

Christian Garve and Immanuel Kant: Some Incidents in the German Enlightenment

Introduction

The Breslau translator and popular writer Christian Garve was a good deal more typical figure of the German Enlightenment than was Immanuel Kant. Although a number of years younger than Kant (Garve was born in 1742 and Kant in 1724) he became well known as a writer and publicist before Kant's critical philosophy was to establish him as a philosopher of the first rank. Beginning in the 1760s, Garve captured the public's eye and imagination with his many translations into German both of classical writings and contemporary works in European philosophy. Garve drew especially from the writings of British philosophers and social commentators in seeking to present to the German speaking world the most significant philosophical and social currents of his time. Garve is more typical of the German Enlightenment than Kant because of his derivative, eclectic approach and his stress on developing a 'philosophy of life'.¹ Garve appears to have taken for granted a certain intellectual and philosophical backwardness in Germany and sought to remedy it by making available to the German public new editions of the classical writers and lively translations of his own selection of leading British thinkers and social commentators of the day.

In Garve's literary output we can see the German Enlightenment as a reaction and response to the Enlightenment in other leading European states. Garve appears to have seen his role as one of keeping the German public up to date with some of the leading intellectual, social and political trends of the day. He wanted to demonstrate the relevance of philosophy, to take higher thought from the scholar's study to the people. He never made great claims as to his own originality but he did pride himself on the accessibility of his work. Garve saw himself as engaged in an educational task of drawing the public into philosophy and literature. He took very seriously the goal of popular enlightenment. What signified success for Garve was to engage as wide a section of the public as possible in philosophical, literary and political debate; the absolute standard of the discussion did not concern him as much as its extent and intensity. Garve wanted the German speaking world to have an intellectual life which matched in its liveliness that of Britain and France. In this respect Garve deserves high praise for providing his fellow subjects with the means with which to realise this goal.

Kant provides a sharp contrast to Garve in these respects. Instead of being eclectic and derivative in his approach to philosophy Kant was highly systematic and innovative. Garve's approach was low-risk philosophically and Kant's entirely high risk. If Garve's own ideas were to prove wrong he could still point to the important contribution he had made to German letters through his translations and commentaries, had Kant's main ideas proved to be misplaced he would have had little to fall back on. To this day, Kant's pre-critical output commands next to no attention from non-specialists. Doubtless Kant would have shared Garve's view that Germany was philosophically and socially less advanced

¹ Leonie Koch-Schwarzer, *Populare Moralphilosophie und Volkskunde: Christian Garve – Reflexionen zur Fachgeschichte* (Marburg, N.G. Elwert Verlag, 1998) p1

than Britain and France. Kant engaged closely with the leading French and British philosophers of his day. Rousseau and Hume were amongst the philosophers that delighted him most. Kant would even have reason to be grateful to Garve for making available in German a full translation of Burke's *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (translated by Garve in 1773) after his own essay *Observations on the feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* had been stimulated by Moses Mendelssohn's review and summary of the work in 1758.² But Kant's recognition of foreign excellence did not lead to a derivative approach in his own philosophy. True to his own motto 'dare to be wise' expressed in his essay 'What is Enlightenment' Kant insisted on finding his own path in philosophy.³ This path took into account the French and British Enlightenments but struck out in its own new critical direction.

Although Kant was a more ambitious philosopher than Garve and most of his contemporaries, this did not lead to a supercilious attitude towards Garve and other German philosophers. Kant engaged with the writers around him. He corresponded extensively with leading figures of his time such as Moses Mendelssohn, J. H. Lambert, Marcus Herz, and Karl Reinhold. Garve was treated with the same respect. Kant wished to see himself as part of the German Enlightenment but not thereby lagging behind the general pace of European Enlightenment. Kant's engagement with Garve therefore tells us a good deal about how he saw his own role. Kant shared with Garve the desire to inform the German public, and to raise the level of cultural and philosophical debate but, above all, Kant prized excellence in pursuing this aim. Popularity should not be gained at the expense of philosophical rigour.

I shall take as my focus for Kant's engagement with Christian Garve the essay 'On the Common Saying: That may be correct in Theory, but it does not apply in Practice' which Kant published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1793. The first section of the essay which deals with the relation between theory and practice in morality is written as a reply 'to some objections raised by Professor Garve'.⁴ The *Berlinische Monatsschrift* provided an important setting for some of the main debates of the German Enlightenment and Kant several times used the journal to make public his views on the leading issues of his day. Two of Kant's most famous essays 'Idea for a Universal History with a cosmopolitan purpose' (November 1784) and 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment' (December 1784) appeared in the journal. The essay on 'Theory and Practice' represented no exception to this in that it provided Kant with his first opportunity to comment in print on the French Revolution. The French Revolution brought out some important differences between Garve and Kant which Kant sought to tackle systematically under the rubric of the relation between theory and practice. As a background to this clash between Garve and Kant I shall look first at Garve's significance in the German Enlightenment and, secondly, at the close intellectual relationship which developed between Kant and Garve.

² E. Burke (edited and introduced by Boulton) *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* xlvi

³ Kant, (edited by H. Reiss) *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p54

⁴ Kant, (edited by H. Reiss) *Political Writings*, p64

Garve and the German Enlightenment

Much of the understanding of British and Scottish philosophy in eighteenth century Germany was mediated through Christian Garve. Garve was a talented translator and publicist who is often regarded as the quintessential representative of the popular philosophy movement that strongly influenced German letters in the period 1760-1790. Garve began his public intellectual career by publishing a revised version of J. N. Meinhard's translation of Henry Home's *Elements of Criticism* which appeared in three volumes between 1763-6 in Leipzig. The choice of Home's work was perhaps symptomatic of Garve's concern to connect philosophy with wider literary and cultural life. Later in 1768 Garve published a translation of a book by James Porter which depicted the political, ethical and religious life of the Turkish people.⁵ Garve showed a great interest in mores and customs amongst people, and clearly believed that a great deal could be learned by comparison with other cultures. In 1772 Garve published a translation of Adam Ferguson's *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*. He also translated the *Moral and Political Philosophy* of William Paley; and in 1794 he published a very fine translation of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Garve in addition completed another highly significant translation when he brought out Cicero's *De Officiis* in 1784. Garve's translations were very widely read and not least his translation of Cicero, completed at the request of Frederick the Great. In the writing of his *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant was strongly influenced by Cicero's stoic philosophy. We can see from the essay on *Theory and Practice* that Kant was in possession of a copy of Garve's three volume translation of Cicero.⁶

If we add to these much valued translations Garve's own considerable output, mostly in the form of essays we have a huge scholarly corpus. Between 1775 and 1798 Garve produced more than ten collections of his own essays. He dealt with topics as various as the relationship between morality and politics, the condition of the peasantry, the situation in his own native Silesia; biographies of his contemporaries and the history of ethics. Yet it is as though Garve disappeared from the intellectual scene with his death. He is very much a minor figure in the history of philosophy. Rarely mentioned in most general histories his only apparent claim to attention is his relation with Kant. Hegel, for instance, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* mentions Nicolai, Mendelssohn, Sulzer, Eberhard and Tetens only as figures of the German Enlightenment. (20, 309) Hegel is utterly disparaging about the popular philosophy movement of which Garve was part claiming that 'philosophical research' 'could not stoop lower'.⁷ (308) But it may well be possible that there is more to Garve than often credited. Kant certainly thought him a significant figure, read many of his writings closely and corresponded with him from time to time. In his political writings Kant returns time and again to the problem of the relationship between politics and morality, dealing with it systematically in the *Metaphysics of Morals* but also making it a central theme in the essay on *Theory and*

⁵ *Observations on the religion, law, government, and manners, of the Turks*. (London: J. Nourse, 1768. 2 vol.)

⁶ Kant, (edited by H. Reiss) *Political Writings*, p69n

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel *Werke* Vol. 20 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p308. Hegel identifies the popular philosophy movement with the Enlightenment in Germany and says that it took as its theme the notion of the 'usefulness of all things'. This approach was explicitly 'taken up from the French.' (Ibid.)

Practice and Perpetual Peace. There is every reason to believe that the problem was posed for him by Garve's many writings on the subject, foremost amongst which is the *Treatise on the relationship between Morality and Politics* first published in 1788.

As Fania Oz-Salzberger puts it, 'Garve was a central figure of the German Enlightenment, much better known to his contemporaries than to posterity. He was a prolific translator of major British works and an author of tracts in moral philosophy. He was also one of the best known *Popularphilosophen*, a leader of a movement which dominated the German intellectual scene in the 1770s and 1790s.'⁸ (191) Garve's choice of British writers to translate was eclectic and individual. Like Garve himself, many of those writers he chose to translate were a good deal more prominent in their own time than ours. He translated for example a book on the condition of the Edinburgh poor by a John Macfarland which is now very difficult to trace in British library records. Similarly he translated Alexander Gerard's discussion of the origin of genius⁹ which was perhaps a book of greater note, but it appears that the discussion engendered by Garve's translation was far greater than any debate on Gerard's work that occurred in Britain. Garve not only wrote on moral theory but also social, historical and literary issues. Garve, for example, investigated closely the conditions in the countryside in his home country, publishing a book *On the Character of the peasantry* in 1786. In his writings he paid close attention to style and the clear presentation of his ideas, and one of his most frequent criticisms of Kant was of his lack of clarity as an author and his tendency to coin new phrases and terms in order to present his philosophical arguments.

Garve's literary productivity seems staggering. Generally speaking his translations were not merely literal presentations of the texts. He tried to convey the ideas of the original in the most appropriate and fluent German. Moreover, most of his translations were accompanied by detailed and valuable introductions. His translations of Cicero, Aristotle and Ferguson were accompanied by introductions and textual analysis of this kind. Garve offered an interpretation of the original as well as the translation. This is what made his translations literary events of such significance. As Oz-Salzberger aptly remarks, 'it seems that Garve often had a touch of Midas when it came to producing new translations or breathing new life into older ones.'¹⁰ This seems to be particularly true of Garve's translations of Ferguson's *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* and Cicero's *On Duties*. These translations not only led to detailed discussions of the views of Ferguson and Cicero, but also to a close investigation of Garve's own commentaries. Garve's comments on Ferguson's *Institutes* comprised more than a third of the book, and in Oz-Salzberger's view, influenced the reception of Ferguson's work in Germany as much as, if not more than, the substance of the translation itself.¹¹ Garve was selectively presenting to the German public what he took as significant in current philosophy, social and economic commentary and supplementing that with his own choice of classical texts. Garve was acting as a kind of filter for the educated German public through which past and present

⁸ Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p191

⁹ *An Essay on Genius*, (London: 1774). Translated as *Versuch ueber das Genie* by Christian Garve (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben & Reich, 1776) pp. viii, 424

¹⁰ Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment*, p192

¹¹ Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment*, p200

philosophy, social and political theory was being received. His choice of Aristotle and Cicero as classical writers to translate and the vast array of (primarily) British and French writers he translated reflected his own philosophical bent.

What was this philosophical bent? It is said that Garve liked to regard himself as the German Hume.¹² Modesty would have prevented Garve from representing himself as the equivalent of Hume in originality and intelligence but the comparison was meant seriously as a depiction of the philosophical trends he represented. Garve followed Hume in his reliance on the senses and observation in grounding philosophical discussion. He did not follow Hume fully along the sceptical path, but he did in the range of his interests and concerns. Hume was not only the author of the highly abstract philosophical *A Treatise of Human Nature* but also of the more socially oriented *Natural History of Religion* and the highly concrete and detailed six-volume *History of England*. Above all, it is likely that Garve would have admired Hume for the clarity of his writing style. In his style Hume combined clarity with erudition. Hume contrived to be popular without being shallow. This for Garve was a key goal.

Kant and Garve

Kant's intense engagement with Christian Garve goes back at least as far as the review which Garve published in a literary and philosophical journal the *Zugabe zu den Gottischen Anzeigen von Gelehrten Sachen* in 1782 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant was considerably irritated by the review although it was not in every respect hostile. Particularly unacceptable for Kant was the identification of his position in the review with that of George Berkeley, the Irish idealist philosopher. Kant tried to correct this misrepresentation in a lengthy appendix to *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (1783: pp 372-383 AA IV). In the Appendix Kant challenged the reviewer to defend any of the eight propositions which Kant presents as contradicting themselves within traditional metaphysics. Should the reviewer be able to prove that any one of these propositions can wholly withstand objection then Kant undertakes to abandon his critical philosophy. Kant adds the one further condition that the reviewer should 'step out of his incognito' or, in other words, reveal his identity.

In response to this challenge Garve did reveal his identity to Kant in a letter of July 13, 1783. The tone of the letter is highly apologetic and defensive. Garve explains to Kant that he 'cannot in any way recognize that review, in the form that it was published, as my own.' (191/ 10 328-9) Garve claims, with some justification, that the original review that he sent to the editor of the journal Feder had been considerably shortened and amended before its publication. Thus the review does not entirely represent Garve's opinion, although Garve none the less says that 'I bear some responsibility for it'. (191/329) The review had been reduced by Feder to some one-third of its original length and Feder himself had contributed approximately a third of its final content. Although the review was finally published in its original form in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* (suppl. Vols. XXVII-LII, pt. II, pp 838-62) Kant was never entirely happy with Garve's portrayal

¹² Johan van der Zande, 'In the image of Cicero: German Philosophy between Wolff and Kant', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 56, 1995, p429

of his position in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. And even in his apologetic letter Garve remarks that he like Kant is convinced there are limits to our knowledge. 'But I do not see how your *Critique of Pure Reason* has contributed to overcoming these difficulties. At least the part of the book in which you bring these contradictions to light is incomparably clearer and more illuminating (you yourself will not deny this) than are those parts where the principles for resolving these contradictions are supposed to be established.' (194/ 332)

The most interesting difference of opinions which comes to light in the Garve-Feder review concerns their lukewarm reception of Kant's views on practical reason. In the *Critique* Kant had wanted to clear the way for faith by removing knowledge. By faith Kant had in mind the application of practical reason in our lives. Although Kant took the view that there were severe limitations to the application of pure reason in the theoretical realm he concluded there were fewer restrictions to our use of practical reason. In the use of our practical reason we were entitled to range beyond what we could take in through our senses and understanding in order to seek our improvement as individuals and as a species. In the review Garve-Feder say of Kant's approach to practical philosophy: 'The manner in which the author finally wants to provide grounds for the common way of thinking through moral concepts, after he has deprived it of the speculative we prefer to pass over; because we can find ourselves least therein. Anyway there is a way in which to link the concepts of the true and general laws of thought to general concepts and fundamental principles of right conduct which has its basis in our nature, which can guard us from the excesses of speculation or bring us back from them. But we do not recognise these in the expression and wording of the author'. (16, Landau, 1991) Garve shows himself to have utilitarian or eudemonist convictions in the review. He was an eclectic philosopher who followed both Cicero and the British empiricist philosophers in his ethics. Garve took from Cicero the idea that there was a harmony in nature that we could through our right actions express. He also followed Cicero in thinking that morality and expediency could be combined. But Garve also added to this an appreciation of British social and political philosophers like Ferguson and Paley who argued that self-interest and the pursuit of pleasure were in the right context themselves moral. The Garve-Feder review regrets that Kant fails to combine ordinary ways of thinking with a 'middle path between excessive scepticism and dogmatism'. To do this it is necessary to accommodate what we might now call utilitarian considerations. As Garve and Feder put it, 'first of all the correct use of the understanding of general concepts of right conduct must correspond to the fundamental principle of our moral nature, thus the advance of happiness.' (16)

Relations between Kant and Garve were often stormy, but it is possible to detect in their correspondence a mutual respect which appears to have grown stronger over the years. This culminates in a heart rending exchange of letters in 1798, at a time very close to Garve's death in the December of that year. The immediate cause of the exchange of letters was the gift that Garve had made to Kant of a copy one of his last publications *A Survey of the most significant principles of the theory of ethics* (Uebersicht der vornehmsten Prinzipien der Sittenlehre). The book contained a printed dedication to Kant. In the accompanying letter Garve strikingly remarks: 'I shall always respect you as one of

our greatest thinkers, a master of the art of thinking, who trained me when I was still an apprentice and beginner.’ Garve for his part speaks of a bond between himself and Kant which he wants to mark with the dedication so that ‘this hidden, silent connection which has existed between us for so long should be made still firmer in our old age.’ (819, p549) Garve goes on to describe in disturbing detail the nature of his face cancer which was shortly to lead to his death. For the most part the substance of Kant’s reply to Garve has to do with Kant’s own condition. Kant reports that his health ‘is less that of a scholar than that of a vegetable’. Kant expresses himself as deeply frustrated by his condition which prevents him from putting the vital finishing touches to his critical philosophy. To all appearances though Kant (despite their many differences over the years) reciprocates Garve’s generosity and kindness referring to Garve as ‘dearest friend’ and thanking him for the receipt of his book ‘so full of kindness and fortitude’. (820, p515) Kant finds the description of Garve’s condition deeply moving and commends Garve for his ‘strength of mind in ignoring that pain and continuing cheerfully to work for the good of mankind’. In contrast with Garve’s, Kant’s reply is somewhat at a more formal philosophical level ending with a correction to a comment Kant found on skimming through Garve’s book. Contrary to Garve’s assertion, Kant asserts that it was ‘not the investigation of the existence of God,’ but rather the antinomies of pure reason which first ‘aroused’ him from his ‘dogmatic slumber’. (220, p552)

We can only conclude from this exchange of letters that Kant respected Garve both as a person and a scholar. The book, which Garve had dedicated to Kant, does not present an uncritical view of Kant’s philosophy. Indeed, Garve sustains in his account of Kant the criticisms that he had formulated and levelled over the years. (1. That Kant starts from unproven presuppositions and develops his ideas according to postulated goals, 2. That his rational law lacks motivational force, 3. That he ends by reuniting virtue and happiness after all, in contradiction to his own theory, and 4) that the moral law lacks content.’ (552 *Correspondence*). Garve does not depart from his own empiricist, eudemonistic position in this survey, remaining true to his popular philosophy position. The main aims of the popular philosophers have been described by Oz-Salzberger as ‘to promote education and morality by propagating a simplified and deliberately eclectic philosophy of reason and feeling’. (191) More broadly the same writer describes popular philosophy as ‘a none too rigid mixture of the metaphysics of Leibniz and Wolff with the ideas of British common-sense school, steering clear of mechanism, materialism and atheism.’ (191) Judging by three of the philosophers who Garve translated from English into German we can affirm the Christian, common sense, part of this judgement. Ferguson, Burke, and Paley were committed Christians who had a strong distaste for abstract, speculative methods. Garve’s decision to translate William Paley’s now little known book on moral and political philosophy is a particularly interesting one. Paley was Bishop of Carlisle and sought in this book to combine Christian doctrines with a form of utilitarianism.

The Essay on Theory and Practice

Garve’s prime means of communication with his audience was the printed word. He occasionally gave lectures in Breslau to a circle of friends and admirers which were then published as contributions to journals or as part of his own collections of essays. One of

Garve's collection of essays *Versuche der verschiedene Gegenstaende aus der Moral und Literatur* figures in the essay *Theory and Practice*. It is also highly probable that Kant had read Garve's essay on Morals and Politics. Significantly Oz-Salzberger remarks that '*Die Verbindung der Moral mit der Politik* earned Garve the reputation of an "ultra-conservative", a defender of benevolent despotism, property and the social and political status quo.' (209) This is certainly a direction in which Kant would not go. Kant was a principled republican who was prepared to accord enlightened monarchs a role in inaugurating new and improved political structures but not a lasting place in the political order. Kant's vision for the future was one of greater equality and independence for citizens. That 'the *Verbindung* was a defence, using the terms of natural law, of Frederick's domestic and foreign policies' (209) would have considerably tried Kant's patience with the Silesian popular philosopher. Kant provides in his political philosophy the most telling critique of Frederick's *Realpolitik*, and presents his own ideal of gradually spreading *Perpetual Peace* as an alternative to it. Garve's whole line of argument in *Die Verbindung* seems to have been designed to irritate Kant:

'Garve began by asserting the usefulness of a state-of-nature hypothesis for analysing the relations between sovereigns. The happiness of a state depends on the power and the influence of its rule, who is ideally committed to the "security, freedom, and well-being of all nations". However, the moral sphere in which a statesman acts is, by its nature, more abstract, and the results are less immediate and direct, than those of the individual in his limited domestic circle. The sovereign bears greater responsibility than a *Hausvater* does, because the well-being of a whole society depends upon him. Consequently, the morality of the ruler's acts is less clear-cut.'

Garve seems here to be hinting at a doctrine of the 'office-holder' who in his or her personal relations is bound by the same moral rulers as others, but in relation to the role of office-holder is free to interpret his or her responsibilities more freely. This separation of the morality of the politician and ordinary morality is one that Kant strenuously opposed. This opposition can be seen as a prime motivation in the writing of both *Theory and Practice* and *Perpetual Peace*. Politics for Kant has to be brought into harmony with morality and, under no conditions, contrariwise morality brought into harmony with politics.

With Hobbes and Moses Mendelssohn, Garve is one of the three primary addressees in the essay on *Theory and Practice*. Indeed the broad framework of the essay seems to have been suggested by Garve's remarks both on the relation of theory to practice and the relation of morality and politics. As the title of *Popular Philosopher* suggests, Garve was reaching a wide audience with his translations and publications. He also had the ear of the country's rulers. Garve was born in Breslau in Silesia which had been annexed by Frederick the Great to Prussia at the end of the war with Austria (1756?). Garve spent much of his life in Breslau, living at home with his mother. He had briefly held a teaching position at Leipzig after undertaking research there, earlier he had studied at Frankfurt on Oder. Garve was unable to remain as a University professor at Leipzig

owing to ill health. This ill health dogged him most of his life, his final letter to Kant in 1798 contains harrowing details about the face cancer which finally brought his life to an end.

Christian Garve is probably primarily responsible for Kant penning the essay on *Theory and Practice* at the time and in the manner that Kant did. Garve had probably stimulated Kant to think along these lines by remarks that he had made in the appendix to one of his many essays in a collection published in 1792 entitled *Essays concerning a number of objects in Morality, Literature and social life*. (pp111-116) Kant refers extensively to these remarks when criticising Garve and seems to have as one of his main objectives the challenging of Garve's apparently popular nostrums. Yet although Garve's popular philosophy is clearly the most immediate target of Kant's essay it is interesting to note the comparative lengths of the sections on Garve, Hobbes and Mendelssohn in *Theory and Practice*. The middle section on Hobbes is by far the longest, occupying pages 231-270 in the first edition of the essay in the *Berlinischen Monatsschrift*, September 1793, in comparison with the first section on Garve which occupies pages 207-231 and the very short final section on Mendelssohn, occupying pages 271-284. Thus although it is two of Kant's contemporaries who provide the immediate focus of the essay I suggest that Hobbes represents the main adversary.

I would suggest that Hobbes becomes the main adversary because Garve, although a lively essayist who wished to capture the public's imagination, was not drawn to systematic issues. It was the derivative and eclectic nature of Garve's thinking which led to Hobbes. Kant had a great respect for thoroughness and consistency and sought to achieve the same in his own writings. In Hobbes Kant, I would argue, found a philosophical opponent who drew together in a coherent way the problems raised by the issue of the relationship between theory and practice in morality, history and politics in a way which Kant's contemporaries Garve and Mendelssohn had hinted at. Beneath the objections in Germany to his own moral philosophy, those of Garve in particular, Kant detected a more systematic voice. To that voice he turns in the section on Hobbes. Garve was self-consciously the representative of British empiricism in Germany. He avidly read and translated the latest works in British philosophy. In Garve, the spirit of Hobbes's philosophy was to be found, admittedly neither in its original nor in its best form but nonetheless present in a mutated form. To Kant Hobbes was the voice of expediency, prudence and materialism in modern political philosophy, and it was upon him that Garve as a representative of the German Enlightenment was drawing.

Kant's main criticism of Christian Garve in *Theory and Practice* is that Garve is theoretically inconsistent. Ultimately Kant follows the same line of criticism with Hobbes and Mendelssohn in the essay, but the objection to Garve sets the scene. Another way of putting this objection is to say that Kant regarded Garve's metaphysics as faulty. It is plausible to argue that Kant shared with Garve the objective of making philosophy a less exclusively scholarly pursuit. However Kant did not think that philosophy should be popularly taught at the expense of scientific accuracy. Kant shows no taste for scholasticism in his writings but he does have an immense respect for systematic,

thorough and consistent thinking. In moral or practical philosophy Kant thinks that metaphysics holds the key. A consistent and defensible metaphysics must underlie any moral and political theory Kant feels able to recommend. A wholly worthwhile moral and political life has for Kant to be founded upon a theory. In Kant's view Garve yields too much to existing moral and political activity in presenting the moral ideas of his popular philosophy. Life has for Kant to be guided by moral ideas and not moral ideas guided by life.

Kant acknowledges that 'it is obvious that no matter how complete the theory may be, a middle term is required between theory and practice, providing a link and a transition from one to the other.' (61) There is naturally an 'act of judgement' which comes between the theory and the activity derived drawn from it. But that this act of judgement must take place does not mean that the theory should be wholly subordinate to the practice. Just as we would not think very highly of a doctor who is brilliantly versed in the study of medicine but who is incapable of curing a single patient owing to bad judgement, so we are unlikely to place our trust in a lay person who has performed excellently when called upon to provide a recommendation about our health but who we know not to have studied medicine formally at all. When we are looking for the ideal person to cure we look for someone who has the proper combination of theoretical knowledge and experience. Neither the skilled practitioner nor the good theorist can afford to dispense with the knowledge that both theory and practice bring. The moral and political theorist who is solely abstract can expect little success. But also 'no-one can pretend to be practically versed in a branch of knowledge and yet treat theory with scorn, without exposing the fact that he is an ignoramus in his subject.' (62)

Kant does not think that Garve is the kind of person who ignores moral theory altogether to get on with the activity of living. Garve after all acknowledges the importance of learning and communicating clearly with the public in his writings and translations. However, Kant thinks Garve does this insufficiently and he might well be taken for a 'would-be expert who admits the value of theory for teaching purposes, for example as a mental exercise, but at the same time maintains that it is quite different in practice, and that anyone leaving his studies to go out into the world will realise he has been pursuing empty ideals and philosopher's dreams.' (62) The section of Garve's writings to which Kant pays special attention to in *Theory and Practice* emphasises heavily the differences Garve believes exist between the theoretical consideration of a topic and the considerations which come to mind whilst acting. Here Kant 'loudly and resolutely disagrees with Garve'. In Garve's view it is very difficult to decide whether or not virtue or happiness should be the highest goal of morality. He claims to understand very well the distinction Kant makes between the pursuit of virtue and the possible happiness that may indirectly arise from doing our duty. However Garve finds it a very subtle and complex distinction which largely fails to affect the ordinary person. Kant's view is that human individuals should seek to make themselves worthy of happiness by acting from the motive of duty, rather than seek happiness as a goal in itself. Garve makes the psychological objection to this that although the ideas of duty and happiness may be analytically distinct for the corporeal individual that both thinks and feels it may in fact be impossible to keep duty and happiness apart. 'For my part', Garve says, 'I confess that

I indeed grasp this division of ideas with my head, but that I do not find this division between desires and strivings in my heart.’ Moreover, it seems to Garve ‘inconceivable how any persons can be conscious of themselves purely separating their requirement to be worthy of happiness from their requirement for happiness itself’. (112) Garve goes so far as to deny one of the central precepts of Kant’s pure moral philosophy when he claims that it is not possible to pursue ‘duty wholly without regard to self-interest’. (112)

The passage in Garve’s writings which Kant particularly draws attention to follows on immediately this claim. In quoting it in *Theory and Practice* Kant highlights Garve’s aversion to theory and the deontological (virtue) ethics of the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*. ‘Such subtle distinctions between ideas become obscure even when we think about particular objects; but they vanish completely when it comes to action (practice), when they are supposed to apply to desires and intentions. The more simple, rapid and devoid of clear ideas the step from consideration of motives to actual action is, the less possible it is to determine exactly and unerringly the precise momentum which each motive has contributed in guiding the step in this and no other direction.’ (70: 112 Garve’s *Werke*) In raising this objection to the role of theory in everyday life Garve is drawing upon a long tradition in moral and political theory. Aristotle raises a similar objection to the grand theory of his teacher Plato in his *Ethics*, arguing that we cannot hope to attain the same accuracy in moral theory that we can attain in the physical sciences. The supremacy of practice is also argued for, in different ways, by both Machiavelli and Hobbes. Garve was probably most indebted to Aristotle for his views on practice – one of his earliest publications was an edition of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, and he later produced translations of the *Ethics* (1789) and *Politics* (1799). It is not surprising that Kant comes out on the side of Plato in defending theory, although Kant’s transcendental idealism and the metaphysics of morals he draws from it is a good deal different from Plato’s idealism and political theory. Garve may also have been influenced in his criticism of Kant’s a priori theory of morality by the British empiricist philosophers he assiduously translated into German. Writers like Ferguson, Burke and Paley, although by all means not dismissing theory and the principles drawn from it in moral philosophy, none the less placed a great deal of emphasis on considerations of expediency and prudence drawn from experience.

On the psychological point that we cannot distinguish in our desires between what derives from self-interest and what derives from the sense of duty Kant partially concedes to Garve. In Kant’s view we can, on the one hand, never know with certainty that the emotion which arises from our sense of duty predominates but, on the other hand, we can never know with certainty that the self-interested desire for happiness always plays a part. As Kant puts it, ‘I willingly concede that no-one can have certain awareness of having fulfilled his duty completely unselfishly. For this is part of inward experience, and such awareness of one’s psychological state would involve an absolutely clear conception of all the secondary notions and considerations which, through imagination, habit and inclination, accompany the concept of duty. And this is too much to ask for. Besides, the non-existence of something (including that of an unconsciously intended advantage) can never be an object of experience’. (69) Psychological perception is necessarily always

incomplete. We can never verify with certainty our inner condition. We cannot understand what we cannot fully observe. But the path of psychological perception is anyway not for Kant the way to ground our ethics. Ethical behaviour can only be grounded in principles and these principles should determine the will.

‘The concept of duty in its complete purity is incomparably simpler, clearer and more natural and easily comprehensible to everyone than any motive derived from, combined with, or influenced by happiness, for motives involving happiness always require a great deal of resourcefulness and deliberation. Besides, the concept of duty, if it is presented to the exclusive judgement of even the most ordinary human reason, and confronts the human will separately and in actual opposition to other motive, if far more powerful, incisive and likely to promote success than all incentives borrowed from the latter selfish principle.’ (70) By its very nature utilitarianism involves a great deal of calculation of presumed advantages, disadvantages, hindrances and supports than determining our duty. To Garve suggestion that the pursuit of duty must always have an unknown and so possibly calculating side to it, Kant responds that the pursuit of happiness is all uncertain and often risky calculation.

One further central objection that Kant has to Garve which he expresses in *Theory and Practice* is his objection to the general moral theory which Garve supports. As befits his interest in British empiricism Garve was an exponent of the theory of happiness (Glueckseligkeit). It is possibly somewhat anachronistic to describe Garve’s moral doctrine as utilitarianism since the term was not yet widely current, but Garve was deeply influenced by those trends in philosophy which were to issue in modern utilitarianism. His reading and translation of British writers had acquainted him with political economy and the revived forms of Epicurean materialist philosophy which went so well with the appreciation of the benefits of the development of a market economy. Garve found himself thoroughly convinced by these utilitarian doctrines, arguing in the passage Kant refers to that ‘in the succession of our ideas the step forward from happiness to virtue is far more natural than the reverse’. (114) For Garve, ‘I must first above all know that something is good before I can ask whether the fulfilling of moral duties belongs under the rubric of the good’ (114) and whether something is good I can only know from experience. ‘Happiness’ is for Garve ‘the only conceivable purpose of things’.

Kant thoroughly rejects such utilitarian philosophy. In his view the pursuit of happiness leads to a wholly inconsistent moral outlook and life. ‘Thus a will which follows the maxim of happiness vacillates between various motives in trying to reach a decision. For it considers the possible results of its decision, and these are highly uncertain; and it takes a good head to find a way out of the host of arguments and counter-arguments without miscalculating the total effect.’ Kant contrasts this to his own metaphysic of morals: ‘On the other hand, if we ask what duty requires, there is no confusion whatsoever about the answer, and we are at once certain what action to take.’ (71)