Garve, Christian (1742-1798) Encyclopedia Article

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Garve, Christian (1742–1798)

Christian Garve, the German "popular philosopher," was born in Breslau. After studying at Frankfurt an der Oder, Halle, and Leipzig, he became extraordinary professor of philosophy at Leipzig in 1770, but in 1772 he resigned on account of ill health and moved to Breslau. In 1779 Frederick II called him to Charlottenburg, where he remained until his death.

Garve's interests were mainly in practical morality and empirical psychology. He sought useful knowledge and was averse to abstract speculation. He drew inspiration from Duc François de La Rochefoucauld and Claude-Adrien Helvétius, and especially from the British moralists. His translations of Adam Ferguson, Edmund Burke, Alexander Gerard, Adam Smith, and other British authors were important in popularizing British moral philosophy and aesthetics in Germany. He also translated and commented on the moral and political works of Aristotle and Cicero.

In his own writings Garve studied the individual characteristics and inclinations of different men, and their interrelation in society. He explained their differences by a difference in the degree of clarity and vividness of the ideas they possessed. Interest—the participation of an individual in the feelings, ideas, and actions of another—was a central notion in his psychology. It was derived from the "benevolence" and "sympathy" then current in British thought. In Garve's works psychology, sociology, and ethics were interwoven. His goal was that of a social psychologist, moralist, and educator. Immanuel Kant drew from Garve some elements of his moral and religious philosophy.

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