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On Sociability and Solitude in Civilised Society: Christian Garve and the Reception of the Scottish Enlightenment

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Abstract

This study explores Christian Garve's (1742–98) perspective on sociability and solitude by analysing On Sociability and Solitude (Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit). Although Garve has long been recognised as a principal mediator of the Scottish Enlightenment in Germany, the influence of Adam Smith on his social philosophy remains unclear. This study argues that Garve appropriated Smith's analysis of commercial (or civilised) society, particularly his account of the intellectual and moral consequences of the division of labour, while transforming structural social problems into questions of individual moral cultivation. Garve regarded The Wealth of Nations more as a penetrating observation of modern society than as a systematic treatise on political economy. His critique of civilised society, therefore, remained confined to the framework of moral psychology rather than developing into a theory of political and social reform. By reconstructing Garve's reception of Smith through On Sociability and Solitude, this study clarifies both the originality and limitations of Garve's social thought, thereby enhancing comprehension of the German reception of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Keywords: sociability; solitude; Christian Garve; Adam Smith; Enlightenment; moral philosophy

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Introduction

This study examines Christian Garve's views (1742–98) on solitude and sociability, focusing particularly on his *On Sociability and Solitude* (*Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*).[1] Garve has historically been acknowledged as a key mediator of the Scottish Enlightenment in Germany. However, the extent to which his interpretation of Scottish social philosophy, especially that of Adam Smith, shaped his understanding of sociability, solitude and modern civilised society remains ambiguous. This study contends that Garve adopted Smith's analysis of civilised or commercial society in his *On Sociability and Solitude* while ultimately recasting structural social issues as matters of the cultivation of moral character. For Garve, *The Wealth of Nations* was not primarily a systematic exposition of the principles of political economy but rather a work offering penetrating observations on modern society. This interpretation reveals both the originality and the limitations of Garve's social thought.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 1 places Garve within the German reception of the Scottish Enlightenment. Section 2 presents the intellectual history of solitude and sociability. Section 3 examines their respective roles in intellectual cultivation, and Section 4 analyses Garve's critique of civilised society considering Smith's influence. The conclusion considers what this reception reveals regarding both the originality and limitations of Garve's social thought.

1 Christian Garve and the Reception of the Scottish Enlightenment

Garve contributed to the transmission of the Scottish Enlightenment to Germany and is reported to have regarded himself as a 'German Hume'.[2] He is known as a popular philosopher[3] and moralist from Breslau in former Prussia (now Wrocław, Poland), and a figure who exerted a significant influence on the German intellectual world from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. Despite his limited career as a university teacher, partly owing to chronic illness, he nevertheless left a significant impact through his interactions with contemporary intellectuals such as Mendelssohn, Kant and Biester.

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1 Christian Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit* (2 vols, Breslau, 1797–1800).

2 'It is said that Garve liked to regard himself as the German Hume'. (Howard Williams, 'Christian Garve and Immanuel Kant: Some Incidents in the German Enlightenment', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 19 (2000), 171–92, 5.) This claim is based on Johan van der Zande, 'In the Image of Cicero: German Philosophy between Wolff and Kant', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56, 3 (1995), 419–42, 429, and it should be noted that Garve himself did not state this directly or explicitly, even if he might have accepted the statement itself.

3 On German popular philosophy, see Gert Ueding, 'Popularphilosophie', in Rolf Grimminger (ed.), *Deutsche Aufklärung bis zur Französischen Revolution 1680–1789* (München, 1980), 605–34; Christoph Böhr, *Philosophie für die Welt* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2003).

Garve's oeuvre can be broadly divided into three categories: (1) moral philosophy, drawing on the tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment and encompassing not only morals but also politics, society, economy and aesthetics; (2) translations and commentaries on the latest English works of the time, such as E. Burke's A *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*,[4] A. Ferguson's *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*[5] and A. Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*;[6] and (3) translations and annotations of classical texts such as Cicero's *De Officiis* and Aristotle's *Politics*.

As Norbert Waszek has noted, 'Christian Garve, [...] was thus not the only German thinker steeped in Scottish philosophy'.[7] For example, Manfred Kuehn's seminal research overestimates the influence of the Scottish Common-Sense School on German thought, particularly Kantian philosophy; nonetheless, it demonstrates that the Göttingen School, led primarily by J. G. Feder, actively received Scottish Common-Sense philosophy.[8] The Göttingen School's reception of the Scottish Enlightenment was closely connected with the fact that the king of the Kingdom of Hanover, with Göttingen as its capital, had concurrently reigned as the king of Great Britain since 1714, thereby forming what is known as the 'English connection'. Through this connection, those associated with the University of Göttingen were able, from the late 1760s onwards, to receive the works of Thomas Reid, James Oswald and James Beattie almost in real time. Using *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* (1753–1801) as a platform, they disseminated this knowledge through book reviews. By contrast, what may be regarded as Garve's distinctive contribution—given his closer ties to the Leipzig School—lies not in the translation of British epistemology or metaphysics, but in his active translation of works related to social philosophy. Moreover, he did not merely translate them; he

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4 Christian Garve, *Burkes Philosophische Untersuchungen über den Ursprung unserer Begriffe vom Erhabenen und Schönen* (Riga, 1773).

5 Christian Garve, *Adam Fergusons Grundsätze der Moralphilosophie* (Leipzig, 1772). The significance of Garve's translation of Ferguson has been relatively well studied. See, for example, the following articles: Jiaqi Wang, 'Considerations on the German Reception of Scottish Moral Philosophy: C. Garve's Translation Practice of A. Ferguson's Institutes of Moral Philosophy', *The Kyoto Economic Review*, 88 (2022), 34–65; Antonino Falduto, 'Schottische Aufklärung in Deutschland: Christian Garve und Adam Fergusons Institutes of Moral Philosophy' in Udo Roth and Gideon Stiening (eds), *Christian Garve (1742–1798): Philosoph und Philologe der Aufklärung* (*Werkprofile: Philosophen und Literaten des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, 14) (Berlin, 2021), 33–54.

6 Christian Garve, *Untersuchung über die Natur und die Ursachen des Nationalreichtums von Adam Smith* (3 vols, Breslau, 1794–6). The background and significance of Garve's translation of Smith are discussed in Carl William Hasek, *The Introduction of Adam Smith's Doctrines into Germany* (1925); reprinted (Honolulu, 2002), ch. 3. On the influence of Scottish thought on Germany in general, see also Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1995).

7 Norbert Waszek, 'The Scottish Enlightenment in Germany' in Tom Hubbard and R. D. S. Jack (eds), *Scotland in Europe* (Amsterdam, 2006), 55–71, 57.

8 Manfred Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800: A Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy* (London, 1987).

also contextualised them within the conditions of German society and used them to theorise his own empirical observations. However, this achievement has long remained obscured and forgotten in the shadows of major thinkers such as Kant, Fichte and Hegel. To borrow Waszek's words once again, 'Considerable as were his services in furthering the reception of a work of the first importance, and its consequences, Garve's reputation was one victim of the succeeding generation's cult of genius'.[9]

Although such evaluations have evolved in recent years and research aimed at reassessment has progressed, Garve's thoughts and works remain only partially clarified. Unlike his translations of Ferguson or Cicero, Garve's translation of *The Wealth of Nations* lacked the extensive commentaries typical of his work, leaving his evaluation of Smith ambiguous. Therefore, to ascertain how this reception is reflected in Garve's own thoughts, identifying and reconstructing the relevant elements from his extensive oeuvre is essential. *On Sociability and Solitude* is especially important for this purpose because Garve's analysis of the intellectual and moral effects of civilised society bears clear traces of his engagement with Smith. The following situates the themes of solitude and sociability within their broader intellectual-historical context.

2 Solitude as a Topic in the History of Ideas

Solitude and sociability are phenomena that are universal to humankind, yet their interpretation and evaluations differ between societies and cultures, influenced by individual circumstances, desires and hopes. Therefore, many writers and philosophers have reflected on solitude and sociability. Nevertheless, particularly in the case of solitude, although numerous fragmentary reflections often contain moral advice, establishing whether they have been refined through sustained philosophical debate is challenging. Consequently, Barbara Taylor has remarked as follows: 'Researching the history of solitude is challenging. Of all the human universals, solitude is probably the least-examined, the least-historicized. Birth, death, desire, pain – all have substantial historiographies, but not solitude'.[10]

The concept of sociability and solitude are both timeless and contemporary themes. For example, a long tradition dating back to ancient Greece pertains to the question of whether a truth-seeking scholar ought to live in solitude. Socrates, who enjoyed dialogue yet was often portrayed as solitary and contemplative, alongside Aristotle, who, while recognising the necessity of solitude for scholarship, famously declared that 'he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god',[11] may both be regarded as practitioners of a certain type of solitude and sociabil-

9 Waszek, 'The Scottish Enlightenment in Germany', 67.

10 See Barbara Taylor, 'Philosophical Solitude: David Hume versus Jean-Jacques Rousseau', *History Workshop Journal*, 89 (2020), 1; Steven Shapin, '"The Mind Is Its Own Place": Science and Solitude in Seventeenth-Century England', *Science in Context*, 4, 1 (1990), 191–218.

11 Aristotle, *Politics* [c. 350 BCE], trans. Benjamin Jowett, rev. Jonathan Barnes, in Stephen Everson (ed.), *Aristotle: The Politics and the Constitution of Athens* (Cambridge, 1996), 14.

ity. Solitude does not necessarily mean having no contact with anyone or being absolutely alone. Rather, solitude often means withdrawal or separation from a particular social group or place—especially one central to a person's work.[12] This is most typically observed in the life of Epicurus' school, which espoused the motto 'live in obscurity', as well as in Rousseau's later life described in *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

Opinions are divided as to whether solitude is essential for the life of scholarship (for example, Bacon rejected this view[13]). Nevertheless, many people continue to hold the image of the philosopher as a solitary figure devoted to the pursuit of truth, such as Nietzsche's Zarathustra, and Kant, who published *Critique of Pure Reason* after ten years of silence.[14]

Another question is whether sociability and solitude contribute to, or undermine, the happiness and virtue of individuals. Rousseau's dislike of civilisation and his insistence on the necessity of education in an environment removed from civilisation suggests that his answer to this question was negative. By contrast, Hume's famous remark, '[a] perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer',[15] can be regarded as expressing the opposite view.

Loneliness has recently been regarded as a pathology of modern society. Sociology and social psychology have pointed out that modern society tends to isolate individuals and makes them feel lonely. Since David Riesman's classic work, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), this issue has been discussed under the heading of theories of individualisation.[16] Yet, as Garve has already perceived, it is possible to trace this line of argument back to Adam Smith's theory of the division of labour (discussed below).

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12 Shapin, '"The Mind Is Its Own Place"', 200–1.

13 Shapin, '"The Mind Is Its Own Place"', 200–1; Taylor, 'Philosophical Solitude', 1. To obtain knowledge of the world, Bacon and his followers, especially the natural philosophers associated with the Royal Society, called for the cooperation of sailors and merchants. See Huaping Lu-Adler, *Kant, Race, and Racism: Views from Somewhere* (Oxford, 2023), ch. 4.

14 The view that the *Critique of Pure Reason* was the product of Kant's solitary reflection has recently been challenged. According to Manfred Kuehn, Kant showed drafts of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to his close friend Joseph Green step by step and discussed them with him. Therefore, 'Kant's *Critique* is not so much the work of a solitary and isolated thinker as the product of collaborative effort' (Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Edinburgh, 2001), 240).

15 T 2.2.5.15, SBN 362–3. The quotation is taken from https://davidhume.org/texts/t/. It should also be noted that Thomas Joiner's research on loneliness among middle-aged and older men statistically demonstrates that loneliness has harmful effects on health and both physical and mental well-being. See Thomas Joiner, *Lonely at the Top: The High Cost of Men's Success* (New York, 2011).

16 On theories of individualisation in sociology, see the series of works by Ulrich Beck, especially the work that may be regarded as their culmination: Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (California, 2002).

In *On Sociability and Solitude*, Garve also refers to the three themes mentioned above; therefore, he should occupy an important place in the intellectual history of sociability and solitude.

Now, the eighteenth century was an age of sociability. Of course, this does not mean that sociability did not exist in the earlier periods. The Enlightenment era is called the age of sociability because some forms of sociability that had previously been largely confined to the court, namely, communication with strangers based on politeness, spread among the urban middle class and became a more general social phenomenon. Sociability does not simply refer to interactions with others. Rather, it refers to formal or semi-formal social intercourse with people who are either meeting for the first time or are only slightly acquainted, and held at dinner parties, salons, coffeehouses or at the homes of notable persons encountered while travelling and so on. To communicate smoothly in such settings, not only politeness is required but also the skill of engaging in harmless conversation or maintaining superficial conversations.[17]

The age of sociability was supported by various social improvements, such as the development of transport and postal networks, an increase in printed publications in vernacular languages, the expansion of higher education and the emergence of a new bourgeoisie. Moreover, if, as Hartmut Rosa has argued, the defining feature of modern society is acceleration rather than particular technologies or systems, then it can be said that an important social condition characterising the Enlightenment era was the increasing speed of the circulation of information and human communication.[18] Sociability was so ordinary that it came to be regarded almost part of human nature. Simultaneously, Rousseau exemplified this notion, which many regarded as a source of human corruption.

Nevertheless, as Kant aptly counted 'unsocial sociability' (antagonism)[19] among the characteristics of human nature, human beings are creatures who, while enjoying sociability, find it troublesome. If this is the case, then the inclination towards solitude may likewise be regarded as a part of human nature. In other words, if sociability is regarded as an important human activity, solitude should be given positive significance as well. Indeed, at the beginning of *On Sociability and Solitude*, Garve stated the following:

> Sociability and solitude are important for human life and are therefore also worthy of philosophical investigation: either insofar as they influence the intellectual cultivation of human beings, or insofar as they influence their happiness. Happiness is something simple and unified; but the cultivation of human beings is divided into three clearly distinct parts: the cultivation of understanding, the cultivation of character, and that of outward manners.[20]

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17 On the role played by politeness in the everyday morality associated with sociability, see Philippe Raynaud, *La politesse des lumières* (Paris, 2013).

18 Hartmut Rosa, *Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main, 2012).

19 Immanuel Kant, 'Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht', in *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1900–), 17–31, 20.

20 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 2–3.

According to Garve, sociability and solitude are related to (1) 'the intellectual cultivation of human beings' and (2) happiness. Furthermore, (1) includes three elements: 'understanding', 'character' as inner morality and 'outward manners'. These elements are closely reflected in the structure of the chapters of *On Sociability and Solitude*.[21]

This study examines Garve's views on the role of sociability and solitude in the cultivation of understanding. Nevertheless, as Claus Altmeyer observed earlier and Hans-Peter Nowitzki acknowledged more recently, *On Sociability and Solitude* is a work in the tradition of the French moralists and is interspersed with a wide variety of topics.[22] Therefore, I focus on Garve's account of sociability and solitude in intellectual cultivation, reading as a form of quasi-sociability, and the intellectual and moral pathologies generated by a civilised society.

3 Sociability and Solitude for Scholarship

3.1 Sociability is necessary for the cultivation of understanding

As previously noted, the question of whether solitude is necessary for scholarship has existed since ancient Greece. According to Taylor, on this issue 'Eighteenth-century opinion divided sharply; more sharply perhaps [...] than in any previous period'.[23] In other words, solitude was praised on the one hand as a path leading to truth, whereas on the other it was regarded as a path towards irrationality, prejudice and fanaticism. In particular, the latter view was combined not only with pathological interpretations but also with the idea that solitude was something uncivilised, whereas the spread of sociability was considered as a form of civilisation.[24] Garve's claim that sociability is necessary for the cultivation of understanding is grounded in this intellectual background. Why, then, is sociability necessary for the cultivation of understanding? According to Garve, self-knowledge requires a relationship to an object:

> Admittedly, theoretical knowledge of human nature in general can be drawn from observations that the philosopher makes about himself; and its

[21] *On Sociability and Solitude* is structured as follows. First section: the influence of sociability and solitude on the cultivation of Understanding. Second section: the influence of sociability and solitude on moral character. Third section: the influence of sociability and solitude on outward manners, or decorum and politeness. Fourth section: different kinds of sociability and solitude.

[22] Claus Altmayer, *Aufklärung als Popularphilosophie: Bürgerliches Individuum und Öffentlichkeit bei Christian Garve* (St. Ingbert, 1992). Hans-Peter Nowitzki, 'Schon als Thier ist der Mensch gesellig' in Roth and Stiening (eds), *Christian Garve* (1742–1798), 301–24.

[23] Taylor, 'Philosophical Solitude', 4.

[24] 'Solitude bred irrationality and fanaticism; it was self-indulgent, lustful (masturbation, never previously cause for much concern, became a medical obsession), and – key descriptors these – "barbaric", "savage", "bestial", the obverse of polite civility'. (Taylor, 'Philosophical Solitude', 4)

> acquisition therefore appears possible even in the most complete solitude. Yet when one asserts this, one does not consider that self-observation is originally prompted—and at all times furthered—by our comparing ourselves with others. Human beings are made to live outside themselves before returning into themselves [außer sich zu leben, ehe er in sich selbst zurückkehrt]—first to observe the objects that surround them, and only then, through a light reflected back from these objects to contemplate themselves [ein von den Gegenständen auf ihn zurückgeworfenes Licht, sich selbst zu betrachten].[25]

Here, self-knowledge does not refer so much to the recognition of the self in a literal sense as to the recognition of inner representations; in short, it refers to the cognition of experience in general. Garve had already emphasised the structure of human cognition 'to live outside oneself before returning into oneself' in his early work. In his translation of Adam Ferguson's *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, he called this structure *interest*.[26] This structure of cognition applies not only to mere objects but also to social phenomena. As long as sociability comprises the interaction of the self and others within a relationship of interest, knowledge concerning social cooperation is cultivated through sociability.[27]

As noted above, the development of understanding through sociability occurs through the acquisition of empirical knowledge gained through social interactions. However, the significance of sociability for the development of understanding remains unclear. Garve pointed out that sociability contributes to the formation of opinions in two ways. First, our understanding develops by being instructed by others. In particular, association with the wise provides knowledge that cannot be found in books. Second, the very act of speaking before others is an opportunity to form opinions. Even if it were true that our thinking is cultivated in solitude, Garve argued that we are motivated to organise and generalise our thoughts only when we attempt to speak before others.[28]

Thus, through sociability we (1) acquire a certain know-how concerning social activity, (2) are taught various kinds of knowledge, so to speak as second-hand knowledge, and (3) gain the motivation to organise our opinions to communicate them to others. According to Garve, studying and reflecting in a state of solitude has value only insofar as it presupposes the moment that we live in the world of sociability and are always prepared to return to it.

3.2 What philosophy and poetry ought to be

Garve's claim itself may not appear particularly novel. What is important, however, is that Garve uses this argument as a critique of the poetry and philosophy of his own time. He

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25 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 6–7.

26 Garve, *Adam Fergusons Grundsätze der Moralphilosophie*, 332–3.

27 It should also be noted that such knowledge includes non-verbal conduct as well. Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 12–13.

28 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 16–17.

points out that poetry and philosophy, now produced in seclusion like garrets, once existed within the sphere of sociability. With regard to poetry, he wrote the following:

> Poetry and eloquence were, before the invention of writing, the only teachers of humankind; and they long remained the most eminent ones even after this art had been invented, though it had not yet spread widely. […] For the sake of society, for the entertainment of others, and with the intention of receiving from them admiration or reward, they gathered the tales of earlier times and adorned them with rhythm and song.[29]

Regarding philosophy, he states as follows:

> Even later, when science properly so called—or *philosophy*—emerged, it at first appeared only in the form of social conversation. […] The Greeks had no other name for reason than that of *speech* [Rede]; to conduct scholarly enquiries meant, for them, to *converse* about their subjects; and, in accordance with its oldest name, logic is nothing other than the art of learned conversation.[30]

Such views were expressed considering modern transformation, whereby poetry and philosophy came to be written and read in seclusion—that is, in a state of solitude. Moreover, the view that reason and speech were the same in ancient Greek may be interpreted as an antithesis to modern reason, which turns away from the world and seeks to observe it from a transcendent standpoint, more specifically, as an antithesis to the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and their followers.

Nevertheless, Garve did not wish to argue that philosophy should entirely return to its ancient form. He also stated that scholars and poets must deliberately place themselves in solitude.[31] However, he simultaneously also points out that remaining in solitude for long periods is dangerous. The advantage of solitude lies in the ability to pursue one's ideas without being disturbed by the external world; yet it also opens the way to delusion and fanaticism.[32] Therefore, as already noted, whether in philosophy or in poetry, insofar as they are intended to be communicated to others in some form, their authors must return to the sphere of sociability. A state of solitude, appropriate to philosophers and poets, is thus a place to cultivate the vitality required to return to the circle of human society.[33]

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29 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 18.

30 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 19.

31 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 333.

32 'From this there arise of themselves the difficulties and aberrations to be feared in such solitary occupations. One is the sinking into empty play of thought, or delusions [Träumerey]; the other is the excessive excitation of the imagination and the vital spirits, or fanaticism [Schwärmerey]' (Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 96).

33 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 336.

3.3 On reading

In solitude, the scholar engages in reading. Garve considered books preferable for oral communication in the transmission of scholarly matters. However, especially towards the end of the eighteenth century, reading became even more important as knowledge became increasingly specialised and systematised with the progress of learning. This applied not only to scholars but also to the public. With the growing complexity of society and progress in learning, it has become difficult to convey any kind of knowledge about society through sociability alone.[34]

In addition to these circumstances, the emergence of a culture of silent reading should be noted.[35] Aside from specialised scholarly works, moral and didactic literature was often read aloud in households or salons, that is, in sociability. Such work gradually came to be consumed through silent reading in solitude. Garve assumes that reading takes place in a state of solitude, yet retains traces of the culture of reading aloud. Therefore, Garve understood reading as akin to conversation:

> Books are those things that can best take the place of people for our instruction, and nothing has a greater resemblance to a […] conversation than reading. In books, too, people speak with us and communicate to us their ideas in full concerning the subjects that are treated in them.[36]

Thus, good reading consists of reading in such a way that the author (or characters within the work) seem to speak vividly to us. In other words, careful listening is essential. Likewise, speaking is also important in reading, and we should actively speak to the author.[37] Only through such dialogue does reading become a form of quasi-sociability in solitude.[38]

Now, if there are good readers, there are also bad readers. This includes those who do not possess the skill to engage properly in dialogue with books. However, another type of bad reader is the one who lacks concentration (Aufmerksamkeit). Garve seeks the cause of the lack of concentration in sociability: 'Indeed, the attention is distracted in many ways in social life, whether people come together for conversation, for amusement, or for the conduct of their affairs'.[39] The decline in concentration, he suggests, is due to the various pleasures and passions produced by sociability:

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34 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 49–52.

35 For the so-called reading revolution of the late eighteenth century, see the following: Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin (eds), *Histoire de l'édition française* (4 vols, Paris, 1983–6); Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London, 2014); Rolf Engelsing, *Bürger als Leser: Lesegeschichte in Deutschland 1500–1800* (Stuttgart, 1974); Erich Schön, *Der Verlust der Sinnlichkeit oder Die Verwandlung des Lesers: Mentalitätswandel um 1800* (Stuttgart, 1987).

36 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 47.

37 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 76–9.

38 This view resonates with the tradition, extending from Plato to Shaftesbury and Hannah Arendt, that understands thinking in solitude as a form of dialogue with oneself. See Taylor, 'Philosophical Solitude', 12.

39 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 56.

> Sometimes, when company is numerous, it is merely the noise; at other times it is the sensual pleasures that accompany social intercourse—the enjoyments of the table, of gaming, and of dancing; and finally it is the passions that so easily arise in human association—ambition, hatred, timidity, envy, or jealousy—which occupy our minds while we are assembled with others and render us incapable of attending to those objects, less sensual or less passionate, that might instruct us.[40]

It is particularly in civilised society that passions such as 'ambition, hatred, timidity, envy, or jealousy' are excessively aroused. Indeed, the most remarkable feature of *On Sociability and Solitude* lies in its (moralist-style) critical depiction of the present condition of solitude and sociability in civilised society. This issue is examined in the following section.

4 Isolation Brought About by Civilised Society and Transformation of Sociability

4.1 The expansion of mechanical labour through the division of labour and the isolation of workers

According to Garve, people now live in an increasingly complex civilised society. One major cause of this complexity lies in the development of industrialisation and the division of labour, which gives rise to what Garve calls 'a mechanical labour [eine mechanische Arbeit]'. This is characterised as a form of isolated labour in contrast to the craft labour of the apprenticeship system, which is carried out through oral communication and cooperative work.

> This obstacle, which arises for the progress of the lower classes in knowledge and morality from the *mechanical* and *unsocial* character of their occupations, is increased rather than diminished by the growing prosperity of industry and commerce. For that very division of labour, which is indispensable for bringing manufactures to the highest possible perfection, confines each worker ever more narrowly to the mere repetition of simple operations, thereby enriching his mind with ever fewer kinds of knowledge and giving him ever less occasion for a lively exercise of his powers.[41]

The development of a civilised society inevitably deprives people of cooperative labour which is carried out in sociability and provides an opportunity for cultivating understanding, thereby making human beings more ignorant. By contrast, therefore, 'a mechanical labour' obstructs the cultivation of understanding. Consequently, people become less familiar with 'social and political associations [gesellige und politische Verbindungen]'.[42]

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40 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 56–7.
41 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 41.
42 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 40–1.

Garve noted that this deprivation occurred especially in England:

> In England, where in certain manufactures this division has been carried the farthest, and where the perfection of the products has been brought to the highest degree, and in that very England, in which the greatest mass of insights and knowledge is to be found […], yet that very class of ordinary manufacturing workers, according to the testimony of well-informed writers, stands behind their counterparts in other countries, for example, in Germany, in enlightenment.[43]

As noted above, Germany was not in as miserable a situation as England. Nevertheless, Garve believed that the establishment of Sunday schools, which spread in Germany during the same period, responded to the need to provide another place in which workers could acquire the know-how of social activity as compensation for the loss of sociability within labour.[44] In short, with the expansion of the division of labour, providing some opportunities of education for workers became necessary to promote the development of their understanding.

Now, guessing who are the 'well-informed writers' mentioned in the previous quotation is not difficult. Adam Smith is one of the greatest writers in this field. For in 5.1.3.2. in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith states as follows:

> In the progress of the division of labour, the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour, that is, of the great body of the people, comes to be confined to a few very simple operations; frequently to one or two. But Understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects, too, are perhaps always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his Understanding, or to exercise his invention, in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. […] His dexterity at his own particular trade seems, in this manner, to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues. But in every improved and civilized society, this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it.[45]

This view of Smith corresponds to the earlier statement that the 'very division of labour […] confines each worker ever more narrowly to the mere repetition of simple operations,

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43 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 41–2n.

44 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 42n.

45 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Edinburgh, 1776), 436–7; available at http://gesd.free.fr/smith76bis.pdf [Last accessed 13 March 2026].

thereby enriching his mind with ever fewer kinds of knowledge and giving him ever less occasion for a lively exercise of his powers'.

As Hasek also argues, Garve might not accept Smith's principles of political economy, nor did he regard them as decisive;[46] he was rather critical of doctrinaire approaches to political economy. For him, the universal principles of political economy must be limited by specific circumstances in practice. In a book published in 1785, he noted, 'All universal maxims are suspicious in practical matters. The more we gather experiences, especially in the political economy and learn the exceptions that restrict the universality of these maxims [...], the less universal they become'.[47] Garve, therefore, accepted Smith not as the father of political economy but as a social observer.[48] It also seems that Garve styled himself not as a 'German Smith' but as a 'German Hume', as Hume was more inclined to examine the particular and specific matters of civilised society without being preoccupied with deriving general principles.

However, this reception revealed the limitation of Garve's social thought. He recognised the structural problem that a civilised society deprives community workers and leaves their understanding undeveloped. However, rather than seeking a structural solution to this problem, he turned to the moral improvement of individuals engaged in politics and the economy. One indication of this shift is that, after publishing his translation of *The Wealth of Nations* (1794–6), he undertook translations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1798–1801) and *Politics* (1799–1802).

The recognition that social problems transcend the level of individual agency and therefore require social or structural solutions would have to await nineteenth-century thinkers, especially Friedrich List, Hegel and Marx. As noted above, Garve believed that Germany had not yet undergone industrialisation to the same extent as England. Conversely, this meant that there was still room for individuals to respond successfully to the problems of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*—the term by which Garve consistently translated Smith's 'civilised society'

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46 Hasek, *The Introduction of Adam Smith's Doctrines into Germany*, 70–1.

47 Christian Garve, *Anhang einiger Betrachtungen über Johann Macfarlands Untersuchungen die Armuth betreffend, und über den Gegenstand selbst, den sie behandeln: besonders über die Ursachen der Armuth, den Charakter der Armen, und die Anstalten sie zu versorgen* (Leipzig, 1785), 86.

48 From this perspective, Garve mentions Smith by name twice, in *On Sociability and Solitude*: 'What Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, perhaps says with too great generality and definiteness about the distinction between moral good and evil—namely, that we always perceive it first in the conduct of others, towards us or towards one another' (Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 87n). 'Most people begin every meditation in a drowsy state and only grow warmed to it in the course of it. Therefore, as Smith remarks, the frequent transition from one kind of work to another is so detrimental to diligence in general, because every new beginning is, for a time, still a kind of intermediate state between work and idleness' (Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 113n).

as bourgeois society.[49] This, I suggest, explains why, despite his reception of the Scottish Enlightenment and his sustained engagement with political and social themes, Garve never developed a theory of political and social thought proper, but remained within the framework of virtue theory, or more precisely, moral psychology.

4.2 Frivolous or business-orientated sociability in civilised society

Garve also points out that the sociability practised in a civilised society tends to hinder the development of people's morality, not only through the isolation of workers caused by mechanical labour, but also through the excessive sociability of the middle and upper classes. Therefore, Garve claimed that the latter must withdraw from excessive sociability and seek an appropriate state of solitude, even if they are not scholars.[50]

Sociability in a civilised society can be broadly divided into two types. The first is the pursuit of frivolous sociability in the form of diversion. It is 'more a diversion than an occupation of the mind: it merely fills up time without our really applying it to any definite purpose'.[51] In such a sociability, 'the more numerous and the more splendid the circles become, the more insignificant the conversations become; and the fewer opportunities they offer for instructing oneself'.[52]

The second is a form of sociability in which serious conversations occur. However, the central topics of such sociability are 'only the objects of *ambition* or of *self-interest* that arouse this *interest*'.[53] More specifically:

> It is always *politics* and *commerce*, or *agriculture* and *household economy*—it is the news or the amusements of the day that provide the material for these reflections. Through society one becomes ever more entangled in the affairs of the world.[54]

Notably, politics is counted here among the objects of interest in sociability. It is commonly believed that sociability cultivates citizen's political virtue.[55] Indeed, as we saw earlier, Garve also pointed out that, owing to the isolation produced by the division of labour, people

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49 This point was first established by Kunihiko Uemura through a meticulous textual analysis. See Kunihiko Uemura, *What Is Civil Society? The Genealogy of a Fundamental Concept* (Tokyo, 2010), chap. 3. Unfortunately, this important study is available only in Japanese.

50 'The formation of morally sound principles is hindered by a life dispersed through sociability and business, unless it is interrupted by periods of rest and withdrawal' (Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 242–3).

51 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 243.

52 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 243–4.

53 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 244.

54 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 244–5.

55 See Shapin, '"The Mind Is Its Own Place"', 196.

become less familiar with 'social and political associations'. The politics that Garve has in mind here, however, is politics only insofar as it is connected with 'ambition' or 'self-interest':

> The present moment, the current conjuncture, a gain that now entices us or a loss that threatens us, an open office which we seek for ourselves or into which we wish to place one of our favourites—in short, the present, the sensible, the external: these are what occupy the excessively sociable people of the world without ceasing; they therefore acquire an ever greater power over their minds and ultimately rule them without restraint.[56]

In this statement, Garve clearly understands the 'ambition' or 'self-interest' of people as the desire for wealth and social status:

> Once we enter social life, we become all the more aware of what wealth and social status [Reichthum und Rang] mean and of the advantages they confer. The solitary person can do without them without experiencing very unpleasant feelings, provided only that he does not suffer a lack of what is necessary. But in intercourse with the world, there occur at every moment occasions on which the poorer and more humble person finds himself either deprived of certain comforts or exposed to certain humiliations.[57]

Furthermore, the desire for wealth and status ultimately undermines our 'gentler interest of morality [sanftere Interesse der Moralität]'. Garve states:

> It is therefore no wonder that in society one learns to value wealth and power [Macht] even more; that the inclinations which these two goods naturally arouse are there inflamed into violent passions. Against such passions, the gentler interest of morality cannot sustain the struggle.[58]

With the development of a civilised society, the desire for wealth and status or power increases, and topics in sociability become dominated by questions of how one's wealth and power may be expanded or how one may succeed economically and politically. Thus, sociability becomes vulgar and no longer suited to the cultivation of moral character.

The frivolity and vulgarity of sociability in a civilised society give rise to a type of person who is *lonely in the midst of sociability*. Such individuals, Garve says, also act on the basis of 'ambition' and 'self-interest':

> Others still love solitude out of a lower kind of ambition and lust for domination, because they would rather live under inferior company and with their

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56 Shapin, '"The Mind Is Its Own Place"', 245.
57 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 245–6.
58 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 246.

> servants and humble attendants than among free people and their equals, in a manner appropriate to that relation.[59]

Such people are often found in large cities; yet they 'live in the world as at a masquerade and enjoy in the former roughly the same pleasure that one seeks in the latter'.[60] They are often in coffeehouses and, while engaging in sociability, observe others to manoeuvre successfully themselves. They behave as 'unnoticed spectators'.[61] Even people with great talent, once they become inhabitants of such a masquerade, ultimately withdraw from sociability or are driven out of it. The reasons, Garve says, are 'that they demand too much from their companions in society with regard to conversation, and require too much attention for themselves'.[62] More precisely:

> Both arise from a certain pride: the first because, however modest their language may be, they silently place themselves so far above others, that they do not consider those others worthy of their company; the second because they regard everything they say as so important that everyone ought to listen to them in silence.[63]

4.3 Self-love as a pathology of civilised sociability

Moral corruption produced by civilised sociability is not limited to the pursuit of wealth and status. Garve also argues that this gives rise to an excessive form of self-love. Garve also points to the case 'when men desire to be not merely esteemed but also deeply loved by all those with whom they associate'.[64] Such extreme self-love is, likewise, a cause of human solitude within the sociability of a civilised society. As a typical example of a person possessing such self-love, Garve cites Rousseau:

> What then deprived Rousseau of all these friends? What gradually plunged him into such deep misanthropy that he first fled from people into solitude, and finally, in Paris, in a little attic room, wished to be forgotten by the whole world and turned everyone away from his door? Many causes came together here; but the following was certainly one of them. — As a man whose sensibility was as excessive as his ideas were often extravagant, he wished not merely to be admired by all with whom he associated—although even in this he carried his claims very far and believed that only a few valued him and his works

59 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 56.
60 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 303–4.
61 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 306.
62 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 306.
63 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 308.
64 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 308.

> according to their full worth—but he also wished to be deeply loved by everyone; and this demand is far greater and far more impossible to fulfil.[65]

Garve examined the course of events by which Rousseau was expelled from Parisian society, was invited by Hume to move to England, and eventually even fell out with Hume. He generalised the lessons from this episode as follows:

> What existed in Rousseau in the highest degree is found in many people to some extent. They were made to be esteemed and sought after by many, yet they make the absurd claim to be the intimate friend of just as many. This is naturally not granted to them; and thus they also renounce the happiness that arises from sociability.[66]

He then continues: 'To prevent this error, nothing is more useful than precisely Hume's disposition and advice'.[67] In other words, 'The Europeans, he says in his essay on polygamy, best understand how one may live happily in the world: one must have only one wife, few friends, and many good companions'.[68] For Garve, even the problem of self-love should not be solved politically but personally. Indeed, Garve also seems to regard excessive self-love as a product of the complexity of civilised society, and in particular, the frivolity and vulgarity of Parisian sociability. However, he does not generalise Rousseau's experience as a pathology of modernity. Rather, he treated it as a matter of individual experience and sought its resolution within the sphere of personal relationships. Thus, even when Garve identified excessive self-love as a pathology generated by civilised society, he ultimately sought a remedy in the moral cultivation of individuals rather than social or political reform.

Conclusion

On Sociability and Solitude is important for the intellectual history of sociability and solitude because Garve considers the development of a civilised society as his premise and depicts the modern transformations of various phenomena surrounding them. Moreover, although this study does not treat the matter as its main theme and only briefly touches upon this issue, this depiction owes much to the reception of Scottish thought. For Garve, the advantage of Scottish thought lies precisely in its sharp empirical observation of particular social phenomena and human relations. The following remark is presented as a general statement, yet it may also be understood as expressing Garve's own sentiments:

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65 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 309–10.

66 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 312.

67 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, II, 312.

68 For the reception of Hume's essays in eighteenth-century Germany, see also Lina Weber, 'The Reception of Hume's Essays in Eighteenth-Century Germany' in Max Skjönsberg and Felix Waldmann (eds), *Hume's Essays: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2025), 36–51.

> With the help of a sentence from Montaigne or Wieland, or a speculation from Hume or Kant that occurs to us at the right moment, we may sometimes become aware in persons whom we know best of things that would have escaped us without these models of others' observations and conclusions.[69]

As this passage indicates, Scottish thought was not Garve's only intellectual school. Nor did he leave a treatise on Hume (unlike, for example, Ferguson, whose works lacked extensive commentaries). Nevertheless, as the name suggests, Hume was undoubtedly an important thinker for Garve. Garve himself recalled that *The Wealth of Nations* had attracted him through the many new insights it offered, not only into political economy but also into the wider 'philosophy of civil and social life'. His engagement with Smith is therefore evident in his analysis of the intellectual and moral consequences of civilised society, as examined in Section 4.

In recent years, a reassessment of Garve has been advancing—especially in connection with the De Gruyter series *Werkprofile*[70]—and this is fully justified, not only for his own excellent thought but also for grasping the international networks of the Enlightenment.

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69 Garve, *Ueber Gesellschaft und Einsamkeit*, I, 91.

70 Christian Garve, *Kleine Schriften* in Udo Roth and Gideon Stiening (eds), *Ausgewählte Werke*, I (Berlin, 2021). Christian Garve, *De nonnullis, quae pertinent ad Logicam probabilium / Über einiges, was zur Logik des Wahrscheinlichen gehört* in Giuseppe Motta and Mischa von Perger (eds), *Ausgewählte Werke*, II (Berlin, 2022).