was formed in the Age of Napoleon. In November of 1799, the year Aall bought the Ironwork in Nes, Napoleon Bonaparte took power as the First Counsellor of France. In less than two months he had completely reorganised the French Constitution, introducing the Napoleonic Code, the general law book administratively uniting all of France and introduced into its 'daughter republics' in 1804 (Weis 1992: 233).

Thus at the very moment Aall was establishing himself on the Norwegian scene the foundations of modern political thought in Europe were being revolutionised on the continent (Bendix 1991). It was a time of reforms, revolutions and war, but most of all it was a period that challenged old forms of political thinking and established new political realities, the most influential of which was the idea of national identity. The term 'nationality' had gained currency in Spain (*nacionalidad*) and England as early as the seventeenth century, entering the French language as primary element of the revolutionary project around 1770, to designate national *conscience*. Long before it stipulated a set of rights and privileges associated with national belonging, it connoted a sense of self-understanding which carried enormous political potential (Koselleck et al. 1992: 141–3; Schulze 1996).

By the same token, the notion of *patriotism* circulated extensively in the political turmoil of the Continent before making its inroads in peripheral states like Norway. In England the partisans of Cromwell monopolised *patriotism* in their favour; in France the expression *bon patriote* anticipated the very notion of a 'good citizen' according to the disciplines of the Napoleonic regime and especially after the fall of Napoleon and the Restoration, when 'state patriotism' acquired a subversive connotation (Hermet 1996: 136–7; Hobsbawm 1990: 86–7). Yet while France and England were the centre of gravity of the political modernisation processes intertwined with the emergence of national identity and patriotic consciousness the force of these ideas and sentiments was felt in even the most remote parts of Europe, not the least in the kingdom of Denmark-Norway

The concept of patriotism

Patriotism was an essential principle for any and all who were engaged in social and political questions of the Dano-Norwegian kingdom in the latter part of the eighteenth century, reflecting the historical evolution of economic conditions in Denmark-Norway and the changing realities of political action available to any educated and politically conscious entrepreneur like Aall (Hroch, 2000: 33–5). In Aall's thought in particular, patriotism wears a Janus face. The dominant notion of patriotism prior to the 1770s was one of rational universalism, common sense and virtue in opposition to irrational emotions and unbridled early romanticism. The patriot followed the ideal of the citizen, whose individual interests were inseparable from the interests of civil society. In brief, a utilitarian understanding of patriotism dominated. As the concept of nation gained general currency in Denmark from the 1770s this concept of patriotism was modified somewhat as the mixed notion of national belonging enriched that of a state-oriented civil allegiance. The notion of collective belonging thereby acquired a more ambiguous foundation. Even though the emotional and even spiritual background of patriotism was solicited in order to motivate patriotic engagement, it was always done in the name of the support and advancement of a rational civil society. In other words civic

patriotism built upon a concept etymologically associated with the 'paternal' and the 'familial', thus echoing the notion of an organic belonging and a collective heritage. This conception makes use of the common cultural values implicit in a given group's cultural cohesion in order to form a political understanding of collective welfare.

As was mostly the case with Danish educated national elite in the Norwegian national patriotic movement, Jacob Aall was loyal to the state and king. His political engagement aimed at the realisation of Norwegian national interests, but *within* the secure and traditional framework of the Union. Denmark-Norway was a double kingdom, consisting of two nations combined in one state. The civil privileges and obligations of the Danish state, especially for a young Norwegian-born intellectual like Jacob Aall, schooled on Danish soil, stood in a complex relation to the privileges and interests of the ethnic-cultural Norwegian society. Civic patriotism required allegiance to a collective that extended beyond the limits of the ethnic nation. Aall was *both* Danish *and* Norwegian: Danish as a citizen of the Union and subject of the king, and Norwegian through birth and place of living. On the one hand, Norwegian patriotism was structured as fidelity to the universal values that applied to all citizens of the Union according to the principles of rational governance and social norms. On the other hand, an ethnic Norwegian like Aall was obligated to engage himself in the realisation of his own cultural identity through a political and social movement aimed at crystallising Norwegian national interest. The *national patriotism* of the kind expressed by Jacob Aall and many of his contemporaries contains both these elements and both these functions simultaneously (Storsveen et al. 1997: 18–20).

Patriotism before 1807

Though the Dano-Norwegian Union and kingdom united Denmark and Norway, it was Denmark which held the political and cultural power. Norway had no 'national' university until 1811 (and this is, as we shall see, one of the major issues of Aall's political engagement), and the written language in Norway was Danish. All the central instruments for both establishing and enforcing systems of national culture and value originated from the Danish culture and, in particular, from its capital Copenhagen. In turn the national culture of Copenhagen and Denmark was indebted to the German culture of the southern provinces of the kingdom.

Norway was both an integrated subculture in this dominant universal political-cultural system, and at the same time a singular element, universal unto itself. It was a fully legitimate part of the Union, albeit an inferior province, and a national culture in its own right, with a unique status and a relation to a unique set of referents, and thus also exercising a certain influence on the national self-understanding of Danes. Norway thus occupies an unusual position in the cultural landscape of its time, a position that has marked identity debates until this day. It is both a *particular* moment in a

dominant *universal* political union and an aspirant to a unique political destiny, a beneficiary of a foreign culture and originator of its own.

Aall's concept of patriotism fits into a complex constellation of loyalties, belonging and self-perception. Both the notion of a civic patriotism and its more romantically inspired counterpart were alive and well in the body politic of the turn of the century. We find a civil-type 'state patriotism' among Danish intellectuals such as Jens Schieldrup Sneedorf (1724–64) and Tyge Rothe (1731–95), though other Norwegian figures like Hans Arentz (1713–90) expressed a national ideal with romantic undertones, while at the same time emphasising that the ideal patriotism had to be 'rational'. Similarly, we find a doubly bound concept of 'fatherland', both 'natural' and 'civil' in the writings of Johan Nordal Brun (1745–1816), a well-known Norwegian patriot and later bishop of Bergen (Storsveen, 1997). Another Norwegian-born intellectual who spent most of his life outside the monarchy, Heinrich Steffens (1773–1845), is often considered to have introduced romanticism for a Danish audience in 1802.

Aall's concept of patriotism in his early years – the period stretching from 1799 to 1807, the turning point in the Napoleonic conquests on the continent and the British attack on Denmark – was predominantly oriented toward emphasising the value and utility of the Dano-Norwegian Union. There seems to have been little evolution in this basic understanding of patriotism and in the meaning of his Norwegian identity during this period. In 1799 Aall had just returned to Norway to begin his career after many years abroad, mostly in Denmark. During the subsequent decades Norway experienced an economic boom thanks to the advantageous conditions for export provided under the protection of political neutrality.

As a fledgling industrialist, Aall did well in those golden days and was preoccupied with building up his business, and somewhat indifferent to brewing cultural and political issues. Still, in those same years, we can indeed find a certain tendency to integrate early national romantic conceptions in Aall's largely Enlightenment-oriented notion of patriotism. In 1805, for example, Aall referred to Norway in rural romantic terms as the 'country I love like a true mountain dweller', while at the same time emphasising the utility of living in Norway as the ultimate argument for continuing to reside there: 'My vanity permits me to see the use I could make of myself here as a miner, a farmer and a citizen in a far too positive light to be able to doubt that it was destiny that appointed it as my sphere of activity' (Mannsaker 1943: 34). Nonetheless, what at first glance seems like two conflicting patriotic rationales flow together smoothly in Aall's reasoning – organic belonging to the Norwegian cultural tradition and the pragmatic value of loyalty to the civil society of the Dano-Norwegian union – and melt together into a kind of holistic allegiance.

The war years 1807–13

During the Napoleonic campaigns across Europe the geopolitical alignment during the war years from 1807 to 1814 pitted Denmark against Sweden and

England, leaving Norway in an unsure position. During this period Aall articulated national-romantic notions of solidarity in a clearer and stronger manner than before while at the same time expressing reservations about the general wave of patriotism that built up in Norway during the war years.

It was also in this period that Aall wrote his *Patriotic Ideas* (1808–9), thereby engaging more directly than ever in public debate, challenging the dominant notions of the national and testing the limits of the public sphere. Aall's nationalism – in all its ambivalence, as we shall see – was more forceful than ever in this work. At this point in the evolution of his thought, Aall's conception of the national revolves around the notion of national interest or national 'well-being'. Yet Aall uses this term, which in our day easily slides into the vocabulary of utilitarianism, in a way that places it between the concept of interest as objective value, and interest as the subjective expression of cultural, ethnic and historically determined preferences. The 'well-being' of Norway is clearly determined by material conditions that may be bettered through pragmatic, rational projects of national progress. On the other hand, the national interest, which is to be the object of such pragmatic enterprise, is determined by national predilection.

The ambivalence of the expression 'national well-being' preserves a space for the subjectivism that seems to slowly emerge from Aall's utilitarian persona. The Norwegian nation, which in the eyes of the early Aall was a pragmatic or utilitarian notion is thus subjectivised in a fully national-patriotic way, but through a fusion with instrumental, utilitarian terms: 'the nation's forces', 'the nation's benefit', 'the nation's affair', 'the nation's wealth', 'the nation's culture', etc. (Hyvik 2003: 80) The national-patriotic mission is, according to Aall, an instrumental undertaking. Reciprocally Aall at times employs a national romantic mode of argumentation when advancing the pragmatic or utilitarian value of institutional development, for example in his support of a national university and a national bank. Aall argues, in what today would be called a 'functionalist' vein, that these institutions will through their own development encourage 'the nobility of all positions in Norway' and 'the physical and moral cultivation' of the Norwegian elites (Aall 1813: 226 and 1809: 101). Underlying this argument is the conviction that this approach will in turn lead to the creation of national cohesion and eventually to the formation of national identity. Thus, on the one hand, romantically oriented, national-patriotism is deployed to advance the pragmatic, objective value of an undertaking aimed at attaining a higher quality of life, higher standard of living, higher material well-being. On the other hand, instrumentally oriented civic patriotism is deployed as a means to the advancement of a national-romantic vision of an ethnically united, historically determined fatherland. Patriotism is cast in a utilitarian schema in order to give impetus to a national-romantic consolidation. Here, however, the tools are rational and anti-Romantic.

In the years between the Battle of Jena and the decline of Napoleon's culture-imperialistic dynasty on the Continent, the national question in

Norway was debated on pragmatic and functionalist grounds. Those, like Aall, whose aim it was to bolster the national cause worked to reinforce Norwegian institutions in the belief that institutional consolidation would bring about a development of a national identity and thus national legitimacy and in this way strengthen Norway's position as a more equal partner in the Dano-Norwegian Union. This functionalist approach is evident in the establishment of the Royal Society for the Advancement of Norway's Welfare in 1809, and the proposals at the time for founding a Norwegian university and bank. The Royal Society was an organisation initiated among the Norwegian elite – by civil servants, judges, governors, bishops and ministers etc., who filled the symbolic positions that were proxies for the missing Norwegian nobility – as well the leaders of the large commercial houses. Jacob Aall took an active part in the organisation. He was regional president of the Royal Society and he published several articles in its journals.

The Royal Society organised a broad range of activities. It operated among other things what has been called the first Norwegian publishing house (Hasund 1941: 5), which produced books, learned journals and even a newspaper. More importantly, however, the society spearheaded a renewed campaign for the creation of a university in Norway, a campaign that eventually led to the establishment of the first Norwegian university in 1811. Aall argued in public for the university on two grounds. First, he claimed the introduction of a university and Continental traditions of European science in Norway would raise what he called 'culture and scientific skills' in the country. Second, he argued that the Norwegians still had not had the opportunity to receive the culture and science which their natural 'intellectual gifts' made them suitable to receive. The qualities and gifts granted to Norwegians by the goodness of nature made them morally eligible for higher rewards than they had received up until then (Aall 1809: 104).

The tension that Aall articulates between the foreign 'cultural' and domestic 'natural' has some parallels with the opposition between the rationalistic and counter-Enlightenment national Romantic conceptions of national value, both contained, as we have seen, in Aall's concept of the patriotic. According to Aall, opening Norway to culture and science would permit Norwegians to fully unfold and realise their naturally endowed qualities. By raising their level of education through the founding of a national university as well as through general educational reforms, Norwegians would be capable of becoming more naturally Norwegian, more authentic, more self-acquainted or closer to themselves. For Aall, and in contrast to the Danish culture, the Norwegian culture was identical to its nature. And yet, paradoxically, this nature requires culture in order to become the nature that it already is. The knowledge and culture provided by education, Aall reasoned, would permit Norway to freely unfold as nature.

The notion that nature contributes to shaping the national character is important in Aall's general approach in *Patriotic Ideas*. He thus builds upon a reasoning employed by figures such as Montesquieu and Gerhard Schøning

(Bliksrud 1997: 194). Aall evokes the presence of Spanish settlers in America as an illustration, explaining that the wealth of American natural resources resulted in settlers living in 'idle luxury' making Spain a country rich in 'gold and silver, but particularly poor in industrious and scientifically minded immigrants'. This leads Aall to conclude that a demanding natural environment is advantageous for national character (Aall 1909: 11–12). That this conclusion speaks in favour of the inhabitants of the uncommonly demanding Norwegian natural environment seems evident.

Aall formulates his functionalist variant on patriotism as a means of strengthening Norway's cultural and material development through the development of institutions of culture and a national bank (the latter was not established before 1814, and Aall did not argue for it after the establishment of the university). Aall's patriotic engagement is thus not only a composite of the Enlightenment utilitarian ideals and the national Romantic ideals of subjective freedom, it is also an assemblage of two conceptions of development: a functional notion of education and political economy, with emphasis on the former, and a national Romantic construction. One structural explanation for this ambivalence builds upon a distinction between the Norwegian nation and the idea of a Norwegian nation-state. The Norwegian as cultural and natural collective entity can very well exist within the bounds of the Danish state. Even though the rhetorical impulse of *Patriotic Ideas* remains constant through repeated reference to Norway as a 'nation', Aall never explicitly evokes a Norwegian 'state'. His use of the term 'state' is unclear in the sense that he on the one hand is capable of observing that Norway in the late Middle Ages was 'exterminated among the states', while in the same text he evokes 'the Danish states' in the plural, thus including Norway and 'those lands united by princesses' (Hyvik 2003: 81).

Engagement and reform

In the years leading up to the Treaty of Kiel, Aall became active in several attempts at launching organised national movements in Norway. Through his participation in these movements, like the Royal Society for the Advancement of Norway's Welfare, he clearly gave voice to his own nationalist inclinations. Yet his engagement in the Norwegian national cause continued to build upon a two-tiered conception of the nation. The one was based on reserved loyalty to the union; the other was patriotism toward Norway.

When Denmark-Norway joined the Napoleonic campaign in 1807, the subsequent British blockade of ports led to enormous problems for the supply of food and other goods to the more distant territories of the Dano-Norwegian union, in particular in Norway which depended on Danish grain. As an owner and operator of an ironworks in Norway, the difficulties Aall encountered in supplying himself and those close to him led him to formulate a number of reforms relative to the independence of the Norwegian supply

policies. But the daily sustenance of his personal commercial enterprise left little room for nationalistic idealism. In the Norwegian provinces the war on the Continent was translated into a struggle for survival. The question of autonomy became a question of material well-being. To improve the situation King Frederick VI established a Norwegian Governmental Commission in Christiania (Oslo) to handle affairs in Norway. Yet its members soon found themselves torn between the wishes of the king, on the one side, and the particular Norwegian interests, on the other.

The contrast between Norwegian and Danish interests became even more pronounced when in 1808 war broke out between Sweden and Denmark. Norway's political and geographic situation forced it into a subordinate position in terms of relevance for the Danish, which was forced to prioritise its interests on the European continent, namely Jylland, Sleswig and Holstein. The pressure on Norway continued also after an armistice with Sweden was signed in March 1809. Both the Danish war effort and the British blockade of Denmark continued. The momentary Swedish peace gave some room for political manoeuvres in Norway as the threat from the east disappeared, at least temporarily. A secret proposition by Herman Wedel Jarlsberg to end the Danish union and unify Norway and Sweden was launched at a secret meeting outside Christiania in August 1809. Jacob Aall attended the meeting, and was taken aback by what he heard, realising the immediate threat to the Dano-Norwegian Union. In its aftermath he initiated a particular set of political actions aimed at getting a separate peace for Norway, independent of Denmark, and he thereby led a campaign for this proposal.

In Aall's eyes, giving voice and political weight to Norway's own international policies would both support the Union and weaken the evolution of a Swedish coalition. Together with the marine officer Michael J. P. Bille, Aall helped to organise political action in favour of making the Norwegian Governmental Commission in Christiania explore the possibility of a separate peace with England. An appeal was formulated by Bille, probably at Aall's initiative, and signed by as many as 89 leading Norwegian figures from the cities of Kristiansand, Arendal, Risør, Skien Porsgrunn and Drammen, all of them located on the southern coast of Norway. With this move Aall was adopting an autonomous Norwegian foreign policy, thus breaking with the political union with Denmark. Aall's dialectical insight was clear: by severing political ties with Denmark, the Dano-Norwegian Union could be protected and preserved, albeit on a different plane. Attention to the particularity of Norway's interests, he argued, would only serve the interests of the Union (Hyvik 2003: 136–42). In Autumn 1809 Denmark-Norway achieved an informal armistice with England, thus making peace while remaining allied with Napoleon. By this move both the campaign for a separate peace and the Swedish coalition faded out.

Aall's initiatives and ideas in 1809 show a clearer understanding of the particularity of the Norwegian political situation. This in turn proved to be a steppingstone to a more generalised political identity. The ambivalence of

national identity persisted in the sphere of political union. When Aall argues for the practicality of an independent Norwegian political set-up in the face of the traditional Union, he sees it as a reflection of the depth, meaningfulness and cohesion of the Union.

The Norwegian historical realm

Jacob Aall's comments on the ethical and utilitarian character of patriotic images of belonging reveal how strands of Enlightenment patriotism and romantic patriotism resist abstraction from one another and indeed are co-determinate. The double face of patriotism is the basis for the ambivalence of the Norwegian national movement in Aall's writing. Aall remains a stringent unionist while at the same time bringing Enlightenment principles to bear on pragmatic matters of the general welfare of the Norwegian people. This ambivalence of the patriotic impulse in the Norwegian national movement rests upon an even more basic indeterminacy: the Norwegian national identity. Like the question of the future of the Norwegian people in the union period, controversies abound over the origin and nature of the Norwegian national identity. Either by way of utilitarian claims about the rights and privileges of self-determination or by the organic arguments based on the ethnic genealogy of a people, the question of what the Norwegian identity actually is must necessarily precede political decisions about its future direction.

For this reason Aall's *Patriotic Ideas* is permeated by the question of the identity of the Norwegian people. Aall even introduces his book by reformulating Sieyès's revolutionary rhetorical question '*Qu'est-ce que le tiers-état?*': 'What has Norway been, what is it, and what can it become?' (Aall 1809: 1) The tension between the Romantic and the utilitarian persist in Aall's response to these questions. Norway is both a part of the Danish union and a 'historical realm' in its own right. In Aall's terms, Norway is a *historical realm*, a deep historical consolidation of territory, customs and language (Burgess 1999). Consequently, the deeper and stronger such ties between territory and cultural identity can be established, the more solid the strength of that identity in the present. Such a view is clearly advanced in a speech Aall gave in 1811 in connection with the establishment of the Norwegian university, when he launched the project of developing a written language more Norwegian than the Danish which at the time was the written language in Norway. Such a language, proclaimed Aall, should be closer to the Norwegian way of speaking than the common Danish. Danish should be the starting point for this project, but it had to be developed and enriched with words and forms taken from everyday Norwegian dialects as well as from Old Norse. By forming a language on basis of cultivated Danish and contemporary Norwegian, he thought, the result would be a language of high quality, on the same level as that of most 'cultivated Nations'. The newly established Norwegian university was to have the development of such a language as one of its central tasks (Hyvik 2002:

63–4). This line of reasoning based on the relation between individual expression and collective self-constitution was common elsewhere in Europe from Dante to Luther, Herder to Humboldt and beyond (see Apel 1980), and saturated the *Skandinavisme* movement in nineteenth century Scandinavia (Apel 1980; Burgess 2002b; Haugen 1966; Sørensen & Stråth 1997).

By the end of the union with Denmark, Norway had both the status of an integral member of the union *and* a ‘historical realm’ with its own autonomous past and destiny. If one adds to this the fact that beginning in 1660 Norway had the formal status of being a separate kingdom under the ‘shared’ crown of the King of Denmark, then the political and cultural tension in Norwegian politics becomes more visible. Denmark was without doubt the hegemonic power, but the question of Norwegian autonomy through the union period, particularly in the years before the adoption of the constitution, was often a question of rebellion, revolution and ultimately of emancipation, if not for the Norwegians, then surely for the king (Burgess 2002a).

Nonetheless, the growing image of Norway as a historical realm did not cause the uproar in the Danish court that one might have expected. The modernised (post-revolutionary) ideology of the Danish monarchy had made space for the notion of state-patriotism. Indeed it exploited the ambivalence of patriotism we have mapped out above in order to give modern impetus to the dynastic power, transforming it into ‘opinion-based absolutism’ (Seip 1958). The stakes were high: were the Danish crown to succeed in bolstering the monarchical principles of hereditary right by inscribing them in the post-revolutionary principles of ‘enlightened’ sovereignty then the dynastic power would retain *carte blanche* privileges for the unforeseen future.

For Aall the notion of ‘autonomy’ was essential in these debates. Autonomy was not only a measure of the modernity and power-political sovereignty of Norway’s political institutions. It was also the measure of Norway’s identity, its ‘well-being’ and its self-understanding. Thus, on the one hand, Aall decries, in *Patriotic Ideas*, that Norway’s ‘autonomy’ was lost at the moment it became integrated into the Danish kingdom. On the other, he emphasises the importance and meaningfulness of Norway’s ‘autonomy’ in his arguments for the establishment of a Norwegian national university and bank (Hyvik 2003: 98). Autonomy in the latter case is something that can grow and change. In the former case, it is an unchangeable essence. Both of these conceptions contribute to Aall’s understanding of the uniqueness of the Norwegian historical, cultural and political situation.

In the midst of his loyalty to the Dano-Norwegian Union, Aall nonetheless expressed the conviction that there was indeed a distinct Norwegian identity, a national specificity that stretched both deeply into the cultural and linguistic past and comprised a vast ensemble of local culture and local language in the present. This historical identity was born from rural unusually marked local dialects that preserve with remarkable fidelity the characteristics of the Old Norse, which had been extinguished 400 year earlier. Such a position – both integrated in the Danish *Bildungsbürgertum* and acquainted with the historical

culture of a rural people – equipped Aall with a palette of images and concepts to describe his present.

The most prominent and overtly canonised images of nation-building are those associated with nature and natural history (Witoszek 1998). So also for Aall, but for him the *meaning* of Norwegian history was still more important. Both images were bound up in the particularity of their singular past, and in the wealth of the union that organises its present. In miniature this discovery of the richness and legitimacy of a Norwegian past, which is no more Norwegian for being discovered, corresponds to the general European movement of the ‘discovery’ of hidden European civilisations through the unearthing of their ‘proper’ languages (Anderson 1991: 67–72).

As the Napoleonic campaign of 1807–14 moved to its conclusion, the Norwegian public sphere became increasingly dissatisfied with the union arrangement, or at least with the way it functioned. The Enlightenment ideal of patriotism, which had driven Aall’s work in the first decade of the nineteenth century, came increasingly into conflict with the national sentiments of Norwegians. In *On Culture in Norway* from 1813 Aall again emphasised his conviction that Norwegian national identity was the bedrock of Norwegian interests. But now his polemic was aimed directly at the burgeoning national romanticism on Norwegian soil. ‘National pride’, he insisted, is ‘one of the most ridiculous vices with which a nation can be infected’, to be considered ‘the child of foolishness and not of the Enlightenment’ (Aall 1813: 234–5). Building upon his differentiation between enlightened patriotism and national romantic patriotism, Aall saw a clear line between what we may call ‘just pride’ in one’s nation and ‘unjust pride’ in one’s nation, ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ patriotism and ‘authentic, and ‘inauthentic’ patriotism. The former remained in the traditional, classical, rationalist mould, based on the utilitarianism of the collective interest; the latter appealed, in Aall’s view, only to the utility of self-interest. Enlightened patriotism remained virtuous, while prideful patriotism was characterised as the contrary (Hyvik 2003: 91–2).

The movement toward a distinction between ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ patriotism became stronger throughout the war years. In *Patriotic Ideas* Aall refers to what he called ‘inauthentic’ patriotism (Aall 1809: 85), and he worried that this patriotism was increasing in contrast to what he considered an authentic or rational patriotism. The distinction corresponds to the moral impulse to rationalise and systematise Norway’s infrastructure in order to raise the level of national welfare, organise its institutions to the benefit of all Norwegians, and not least, provide conduits for the transmission of culture. This stands in contrast to ‘inauthentic’ patriotism that is emotional, instinctual, based on ethnic or linguistic categories, war-loving, free from empirical control and scientific analysis.

The very expression ‘inauthentic patriotism’ is, in Aall’s usage, meant as a sharp rejection of the Napoleonic campaigns built upon charisma and reactionary sentiment and leading to the material, scientific and moral devastations

of war. The historical irony of the Napoleonic episode remains, however, to be fully explained: although the Napoleonic impulse was largely motivated by a counter-Enlightenment, reactionary movement, and the force of charisma of one man, the web of civil institutions created by Napoleon in France after 1799, and elsewhere as the campaigns wore on, more than anything in that century gave institutional sturdiness to the modern nation-state. The rational organisation of the Napoleonic code and its attendant institutions changed the way we think about civic organisation, changed the nature of democracy in the direction of Enlightenment principles of rights and rule of law. The nineteenth century insistence on the opposition between Enlightenment and national romanticism melts into thin air in the person of Napoleon.

The utility of patriotism

The ambivalence of national identity in Aall's theory of patriotism extends the form we observed in his thoughts on Norwegian collective identity. Enlightenment utility theory and national romanticism do not clash in the case of Norway in this period, but instead form supplements to one another. Romanticism and utilitarianism form the Janus faces of one and the same movement. Aall's innovation is his reconciliation of two ideologies of reason and culture. His approach was 'a pragmatic synthesis of Enlightenment ideas and nationally oriented Romanticism' (Sørensen 2001: 48).

A further nuance can be introduced into this logic of patriotism by noting the essential opposition in Aall's discourse of nation between 'general utility' and 'proper utility'. 'General utility' refers to the utility created in relation to the greater universal interests of mankind, although in practical terms it usually refers to collective state or national interests as a basis for political decisions. 'Proper utility' refers to the traditional utilitarian strategy of transformation of moral questions of larger social or cultural contexts by reducing them to questions of utility for the individual actor based on his/her own subjective position.

According to Aall and the utilitarian philosophy, general utility is preferable to proper utility since it maximises the benefit of the greater number of individuals. A successful utilitarian politics would encourage a movement from the 'proper' to the 'general' and thereby an increase in public welfare and a consolidation of individual patriotic feelings in the collective national impulse. In other words, by framing the collective identity with political concepts like 'nation', 'state' or 'humankind', utilitarian social and moral theory actually flows in particular into theories of national patriotism and national revival by reinterpreting and reducing the notion of collective good to a sentimental or spiritual substance.

Aall's interpretation of utilitarian social theory flows into his explicit evocation of the programme of philosophical Enlightenment. Aall's representation of the Norwegian national romantic cause refers repeatedly to

typical Enlightenment motifs of the kind developed in his *Patriotic Ideas*. The 'cultural ideal' is one of them; the significance of 'progress' is another. Both take the form of a paradoxical circle.

First, the 'cultural ideal' is a dominant feature both in the period preceding the formation of the Norwegian nation-state and in the formative years of nation-building. The paradox it expresses is more or less classic: in order to attain the status of a full-fledged nation, a people must have a certain level of culture; yet the condition for attaining such a national culture is nationhood. In Aall's context 'culture' is to be understood as self-understanding, self-consciousness and knowledge of one's tradition, of one's place in history, of one's relation to others. It includes a certain level of scientific self-understanding as well: a consciousness of the 'state of the art' of one's nation, society and cultural heritage. In typical arguments both before and after 'the national breakthrough' – the term commonly used to refer to the outspoken cultural and nationalistic romanticism that gained ground in Norway beginning in the 1840s – the Danish elite and the cultured, elite class in Norway generally considered Norwegian culture to be impoverished and underdeveloped and even considered this paucity to be an impediment to nation-building. National romanticism, on the other hand, responds by underscoring a different conception of 'culture'. Culture in this alternative sense is the pre-rational, pre-national, indeed pre-historic substance that grants the force of legitimacy to the national project. 'Culture' is the ethnic foundation of a collective group, the roots and traditions that give it cohesion, the language and customs that establish and enforce the borderline between one collective identity and the other. If one adopts this organic, ethnic definition of culture, the stakes of nation-building are quite different. In that case, it is the rootless, coldly rational intelligentsia that has no foundation for its claims to nationhood. The cultural elite acquires the image of an irrelevant group of ineffectual bureaucratic functionaries. However, the elite soon found their role as nation-builders through the necessary link that could 'render noble' the 'raw' Norwegian culture, lifting it to higher cultural levels. By adapting and 'improving' the popular culture the elite both exercised an influence upon it, but was at the same time influenced by it, renouncing old classical ideals of 'culture'. This tension is never completely resolved in the course of Norwegian nation-building. It forms the background for parliamentary battles, institutional questions and, not least, the matter of the Norwegian national language.

In Aall's writings both of these cultural ideals are present. In general, Aall seems most concerned with the practical side of the cultural ideal: lifting Norwegian culture to a higher level by importing cultural material from abroad. However, the foundation of Norwegian nationhood and the 'material' for improvement is the very Norwegian *ethnie*. The two cultural ideals play an ambivalent role in Aall's writings, simultaneously reinforcing each other.

Second, the question of 'progress' preoccupies Aall in a similar, though less complex, vein. Belief in progress, in the improvement of the welfare of the Norwegian people as a result of the national movement and national

construction represents his version of a pragmatic, Enlightenment justification of the Norwegian national project. Rational utility theory, as embodied in the institutions of political economy, national planning and development, gives full support to the 'rational patriotism' supported by Aall. In *Patriotic Ideas* Aall analyses a number of different areas of development, from farming, to shipbuilding, to small industry, trade, finance, education, etc. He suggests a number of formal and informal measures to be taken in order to support and further these activities on the national level, openly associating Enlightenment with optimism about the ability to rationally steer industry with the aim of improving welfare. The objective, sober analysis of the industrial sciences was the correct and most valuable ground for patriotism.

Thus from the beginning of Aall's authorship and up until 1814, when Norwegian national sovereignty became a reality, and until even later when the 'national breakthrough' arrived in the 1840s, national romanticism was a nascent concept and had limited influence in Norway. It was considered a threat to the rationality not only of Enlightenment principles of individuality and democracy, but also of the practical benefits of popularising Enlightenment innovations in science and technology, market capitalism and education. As we have seen, this did not imply that national romantic ideas and cultural perspectives were not present in the thoughts of the time. At the same time, from Aall's point of view, there was no contradiction between the notion of political rationality, with all that it implies in terms of nation-state sovereignty, and the continuation of the Dano-Norwegian Union, which subjugated Norway to a foreign government. Aall differentiated between the rational-individual elements of Enlightenment thinking and those that carried implications for national or trans-national collective welfare. Granted, Enlightenment thinking was, at least for Aall, not yet politicised to the extent that it would be some years later, at the time of Norwegian independence. However, this kind of 'selective Enlightenment' would in a sense be transferred to the Norwegian struggle for national identity after 1814.

Conclusion: patriotism and ambivalence

Aall's use of utility criteria and the principle of utilitarianism produces a double effect. Depending upon the context in which it is applied, the philosophy of utility can furnish arguments for both the preservation of the Dano-Norwegian union and support for Norway's autonomy. The utilitarian arguments of the kind that strengthened Aall's push for Norwegian autonomy in the form of economic progress and rationalisation, simultaneously served his arguments and observations in favour of continued association with the Danish union. Though he considered the Union's legitimacy to be self-evident, he was highly critical of its make-up, policy and self-criticism. He expressed clear and principled ideas about the just consideration of the interests of the other, of the conditions of life, and about the need to make reason the last and final measure of the propriety of the Dano-Norwegian

relationship. The rationality of the Union would be the guarantee of its success. In the crux of the national question, the sensibility and utility of the Union made arguments for it persuasive.

Aall argues for the Union on the combined basis of personal loyalty to the crown and the utility of the Union in a way that shadowed the paradoxical nature of his own arguments. Norwegians should feel personal attachment to the Union; and yet such personal feelings of loyalty were most naturally justified by the objective, rational, utilitarian value of the Union. Aall's ultimate argument was that Norway *needed* the Union. It needed to be in a union with a country 'whose splendour can mend its shortcomings' (Aall 1809: 104).

Aall's arguments in favour of the 'utility' and 'rationality' of the Union were a demonstration that utility and rationality are far from disinterested or objective, but are instead built upon subjective national bias. Aall's enlightened rationality cuts both ways. First, it articulates the right of a national community to decide upon its own fate (national self-determination); second, it supports enthusiastically the rational necessity of the more advanced and progressive state to determine what institutional arrangement can provide the most utility. Nonetheless, in Aall's discussion of the Dano-Norwegian Union, emphasis on the rational benefits of the Union is linked with Norwegians' loyalty to it. The practical, objective necessity of the Union is bound up with the subjective emotional cohesion holding the Union together. It is 'love' for the king and 'love' for the Union that give the Union the force necessary to realise the rational elements by which Aall characterises it. Aall develops a rhetoric of national 'familial' ties in order to describe the emotional relations binding Denmark and Norway. Loyalty to 'our Danish brothers' and 'our sister land' is the essential affective basis for loyalty to the crown. That loyalty functions in turn as an apology for Aall's adherence to the construction and development of Norwegian national institutions.

On the one hand, it might be argued that Aall simply contradicts himself, that he advances his rational theses about the significance of utility at the expense of his strong but sometimes barely suppressed feelings of loyalty to his homeland. On the other hand, the double meaning of the Union and of Norwegian adherence to it reveals a resemblance to a conceptual pattern we have seen before. What we earlier described as the ambivalence of the discourses of Norwegian national identity and patriotism is reflected in the kind of ambivalence in Aall's utilitarian theory of union. The rationale for union is utility. Union serves the rational interests of Norway and provides a sound basis for its enlightened development. At the same time, that rational utility would never see the light of day if the subjective, emotional, motifs were not in place providing the basis for the interest that is subsequently rationalised through the utility theory of union. The union serves the *rational* interests of Norway, but that very interest – arguably like any interest – is subjectively based.

Some critics in Denmark attacked Aall for his double-edged argument, seeing in it either a dangerous incoherence or simply a thinly veiled lack of loyalty to the crown. His reasoning was criticised and he was suspected of

indirectly attacking the Union. Aall's Danish friend, Peter Erasmus Müller accused him of being 'partly disloyal' in his *Patriotic Ideas*, even though he agreed that from a comprehensive point of view Aall's loyalty was clear. Müller discussed the book with some of Aall's other Danish friends and they agreed that because of this ambiguity Aall should not send the book to the king (Hyvik 2003: 122–5). *Patriotic Ideas* showed the degree to which the foundation on which unionists stood was itself already fractured. The force of allegiance had its foundation in the objective utility of belonging. Thus the ambivalence of the national utility theory of union found other expressions in the discussions about the Union on the eve of Norwegian independence in 1814. It was neither an invention of Aall, nor the result of any kind of incoherence in Aall's reasoning. It was already generally *implicit* in the arguments made in favour of union as part of the process by which it was created. Throughout the years leading up to the Treaty of Kiel in 1814, the question of the *interest* of the Norwegian people was both the central issue for Aall and the axis about which the ambivalence of national constructions revolved. The relative incoherence of this tension from our point of view, seeming to argue simultaneously for and against the Union, is resolved by shifting the point of reference, from subjective notions of belonging, to pragmatic objective determinations of material welfare. In terms of the need for a national cohesion that was by and large *subjective*, the Danish Union was a desirable solution. In terms of the economic and technological needs of the Norwegian people, the development of autonomous Norwegian institutions – primarily a bank and a university – were necessary though they did not imply separation.

Jacob Aall's conception of national identity evolved considerably from 1799 until 1813. Yet by underscoring the constancy of certain sides of Aall's views on the Norwegian nation in the course of that evolution we have suggested that there is a necessary ambivalence at the very heart of the concept of national patriotism. Clearly, Aall's views on the Norwegian national identity develop along with his growing knowledge and experience, and with the sophistication of his analysis. As his understanding matures he discovers a diversity of theories of national self-consciousness in his own time. But more importantly, however, he also discovers the *internal* complexity of the very concept of the national. By pursuing the process of increasing Norwegian autonomy Aall reveals its spiritual and moral *dependence*. On the one hand, by developing forceful utilitarian arguments about the needs and interests of the Norwegian people, Aall discovers that these interests challenge at times the ethnic or cultural nationality of that people. On the other hand, his own arguments in favour of the Dano-Norwegian Union reveal the pragmatic utility of Norwegian national interest at the very foundation of the Union.

Common to Jacob Aall's two expressions of national foundation is a fundamental and familiar opposition between Enlightenment utilitarianism and national romanticism. Yet in Aall's writings, the Enlightenment ideals of rationalisation, pragmatism and progress appear again and again within the subjective, spiritual or cultural impulse that characterises national romanti-

cism. At the same time, Aall and others ascribe the national romantic vision of cultural and spiritual unity to utilitarian values worthy of the best Benthamite analysis. Enlightenment pragmatism is presented as an argument for national autonomy to the extent that it can be associated with the national romantic ideals that increase its power and cultural legitimacy. These national romantic ideals are in turn given currency through association with the utility of rational Enlightenment ideals.

As we follow this circle of ambivalence in Aall's thoughts between Enlightenment utilitarian ideals and national romanticism, a question is raised. To what extent does our model catch the essence of his concept of a nation? Are we witnessing the limits of usefulness of analysing national identity in the field between Enlightenment and national romanticism? Undoubtedly such a method does explain a good deal, but the limitations are evident in the case of Jacob Aall. The value of this question is strengthened by the common ambivalence in Aall's concepts of patriotism, culture and evolution of the Dano-Norwegian Union. If there is one stringent line in Aall it seems to be this ambivalence, an ambivalence useful for supporting his arguments in different contexts, but increasingly, in the context of the Norwegian nation.

Notes

1 Jacob Aall's life and times are mentioned in general in Norwegian historical works about the nineteenth century. However, only a handful of studies explicitly examine Aall's work alone. Among them are Jens Johan Hyvik (2003), Mannsåker (1943), Steffens (1908), Müller (1923) and the short biography written by Jacob Aall's son Jørgen Christian Aall (1859).

2 Among his political treatises are *Patriotic Ideas* (1809), *On Culture in Norway with Regard to the Norwegian University* (1813), and his masterwork *Recollections as a Contribution to Norway's History from 1800 to 1815* (1844–45).

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