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Kant

Political Writings

Edited by
H. S. Reiss

*Cambridge Texts in the History of
Political Thought*



KANT
Political Writings

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KANT

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EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

HANS REISS

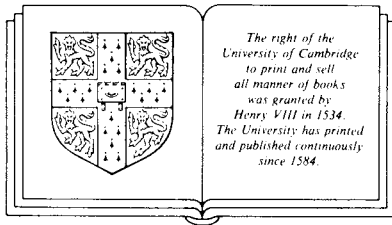
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To Thomas, Richard, Arnold and Marcus

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Preface to the Second Edition

The Cambridge University Press and the editors of the new series of Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought have kindly invited me to produce a second edition of *Kant's Political Writings*, of which the first edition first appeared in an earlier series almost twenty years ago. They also agreed that the volume might be enlarged by three additional texts. To decide on the most suitable texts presented me with anything but an easy choice. The three suitable pieces chosen, the reviews of Herder's *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, *Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History* and *What Is Orientation in Thinking?*, are not 'political' writings in the narrow sense of the word. They do, however, supply a context for the strictly political writings published in the first edition; for all of them illustrate Kant's critical approach to reasoning and his attitude to the public use of reason without which political justice could not, in his view, be achieved. *What Is Orientation in Thinking?* does so particularly clearly. It also introduces the reader to the moral basis of Kant's politics, while the other two texts illustrate Kant's conception of history, another pillar of his political thought. I greatly regret that there was no space to include the other pieces relating to politics mentioned in the preface to the first edition. Perhaps one day the constraints on space will be less pressing and all writings by Kant which refer to politics, including the whole of the *Theory of Right*, can be printed in a later edition.

In order to keep down printing costs and make the volume affordable by students the text of the first edition could not be substantially altered. For this reason, it has unfortunately not been possible to revise and enlarge my introduction itself. I have, however, been able to add a postscript in which I take up issues raised during the discussion of Kant's political thought over the past two decades. I have also provided a more extensive bibliography and a new index.

My thanks are due to Barry Nisbet for translating the additional texts and for giving me invaluable help by commenting on and checking my manuscript. I should like to thank Jeremy Mynott of the Cambridge

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

University Press and the editors of the series for asking me to produce the volume; and also Richard Fisher and Susan Beer for seeing the manuscript through the Press. I am also indebted to University of Bristol colleagues William Doyle, Stephan Körner and Niall Rudd, to Peter Nicholson (University of York), Onora O'Neill (University of Essex) and Lewis White Beck (University of Rochester) for their helpful advice. The German Academic Exchange Service provided me with a grant to work in the libraries of Heidelberg University, for which I am duly grateful. I am also conscious of my debt to the whole corpus of Kant scholarship, and I regret that I have been able to acknowledge only some of the many writings on Kant in the notes and bibliography. For all shortcomings I myself am alone responsible.

Bristol/Heidelberg
Autumn 1989

H. S. REISS

Preface to the First Edition

This volume, to the best of my knowledge, is the first in English to contain all the political writings of Kant which the author himself had published. There have been earlier translations of almost all the pieces which make up this volume; Dr Nisbet has asked me to acknowledge his debt to these, particularly to Professor John Ladd's translation of *The Metaphysical Elements of Rights* (*The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City, 1965). The aim of this volume is to introduce English-speaking readers in general and students of political theory in particular to Kant's Political writings. The bibliography in the present volume may serve as a guide for further reading. For a general introduction to Kant, the student can do no better than read Stephan Körner's *Kant* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1955), easily available in a pocket edition.

Only those writings which deal explicitly with the theory of politics and which were published by him have been included. I have omitted other essays, such as the *Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History* (*Mutmasslicher Anfang des Menschengeschlechts*), *The End of All Things* (*Das Ende aller Dinge*) and Kant's review of J. G. Herder's *Ideen*, which touch only marginally on politics. I have, however, included a brief but essential passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*). In accordance with the aims of the series, I have not included any extracts, unless they form self-contained wholes. A few passages in other writings published by Kant are excluded, since they do not add anything of substance to his theory of politics. I decided to include the first part of *Theory and Practice* (*Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis*), which is devoted to ethics. Since this volume does not set out to be a definitive critical edition of Kant's political writings I did not follow this precedent in the case of *The Metaphysics of Morals* (*Die Metaphysik der Sitten*) and *The Contest of Faculties* (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*). To print both works in full would inevitably have distracted attention from the main purpose of this volume. I hope that the brief summaries of what was omitted will

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give the reader some means of orientation. Except for the appended passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I have also excluded all passages on politics from any other of Kant's larger works, such as the *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilkraft*) and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (*Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*). I have even excluded a brief appendix attached to *The Metaphysical Elements of Right* (*Die metaphysischen Anfangsgründe des Rechts*). In neither case is anything of substance omitted. Kant is simply repeating points which he has made elsewhere. Those readers who wish to study the omitted parts of *The Metaphysics of Morals* should consult John Ladd's commendable translation in *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*. For the second part of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, *The Metaphysical Elements of Virtue* (*Die Metaphysischen Anfangsgründe der Tugendlehre*), they should consult the German text, which they will in any case have to do for *The Contest of Faculties*. To consult the original is naturally always the best course, even if it involves learning German; for all translations fail, in some degree or other, to do justice to the original.¹ I also decided not to include either Kant's preliminary studies for his published works on politics as found in volumes XXII and XXIII of the *Akademieausgabe* of his works and in *Kant-Studien* LI, 1959/60, or his notes on politics and law, as found in volumes XIX and XX of the above edition. These writings were published posthumously and Kant did not intend them to be published. They do not offer anything substantially different from what is found in his published writings. They are often repetitive since many of them are rough notes, comments on the textbook which he was using for lectures on the theory of law (Gottfried Achenwall's *Ius naturae*, Göttingen, 1755-6) and notes for lectures or (probably) later publications. It will always be difficult to decide how much weight should be given to material of this kind; for it could easily contain views later rejected by an author on mature consideration. In Kant's case, the notes may occasionally clarify some of his views. Furthermore, they can give us some insight into the origin and development of his political thought. This latter aspect has been exhaustively discussed by Georges Vlachos in his full-length study of Kant's political theory (*La Pensée Politique de Kant. Métaphysique de l'ordre et dialectique du progrès*, Paris, 1962, pp. xx and 590). However, the development of Kant's political ideas will always

¹ The translations in this book follow the style and substance of the original texts as closely as possible, except that we have not reproduced the indentation (possibly used for emphasis in the original texts) of some passages on pp. 135, 138-140 and 164.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

present problems; for although the work of the editors of the *Akademieausgabe* has been dedicated and painstaking, they have found it difficult to date many of the notes exactly.

Finally, I should like to thank all those friends and colleagues who have helped or encouraged me in my work for this volume. I am indebted to my former colleagues and friends at the London School of Economics and Political Science: Ernest Gellner, Morris Ginsberg, the late Harold Laski, William Pickles, Julius Gould, Donald Macrae, Michael Oakeshott, Sir Karl Popper, the late William Rose, K. B. Smellie and J. O. Wisdom. I have profited considerably from the advice of Stephan Körner and Peter Bromhead of the University of Bristol, who were good enough to read the introduction. David Eichholz of the same University kindly translated Kant's Latin quotations for me. I have also greatly benefited from conversations on Kant with Dieter Henrich of the University of Heidelberg. I have to thank Denis Donoghue of University College, Dublin, Irvin Ehrenpreis of the University of Virginia, Raymond Klibansky of McGill University, George Levine and Irving Massey, both of the New York State University at Buffalo, and Philip Harth of the University of Wisconsin for generously helping me to trace some quotations. Above all I must thank Dr H. B. Nisbet, who not only undertook the formidable task of translating Kant, but has also spent much time in checking the notes and bibliography and has offered many valuable suggestions on scrutiny of my introductory essay. He has also helped me in seeing the whole manuscript through the press. I have in turn scrutinised his translation. Mrs M. L. Taylor, Mrs Rosemary White and Miss B. Gertsch have had the unenviable task of typing the manuscript, for which we owe them sincere thanks. Much of my work on Kant was done when I had a year's leave of absence from McGill University in 1962-3 on award of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. I am grateful to both institutions for making it possible for me to have leave in Europe for the purpose of study. It is a happy coincidence that, as I conclude my work on this volume, I am once again at McGill, this time as Visiting Professor on leave from the University of Bristol.

For any errors that remain I am alone responsible.

H. S. REISS

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Autumn 1968*

Abbreviations

- AA* Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* (generally called *Akademieausgabe* since first published by the Prussian Academy of Sciences), Berlin, 1900ff.
- AIKK* *Akten des 4. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses in Mainz 6.–10. April 1974*, ed. Gerhard Funke. Berlin and New York, 1974.
- APP* 'La Philosophie de Kant', *Annales de Philosophie Politique*, IV, Paris, 1962. Published by the Institut International de Philosophie Politique.
- CLR* *Columbia Law Review*.
- EGerr.* Gerresheim, Eduard (ed.). *Immanuel Kant 1724/1974. Kant as a Political Thinker*. Bonn–Bad Godesberg, 1974.
- JHI* *Journal of the History of Ideas*.
- KS* *Kant–Studien*.
- KSE* *Kant–Studien*. Ergänzungshefte.
- RdA* *Rechtsphilosophie der Aufklärung* (Symposium Wolfenbüttel 1981), ed. Reinhard Brandt. Berlin and New York, 1982.
- SW* Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan. Berlin, 1877–1913.
- PTh* *Political Theory*.
- ZwBat.* Batscha, Zwi (ed.). *Materialien zu Kants Rechtsphilosophie* (suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft, 171). Frankfurt/Main, 1976.

Introduction

I

Immanuel Kant was born on 22 April 1724 in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) in East Prussia which, except for occasional journeys into the immediate vicinity, he hardly ever left during the whole of his long life of almost eighty years. Königsberg in the eighteenth century was a lively city which, owing to its flourishing trade, was by no means isolated from the world at large. Kant, who was anything but a recluse, enjoyed social life and intelligent conversation. He was friendly with many Königsberg merchants, among whom there were also Englishmen, two of whom, Green and Motherby, were particularly close friends. Although he was meticulous and regular in his habits, punctual to a fault, he was also a man of urbanity and wit.

Kant's parents were not rich. His father was a harness-maker who lived in Königsberg. His family was steeped in Pietism, the Protestant religious movement which stressed emotional religiosity and the development of the inner life. The pietistic atmosphere of his parents' household was a formative influence in his childhood, and he was particularly impressed by his mother's simple piety. After the early death of his parents (his mother died in 1738, his father in 1746), Kant's relations with his family were not very close.

Kant's outstanding intellectual gifts were recognised at school. It was made possible for him to enter the University of Königsberg, where he was a brilliant student. In 1755 he was granted the right to lecture as *Magister legens* or *Privatdozent*, i.e. as an unsalaried lecturer who depended on his lecture fees for his income. Since his lectures were popular and since he gave a large number of them—twenty a week at least—he was able to eke out a meagre living. He lectured on many subjects—logic, metaphysics, ethics, theory of law, geography, anthropology etc. He began to make his name as a scholar and scientist by his writings. In his *General History of Nature and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), he put forward a highly original account of the origin of the universe similar to the one later elaborated by the French scientist Laplace. It is now generally called

the 'Kant-Laplace' theory. Kant thus started his academic career by discussing a scientific problem, i.e. he sought to vindicate Newtonian science philosophically—an attempt which later gave rise to his critical philosophy. But it was not until 1770 that he was appointed to the chair of logic and metaphysics and at last found economic security. When his fame spread, his stipend was considerably increased. He was Rector of the University on several occasions.

Kant was a stimulating and powerful lecturer. His students were struck by the originality and liveliness of his observations, which were seasoned with a dry ironic humour.

He was also a prolific writer. His really decisive breakthrough as a philosopher came only in 1781 when he published the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For him, this work initiated a revolution in thought realistically compared by himself to the Copernican revolution in astronomy. In fairly rapid succession, the other important works followed.

The publication of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793, 2nd ed. 1794) offended the then King of Prussia, Frederick William II, who (contrary to Frederick the Great, his predecessor) did not practise tolerance in religious matters. Frederick William II ordered his obscurantist minister Wöllner to write to Kant to extract a promise that he would not write again on religion.¹ Kant reluctantly agreed with their request, which amounted to a Royal command, implicitly qualifying his promise by saying that he would not write again on religious matters as his Majesty's Most Loyal Subject. After the King's death, Kant considered himself to be absolved from this undertaking and explained that his pledge applied only to the life-time of Frederick William II, as this phrase 'Your Majesty's Most Loyal Subject'² indicated. He explained his attitude fully in the preface to his *Contest of Faculties*,³ in which, by implication, he attacked Frederick William II who had died the year before.

Kant was obviously not easy in his mind about this decision. In an unpublished note, he explained his conduct: 'Repudiation and denial of one's inner conviction are evil, but silence in a case like the present one is the duty of a subject; and while all that one says must be true, this does not mean that it is one's duty to speak out the whole truth in public.'⁴

Kant gradually retired from the university. His mind slowly declined,

¹ Cabinet order of Frederick William II, King of Prussia, of 1 October 1794; *AA* VII, 6; *AA* XI, 506 f.

² Letter to King Frederick William II, 12 October 1794; *AA* VII, 7-10, particularly p. 10; also *AA* XI, 508-11, particularly p. 511; cf. also *AA* XII, 406 f.

³ *AA* VII, 7-10.

⁴ *AA* XII, 406.

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his memory gave way, and he had to abandon lecturing. In 1800, his pupil Wasianski had to begin looking after him. Other pupils began to publish his lectures from notes which they had taken down. In 1803, he fell seriously ill for the first time. His mind became more and more clouded. He finally died on 12 February 1804, a few months before the end of his eightieth year.

II

Kant, at least in English speaking countries, is not generally considered to be a political philosopher of note. Indeed histories of political thought do not give him pride of place, but generally mention him only incidentally, if at all. Historians of political thought ignore him, however, at their peril. Only too frequently, he is merely seen as a forerunner of Hegel. The reasons for this neglect and misunderstanding are not hard to discover. Historians of philosophy, even Kant scholars, have neglected his political writings because the philosophy of his three critiques has absorbed attention almost entirely. And historians of political thought have paid little attention to him, because he did not write a masterpiece in that field. *The Metaphysical Elements of Right* has interested legal historians rather than historians of political theory. Furthermore, the very fact that Kant's great works of critical philosophy are so formidable makes his less exacting political writings appear very much less weighty. It also encourages the belief that they are not central to his thought. This assumption, however, is greatly mistaken. While it would be going too far to see in them the ultimate end of his thought, they are not an accidental by-product. Indeed, they grow organically out of his critical philosophy. In fact, Kant has rightly been called the philosopher of the French Revolution.¹ There is, indeed, an analogy between the spirit of Kant's philosophy and the ideas of the French and American revolutions: for Kant asserted the independence of the individual in face of authority, and the problem of human freedom was at the very core of his thought. Similarly, the revolutionaries of 1776 and 1789 believed that they were attempting to realise the rights of man. Besides, the events of the American and of the French Revolution greatly excited and preoccupied him and he sympathised with the aims of the revolutionaries. He did so although he was a man of conservative disposition who refused to countenance revolution in politics as a legitimate principle of action, and certainly did not

¹ Cf. Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ernst Elster, Leipzig and Vienna, n.d., IV, 245; also Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt/Main, 1927), I, 254.

advocate revolution in his native country, Prussia. But his approach to politics was already shaped well before 1789, as his essays of 1784 reveal. It is possible that the French Revolution may have stimulated him to continue writing on the subject. But the example and influence of Rousseau must not be underrated. Rousseau had taught him to respect the common man;¹ he was for him the Newton of the moral realm.² Rousseau's portrait was the only adornment permitted in his house, and when reading *Émile* he even forgot to take his customary afternoon walk, allegedly the only deviation ever to occur from a daily custom followed with clock-like regularity. Kant's views are also, in many ways, close to the aspirations of the French revolutionaries, but in his demand for perpetual peace he goes further. Here he takes up ideas first put forward by Leibniz and the Abbé de St Pierre, but develops them in a novel, original and philosophically rigorous manner.

If it is correct to infer this link between Kant's philosophy and the ideas of the two major eighteenth-century revolutions, the significance of Kant's political thought becomes clear; for the American and French revolutions constituted an open break with the political past. An appeal was made to a secular natural order and to the political rights of individuals for the purpose of initiating large-scale political action. The revolutions, of course, arose from the political, social and economic situation in America and France, but the beliefs of the revolutionaries were not intended as a smoke-screen designed to mislead the public. They depended on a political philosophy in which a belief in the right of the individual would be guaranteed. This attitude was new. In earlier revolutions, even in the English civil war and in 1688, Christian theology had still played an important part in shaping revolutionary thinking in the West. The realities of a revolutionary situation are, of course, always complex. It usually presents a pattern of ideology and political practice which is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle. Kant did not set out to provide a blueprint for revolutionaries or a theory of revolution. On the contrary, he wanted to arrive at philosophical principles on which a just and lasting internal order and world peace could be based. He wanted to provide a philosophical vindication of representative constitutional government, a vindication which would guarantee respect for the political rights of all individuals.

To understand his political thought, it is necessary to see it in the context of eighteenth-century thought, and against the background of his own general philosophy. The American and French revolutions had,

¹ *AA* xx, 44.

² *Ibid.* p. 58.

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to some extent, been prepared for by the ideas of the Enlightenment, the intellectual movement which dominated so much of eighteenth-century thought.¹ Incontestably, the revolutionaries largely used the vocabulary of the Enlightenment, which had created a climate of opinion in many ways favourable to revolutionary action. In Kant, many of the intellectual strands of the Enlightenment converge. He presents a culmination of this intellectual movement, but he is also one of its most thoroughgoing critics. Kant himself characterised the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) as a dynamic process. It was not a static condition, but a continuous process leading to further self-emancipation. The age was not yet enlightened, but still in the process of becoming so. *Aufklärung* meant liberation from prejudice and superstition. It also meant the growing ability to think for oneself. This observation echoes Lessing's famous dictum that what mattered most was not to possess the truth, but to pursue it.² In Kant's view, man was to become his own master. In his special function as officer, clergyman, civil-servant etc., he should not reason, but obey the powers that be, but as a man, citizen and scholar, he should have 'the courage to use his own intelligence'.³ This is the translation which Kant gives to the watchword of the *Aufklärung*, *Sapere Aude*, expanding its meaning for his own purpose. Indeed, this Horatian tag was so popular that it had been inscribed as a motto on a coin struck in 1736 for the society of Alethophiles, or Lovers of Truth, a group of men dedicated to the cause of Enlightenment.⁴

Kant, in his essay *What is Enlightenment? (Was ist Aufklärung?)*, outlines his view of the major tendencies of his age. The Enlightenment has frequently been called the Age of Reason. One of its most striking characteristics is, indeed, the exaltation of reason, but the term 'Enlightenment' (or *Aufklärung* or *les Lumières*) covers a number of ideas and intellectual tendencies which cannot be adequately summarised. A brief characterisation of this movement, as of any other, must needs remain incomplete. For this movement, like all intellectual movements, is made

¹ For thorough general discussions of the Enlightenment cf. *inter alia* Ernst Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 1932) (*The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trs. Fritz A. Koelln and James Pettegrove, Princeton, N.J., 1951); Paul Hazard, *La pensée européenne au XVIII^e siècle. De Montesquieu à Lessing*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1946) (*European Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, trs. J. Lewis May, London, 1953); Jack F. Lively (ed.), *The Enlightenment* (London, 1966); Fritz Valjavec, *Geschichte der abendländischen Aufklärung* (Vienna, 1961).

² Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke* (ed. Julius Petersen and Waldemar von Olshausen), Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, Stuttgart, n.d. xxiii, 58 f.

³ *AA* viii, 35.

⁴ Cf. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (ed. and trs.), Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters* (Oxford, 1967), lxxiv ff.

up of a number of various, and often conflicting, strains of thought. What binds the thinkers of the Enlightenment together, however, is an attitude of mind, a mood rather than a common body of ideas. A growth of self-consciousness, an increasing awareness of the power of man's mind to subject himself and the world to rational analysis, is perhaps the dominant feature. Reliance on the use of reason was, of course, nothing new, but faith in the power of reason to investigate successfully not only nature, but also man and society, distinguishes the Enlightenment from the period which immediately precedes it. For there is a distinct optimistic streak in the thought of the Enlightenment. It springs from, and promotes, the belief that there is such a thing as intellectual progress. It is also revealed in the increasing and systematic application of scientific method to all areas of life. But there was by no means agreement on what scientific method was. Newton's impressive scientific achievement dominated eighteenth-century thinking on science. One school of thought interpreted his work as a great attempt, in the wake of Descartes, to systematise scientific knowledge, whereas another school was struck rather by his emphasis on observation and experiment.

Voltaire, in his *Lettres Philosophiques* or *Lettres sur les Anglais* (1734) (English translation *Letters concerning the English* 1733), popularised Newton and English science in general. He also praised English political life, not only English constitutional arrangements, but also political theory as represented by Locke. Locke's ideas of government by consent and the toleration of different religious and political views appeared to Voltaire in particular and to the thinkers of the Enlightenment in general as exemplary.

These ideas sounded revolutionary in the atmosphere of French politics. Here Church and State resisted change. On the other hand, they persecuted or suppressed heterodox political and religious thought only intermittently. Many thinkers of the Enlightenment believed not only that politics could be subjected to rational scrutiny, but also that political arrangements and institutions could be reconstructed along rational lines. The sceptical refusal to accept traditional political authority is consonant with scepticism towards authority in general. This critical attitude towards authority led to an incessant questioning of all accepted values, particularly those of religion. Revealed religion was scrutinised; in fact, it was put on trial.

The secularisation of accepted beliefs and doctrines is an important process in the development of the Enlightenment, whether it be in the field of religion, science, morals, politics, history or art. Contrary to

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medieval custom, the individual spheres of human experience were isolated from religion. The basic intellectual position, then, was anthropocentric. And for the purpose of our enquiry into Kant's politics, it is particularly important to note that the realms of morality and law, politics and history were seen in a secular context. Although these spheres were separated from religion, the view prevailed in the Enlightenment that, for each of them, universal laws could be established.

The tone of the Enlightenment in Germany was somewhat different from that prevailing in Britain and France. On the whole, considerably less emphasis was laid on empiricism than in Britain. The German thinkers were more erudite, but also more abstract and professorial than their English and French counterparts; and they were frequently more heavy-handed. The absence of a metropolitan culture militated against certainty of style, while the parochial politics of the many petty principalities and comparatively small free Imperial cities were not conducive to the rise of lively political discussion. Unlike Britain, Germany offered virtually no opportunities for the intellectuals to take part in politics. Frederick the Great was, of course, an intellectual, but an absolute monarch anyhow presents a special case.

It is characteristic of this political stagnation that the political event which most affected eighteenth-century Germany took place in France: the French Revolution aroused German political thought from its somnolence.¹ Nonetheless, modern political thought in Germany virtually began with the impact of 1789. Many thinkers, in Germany as elsewhere, welcomed the revolution at first and believed it to be the dawn of a new age. But disillusion began to set in with the outbreak of the Terror. The revolution in practice spread only to those territories occupied by the French revolutionary armies. Revolutionary sentiment in Germany was a tender plant capable of blossoming forth only under the stimulus of force.

Kant and Goethe, the two leading German minds of the age, assessed the political situation correctly. Both recognised that while in France the revolution had answered a great political need, the political situation in Germany was not at all ripe for revolutionary activity. In Germany as in England and France, the rise of the bourgeoisie was noticeable, but the German bourgeoisie had not become emancipated from the dominance of the princes and the aristocracy. It did not possess the self-confidence

¹ Cf. Jacques Droz, *L'Allemagne et la Révolution Française* (Paris, 1949), pp. 154-71; G. P. Gooch, *Germany and the French Revolution* (London, 1920), pp. 160-82; Karl Vorländer, 'Kants Stellung zur französischen Revolution', *Philosophische Abhandlungen Hermann Cohen gewidmet* (Berlin, 1912); for a full discussion of Kant's attitude to the French Revolution.

of its French and English counterparts. Germany was a much poorer country than either Britain or France, and a rising self-confident class which is prevented from giving free expression to its political ambitions is much more likely to take revolutionary action than a weak and unsure one. There was little scope for political freedom in Germany. Even in the Prussia of Frederick the Great, freedom of speech, according to Lessing, meant only the ability freely to criticise religion, but not the government.¹ In addition, the small size of most German principalities permitted a much closer supervision of the subjects by rulers than in larger countries. The growth of bureaucratic control also impeded economic development and was another operative factor in sapping the self-confidence of the German bourgeoisie.

Given these political, social and economic conditions, it is not surprising that the Enlightenment in Germany was different from other Western countries. German philosophy, unlike British philosophy for instance, continued in many ways to resist the impact of empirical aspects of science. Rationalism dominated the outlook of German and French universities, but the style of German philosophical writing was, on the whole, much less urbane than that of its French counterpart.

In setting Kant against this background, it must not be forgotten that the Enlightenment was only one body of thought in the eighteenth century, even if it was the dominant one. There were other strands. Criticism of the Enlightenment arose not merely in its decline, but accompanied its rise and predominance. In Germany, and not only in Germany, the eighteenth century saw the spread of scientific ideas through the thinkers of the Enlightenment, but it was also characterised by a religious way of life centred on the emotions and inward experience. In Germany, Pietism stressed the cultivation of the inner life and fostered an emotional approach to religion. (It was not without its counterparts elsewhere—e.g. Methodism and Quietism.) Kant's fervent conviction of man's inward sense of morality may well have been rooted in that particular soil. Furthermore, persistent criticism of the Enlightenment came not only from the orthodoxy of established religion and from privileged or traditional political interests, but also, as the century progressed, from various new irrationalists. It came from those who preferred intuition to reason, the perception of genius to common sense, and spontaneity to calculated reflection. They tended to base their understanding on the individual instance and example rather than on the universal rule, and even on poetry rather than on science. Their attitude to science was, at

¹ Letter from Lessing to Friedrich Nicolai, 25 August 1769.

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its very best, ambivalent. One of the ironies of history is that Königsberg harboured at the same time the most potent champion of the Enlightenment, albeit a most critical one, *and* its most original opponent, viz. Johann Georg Hamann. The seminal critic of the Enlightenment, Johann Gottfried Herder, the mentor of the German literary school of the *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress), also spent some time in Königsberg and became a friend of Hamann and a pupil of Kant. Hamann and Herder criticised the claim of the Enlightenment to discover universally valid principles and to see history and society in terms of uniform regularity. For them, the individual instance was more revealing and could not readily be subsumed under general laws. In a particularly incisive and outspoken review of Herder's main work, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (*Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*) (1785), Kant took issue with Herder.¹ He apparently sensed that here was not only the decisive issue that separated his approach to knowledge from Herder's, but that it was also the watershed between those who wish to understand the world principally in terms of science and logic and those who do not. Consequently, he mercilessly exposed the logical flaws in Herder's argument. Herder, in turn, reacted with unforgiving bitterness.² Indeed, there can be no bridge between Kant's method and an approach to knowledge primarily based on intuitions of poetic truth and emphasis on the individual example.³

In the sphere of political thought, the differences between Britain and France on the one hand, and Germany on the other, were as marked as they were in any other area of life. There was no single dominating school of political thinking in Germany prior to Kant. There were many people who wrote about politics, and some of their writings were distinguished. The school of Natural Law forms one strand, the cameralists another. In addition, there were a number of publicists, such as Schlözer and the two Mosers, father and son. The most important, perhaps, and certainly the best known political thinkers, were Leibniz and Frederick the Great. Political theory was not central to the activity of either: general philosophy absorbed Leibniz's interests, and government, war and the administration

¹ AA VIII, 43-66, *Rezensionen von J. G. Herders Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, first published in *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, IV, No. 271 (Jena, 1785).

² *Metakritik zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1799) (Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. B. Suphan, Berlin, 1877-1913, XXI).

³ For a general account cf. Alexander Gillies, *Herder* (Oxford, 1944); cf. also H. B. Nisbet, *Herder and the Philosophy and History of Science* (Modern Humanities Research Association Dissertation Series, 3, Cambridge, 1970) for a thorough account of Herder's approach to science.

of his country the Prussian king's. The thinkers of the school of Natural Law,¹ indeed, propounded political theories of great importance, and even laid the foundation for revolution, but their style of thinking was not itself revolutionary. Nor was it specifically German. It continued, modified, and even changed a great tradition. The modern representatives of that school—men like Althusius, Grotius and Pufendorf—had continued to uphold an immutable standard of law which was to determine the positive laws enacted by the state and to regulate the conduct of its citizens, but they had liberated the philosophical study of law and politics from its dependence on theology. Its German practitioners dominated the faculties of law in German universities and German jurisprudence in general. Their works were, like many of the philosophical writings of the *Aufklärung*, abstract and dry. It was the accepted doctrine; it is therefore not surprising that Wolff, the leading philosopher of the *Aufklärung*, wrote a treatise on this subject. Not even Leibniz or Frederick the Great brought about a revolution in political thinking in Germany. It needed perhaps both the events of the French Revolution and the radical reorientation of thought promoted by Kant's philosophy to set in train a new mode of political thinking.

Kant assimilated or criticised the political ideas of many great thinkers, such as Machiavelli, the theorists of the school of Natural Law, Hobbes, Locke, Hume and Rousseau. Of these, only Hobbes was singled out for attack (in *Theory and Practice*), a fact which calls perhaps for comment. The political theories of the two philosophers, of course, differed greatly. Kant rejected Hobbes' authoritarian view of sovereignty, his rationalism, his attempt to apply the methods of geometry to human and social affairs and his explanation of society based on a psychological assumption, that of the fear of sudden death. Yet the basic political problem is the same for both: to turn a state of war into a state of order and peace. Law is a command and has necessarily to be enforced. Sovereignty is indivisible; the individual's status as an independent rational being can be safeguarded only in a civil state. Finally, despite all radical differences in method and conclusions, both thinkers are exemplary in their attempt to develop a rigorous, consistent and coherent argument based on an appeal to reason, unhampered by tradition or any other form of tutelage. In contrast to Hobbes, Kant is indebted to the school of Natural Law and believes in an immutable standard of right. He was, however, much more radical than

¹ See A. P. D'Entrèves, *Natural Law* (London and New York, 1951); cf. also Otto von Guericke, *Natural Law and The Theory of Society* (ed. and trs. Ernest Barker), 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1934).

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the traditional proponents of that school; for he mapped out a theory of politics independent of experience. Another patent influence was Rousseau,¹ but Kant differed from Rousseau in his interpretation of nature and of the general will. Above all, whereas Rousseau is frequently ambiguous, he is clear.

As a thinker, Kant was adventurous and differed courageously, though tacitly rather than explicitly, from his king. He differed from Frederick the Great's view that the king was the first servant of the state and that the state should be run on the patriarchic lines of benevolent despotism. Not only did he oppose Frederick's doctrine of enlightened autocracy (admittedly not always followed by the Prussian king in practice), but he also rejected cameralism, the doctrine that politics is a mere exercise in statecraft. And he also argued against the Machiavellian view that political actions arise solely from egotism. To emphasise the need to obey the law, as Kant did, could imply a bias in favour of authoritarianism.² In Germany his theory has, indeed, been invoked to strengthen the executive prerogative in carrying out the law, the *Obrigkeitsstaat*, the state in which obedience to political authority is writ large. In fact, his outlook was liberal. The citizens of Königsberg, his native city, knew it well; when he died they followed his coffin because they saw in him a great champion of human freedom in an age in which benevolent dynastic despotism was the prevailing mode of government. But Kant's influence has been greatest in shaping the doctrine of the *Rechtsstaat*, the state governed according to the rule of law. It has been the ideal to which at least lip-service has been paid during most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Germany, though there have, of course, been significant and disastrous deviations from this ideal in practice.

Kant is in fact the fountain-head of modern German political thought. Political thinkers who followed him differed from him in profound respects, but his political thought was for many either the starting-point of their own enquiries or he was an opponent against whom they pitted their strength. Kant's political writings appeared when his reputation was established. His views rapidly commanded attention. They were challenged by men like Justus Möser,³ who, from a conservative standpoint,

¹ Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe* (History of Ideas Series, No. 1), Princeton, N.J., 1945, for a penetrating study of Rousseau's influence on Kant.

² G. Vlachos, *La Pensée politique de Kant. Métaphysique de l'ordre et dialectique du progrès* (Paris, 1962), *passim*, argues that Kant's political theory favours the state against the individual. He calls it *étatiste*. I cannot accept this interpretation.

³ Cf. Hans Reiss, 'Justus Möser und Wilhelm von Humboldt. Konservative und liberale politische Ideen im Deutschland des 18. Jahrhunderts', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, VIII (1967).

rejected Kant's approach. Möser believed it was wrong to theorise from lofty presuppositions, and political practice and experience mattered considerably more than abstract liberal ideas. On the other hand, many German thinkers disagreed with Kant's conservatism; to respect law and to reject the right of rebellion was, in their view, mistaken. Among them Rehberg and Gentz sought to defend the prerogative of the individual confronted by tyranny.¹

On a more profound level, two thinkers sought to follow and improve on Kant's liberal approach to politics; Friedrich Schiller² and Wilhelm von Humboldt.³ For Schiller, the Kantian approach to politics was inadequate, because Kant did not pay any attention to the psychological basis of our political decisions. Schiller wanted to show that it is not enough to obey the dictates of duty; that men are able to live a harmonious moral life only if they act in accordance with nature. In order to bridge the gulf between instinct and reason, between will and knowledge, a third mode of experience, the aesthetic mode, is necessary. In his major work on the relationship between aesthetics and politics, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters (Über die aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen)* (1795), Schiller delineated an approach which, while respecting the tenor of Kant's political thinking, would be capable of taking account of the whole complexity of man's involvement in the political process. It should, so to speak, map out the interrelations between the aesthetic response to life and political practice. Schiller's political writings, profound and interesting as they are, have not attracted much attention. The first truly exciting and subtle attempt to put across his message and to spell out its cogency and significance in terms of our own age is very recent indeed.⁴ Schiller has been influential as a political thinker only indirectly, through his dramas, whose political import has only too frequently been misunderstood.

Schiller's friend, Wilhelm von Humboldt, also felt that Kant's political theory needed to be supplemented by an awareness of man's character. His theory of politics, as expressed in his treatise *The Limits of the State*

¹ Cf. Dieter Henrich, Introduction to *Kant. Gentz. Rehberg. Über Theorie und Praxis* (Frankfurt/Main, 1967).

² Cf. Wilkinson—Willoughby's edition of Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters*; cf. also H. S. Reiss, 'The Concept of the Aesthetic State in the Work of Schiller and Novalis', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, xxvi (1957).

³ For an account of Humboldt's political thought, and references to further secondary literature, see Reiss, 'Justus Möser und Wilhelm von Humboldt', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, viii (1967).

⁴ Elizabeth M. Wilkinson's and L. A. Willoughby's profound analysis of Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters* appeared only last year (1967); cf. above, p. 12, n. 2.

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(1793),¹ sought to safeguard the creative power and cultural development of man.

Kant's impact on German legal history was profound, but the rise of nationalism prevented his work from being the dominant force in German political thought during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which it might easily have been. For the Romantic mode of thought introduced into German political thought a note of irrationalism which permeated almost all areas of German thinking for a century and a half between the Napoleonic wars and the end of the Second World War.² The Romantics' rejection of Kant's cosmopolitanism in politics meant that, with his death—followed a year later by that of Schiller—(most of von Humboldt's political writings were only published many decades later)—the climate of opinion changed drastically. It no longer mattered much whether the individual was politically free. The organic theory of the state, which subordinated the individual to the community, prevailed.

For the German Romantics, Kant was an arch-enemy; for he embodied for them the characteristics of the *Aufklärung* which they fought so vehemently. Fichte, who started as a self-professed disciple of Kant and who even, in a private letter to Kant, claimed to be his successor, developed a theory of politics diametrically opposed to Kant's.³ Fichte paid lip-service to Kant's method, but his political theory can be interpreted as an attempt to supersede Kant's political thought. In Fichte's view, freedom is no longer to be seen in negative terms, but becomes a positive force to be utilised by the initiated, who alone can interpret the collective will. Whilst Schiller, in contrast to Kant, had sought to explore the relationship between art and politics, seeking to preserve a careful balance between the two realms, Romantics such as Fichte, Novalis, Schelling and Adam Müller sought to see life and politics from an aesthetic point of view. This method of reasoning is, on the whole, anti-Kantian, but they discernibly write in the shadow of his work. Only too frequently they are, one feels, either seeking to escape from his dominance or implicitly repudiating his method and thought. They base their principles of politics on feeling and intuition, a mode of thought rejected by Kant as a 'lawless use of reason'.⁴ The historical approach to politics and law, too,

¹ The exact title is *Ideas towards an Attempt to Delineate the Limits of the Activity of the State* (*Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen*).

² Cf. Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics* (Oxford, 1955), and *Politisches Denken in der Deutschen Romantik* (Munich and Berne, 1966), for further literature on German Romantic political thinkers.

³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴ *What is Orientation in Thinking? (Was heißt: sich im Denken orientieren?)* (1786); AA VIII, 145.

is fundamentally different from Kant's own mode of thinking. It culminated in the thought of Hegel, which, like that of early adherents of the historical approach such as Herder¹ and Savigny,² becomes fully intelligible only if set against Kant's philosophy. (Hegel's approach to political philosophy is, of course, profoundly different from that of Kant.) Through Hegel, Kant affected Marx, and the impact of Marx on modern political thinking has been powerful, to say the least. Much of modern political thinking thus continues the revolution begun by Kant, just as the American and French revolutions, whose ideas Kant vindicated, set a movement afoot which has shaped much of modern European political history.

Kant's influence on Hegel and his successors is frequently more general than specific. There were, of course, many thinkers who specifically sought to elaborate and apply his political ideas. Jakob Friedrich Fries³ is the most prominent among them, and his ideas were taken up again a century later by Leonard Nelson⁴ who founded the so-called Neo-Friesian school. Or we might mention Sir Karl Popper,⁵ on whose conception of the open society the imprint of Kant's political thought can be discerned. But to single out any specific instances is perhaps less worthwhile than to note the impact of his general philosophy on Western thought through which modern political thought has been affected more profoundly than is sometimes realised. It is the touchstone of a great thinker that he not only makes us view the thought of those who have gone before him in a different light, but that subsequent philosophy, too, is affected by him.

Kant's ideas have thus been a significant political force. But they have also been attacked and modified, sometimes beyond recognition. In any case, they are ideas that look ahead into the future. But more than that: Kant's theory of politics philosophically justifies man's right to political freedom, the view that he should no longer be considered to be under tutelage. Man's growing political and intellectual maturity must be recognised. According to Kant, man is in the process of becoming enlightened.

¹ Cf. F. M. Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism* (Oxford, 1965).

² *Of the Vocation of our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence (Vom Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft)* (Heidelberg, 1814).

³ Cf. Jakob Friedrich Fries, *Vom deutschen Bund und deutscher Staatsverfassung. Allgemeine staatsrechtliche Ansichten* (Heidelberg, 1816); *Politik oder philosophische Staatslehre* (ed. E. F. Apelt) (Jena, 1848).

⁴ Cf. Leonard Nelson, *System der philosophischen Rechtslehre* (Leipzig, 1920), for example.

⁵ Cf. Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 2 vols. (London, 1952).

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Man has both the opportunity and the responsibility to make use of his mind in the spirit of criticism. Such is the temper and the message of the Enlightenment as understood by Kant.

III

Kant had been thinking about political theory for many years before he first published any of his views on this subject. His notes, published posthumously and never intended for publication, reveal his continued preoccupation with and interest in political ideas. The first extant notes probably date from the 1760s when he was studying Rousseau and Natural Law.¹ Kant gave his first lecture-course on the Theory of Right in the summer term of 1767, a course which he repeated twelve times. The kernel of his political philosophy, however, is summed up in a passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781 in the section entitled 'Transcendental Dialectic I'.² It is the first substantial account of his political thought, but the first writings published by Kant which explicitly deal with politics, the two essays *What is Enlightenment?* and *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* of 1784, were written after the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), while the later writings, *Theory and Practice* (1792), *Perpetual Peace* (1795), *The Metaphysical Elements of Right* (1797) and *The Contest of Faculties* (1798) follow the publication of the *Critique of Judgement* (1790). But we do not know whether he ever planned a comprehensive treatise on politics. Whether he did or not, his intellectual vigour gradually began to wane in the last decade of his life, and he never produced a work in which he summarised his philosophical discussion of politics. But the political events which really stirred him occurred relatively late in his life. He was over fifty at the outbreak of the American Revolution and in his mid-sixties at the beginning of the French Revolution. He was sixty when he published his first political essays, and he was in his seventy-fifth year when he published his last piece on this subject. We thus have to turn to these scattered political writings for his views.

Kant's standing and influence as a political philosopher would indubitably have been greater if he had left a more highly organised comprehensive work on politics. His style did not increase his popularity. The reader should not, however, be put off by his relatively unattractive

¹ Cf. *AA* XIX, 334; 445 ff. These entries date from approximately 1766-8. Cf. also Georges Vlachos, *La Pensée politique de Kant*, pp. 20 ff., who argues that we can date Kant's reflections on politics only from 1763 onwards.

² *AA* III, 247 f.; *AA* IV, 201 f.; cf. p. 191 below.

manner of writing. His political essays do not in fact require the same extreme intellectual effort as the *Critique of Pure Reason*, although this does not mean that they do not tax the mind. Except for *The Metaphysical Elements of Right*, they are not written solely for the technical philosopher, but also for the educated general public. The essays belong to his so-called popular writings. He did not, however, claim to be able to master so 'subtle and at the same time so attractive'¹ a manner of writing as Hume. Indeed, he wrote when German was still emerging as a literary language.² Heine, a brilliant stylist himself, called Kant's mode of writing 'a grey wrapping-paper style'.³ He accused him of 'being afraid to speak in an easy, pleasant and gay manner'⁴ and of thus being 'a philistine'.⁵ According to Heine, the effect of Kant's manner of writing was highly detrimental to the development of a clear and elegant philosophical language in Germany. He writes in the *History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany (Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland)*: 'by his awkward, heavy style. . . he [Kant] did much damage. For the unintelligent imitators aped him in this externality and the superstition arose that one could not be a philosopher if one wrote well.'⁶ Nonetheless, Kant's political writings, though far from elegant, are not always cumbersome, and are at times vigorous and characterised by a dry irony. Although the structure of his sentences is frequently complicated, memorable key-sentences occur. And there are impressive passages.⁷

IV

To understand Kant's political thought it is necessary to see it in the context of his general philosophy. His writings on politics correspond with the period of his critical philosophy. They were all written after the completion of the first critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in 1781. Ideally, I should first give a summary of his critical philosophy but it is virtually impossible to summarise! It must here suffice to indicate the trend of his critical thinking, though this will necessarily be somewhat misleading.⁸

Both rationalism and empiricism appeared to him inadequate modes of

¹ *AA* IV, 262 (preface to *Prolegomena for any Future Metaphysics that may be given the Status of a Science*).

² Cf. Eric A. Blackall, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language, 1700-1775* (Cambridge, 1959).

³ Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ernst Elster, IV, 251.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 252.

⁷ Cf. S. Morris Engel, 'On the Composition of the *Critique*. A Brief Comment', *Ratio*, VI (1964) for a discussion of Kant's style.

⁸ For the following account I owe much to Stephan Körner's fine analysis in his *Kant* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1955).