

*From Anthropology to Rational Psychology
in Kant's Lectures on Metaphysics*

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If one were to ask a specialist what Kant thought about rational psychology, their first point of reference would undoubtedly be to Kant's well-known charges against this type of dogmatic reasoning in the Paralogisms section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Having spent the first half of the *Critique* on a description of the manner by which general metaphysics or "the proud name of Ontology" must give way to a mere analysis of the understanding (A247/B304), Kant had been determined in the second half of the *Critique* to expose the illusions at work in the "special" metaphysics devoted to topics such as cosmology, the immortal soul or the existence of God.¹ In the case of rational psychology, its doctrines regarding the soul were ultimately taken by Kant to be the result of a simple misunderstanding (B421). Namely, its practitioners, among whom Descartes certainly counted as the most famous, had mistaken a bare sense of the "I think" – a sense responsible for our indexing the I to the unity, constancy and indeed recognizability of one's inner and outer perceptions – for the whole person, i.e. for not only the person of our constant inner experience, the person whose thoughts, memories and dreams defined us, but for the intelligible person of our moral life, the character whose choices bore the imprint of our immortal soul (B422,

¹ Kant's discussion of these topics took place across three sections of the *Critique*: the Paralogisms dealt with traditional investigations into the precise nature of the soul, the Antinomies were devoted to questions regarding cosmology and finally, the section titled "The Ideal of Pure Reason" took on the traditional proofs for the existence of God. There are numerous studies devoted either in part or whole to Kant's discussions in this part of the *Critique*. Excellent book-length discussions of the Transcendental Dialectic, which contains Kant's chapters on the Paralogisms, Antinomies etc., can be found in Michelle Grier's *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Grier 2001), and John Sallis's *The Gathering of Reason* (Sallis 2005). Karl Ameriks wrote a pioneering book on Kant's Paralogisms (Ameriks 1982), a topic that is also central to Corey Dyck's more recent account in *Kant and Rational Psychology* (Dyck 2014). Dyck has a shorter, though equally valuable, treatment of the soul's immortality (Dyck 2015). Finally, a thorough review of Kant's arguments regarding the soul's purported substantiality can be found in Julian Wuerth's essay in the *Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Wuerth 2010); see also the helpful account in Part One of Wuerth's book *Kant on Mind, Action, and Ethics* (Wuerth 2014).

n.). This did not mean that there was no place for the latter considerations; on the contrary, Kant was clear regarding our rational need to believe in the soul, and on the practical benefits conveyed by humankind's concern for it. Rational psychology, as he put it, prevents us "from throwing ourselves into the arms of a soulless materialism," even if it fails to provide any actual knowledge or practical doctrines regarding the soul (B421). These positive results could emerge, however, only after the practitioners of rational psychology were ready to give up their "windy hypotheses of the generation, extinction, and palingenesis of souls" (A683/B711), and redirect their efforts instead to outlining the practical employment of their ideas in the moral sphere, since it was in this sphere alone that such ideas could "regulate our actions as if our destiny reached infinitely far beyond experience, therefore far beyond our present life" (B421; cf. GMS, 5:461).

Since this is Kant's official position regarding any putative investigations into the "bare I think" and its moral counterpart, the immortal soul, what sense are we to make of the fact that Kant spent some forty years teaching metaphysics, a course that was to a large extent dominated by the very topics under scrutiny in the second half of the *Critique*? In what follows I want to investigate Kant's views, not according to the well-known accounts provided by him in the critical works, but in the sections devoted to "psychology" in the lectures themselves.² In order to orient our investigation I want to begin

² For this type of investigation researchers are able to consult the textbook Kant used in his courses – the fourth edition of Alexander Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* (1757) – Kant's own marginal notations and longer reflections on the pages that he had had expressly interleaved in his copy for this purpose, and of course the notes taken by his own students across the years. At this point there are nine distinct sets of student notes to consider (of thirteen extant notes in total, three appear to be copies, and one consists only of forty scattered lines that had been copied out by Erich Adickes, an early-twentieth-century editor of Kant's works). Of these nine, there are three that have been preserved almost in their entirety. The earliest set of these three notes was made by Kant's most famous student, J. G. Herder, between 1762 and 1764; the next complete set was composed by Christoph Mrongovius in 1782–3, that is, just after the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781; and finally, from 1792 to 1793, we have a set produced by a young aristocrat (presumably with the help of a tutor), named Count Dohna-Wundlacken. The remaining six sets of lecture notes, while not complete, nonetheless contain large extracts from Kant's lectures, with often only a specific topic, e.g. "Natural Theology," or a subsection of a topic missing. Of these six, scholars have perhaps paid the most attention to the *Metaphysics L*, manuscript from 1777 to 1780, for the rare voice it gives to Kant's so-called "silent decade." The best place to start for information regarding Kant's teaching – including the courses taught each semester, the extant notes for each course and all other matters surrounding Kant's lectures – can be found via Steve Naragon's indispensable web resource, "Kant in the Classroom," at www.manchester.edu/kant. The great bulk of these lectures have been published in volumes 28–29 of the German Academy edition of Kant's collected works, with Kant's corresponding notes appearing in volumes 15, and 17–18. The English speaker can consult the Cambridge translation of Kant's *Lectures on Metaphysics* (1997) for most of these (and for *all* of the existing notes on *rational psychology*), in addition to Cambridge's edition of Kant's *Notes and Fragments* (2005), which includes a large selection of Kant's reflections and other comments made by him in tandem with

by saying something first about the structure such courses would historically take, by reviewing the manner in which Wolff and Baumgarten approached the matter, before moving to my more central focus on how much Kant's own course structure would need to change once "anthropology" became an annual fixture of his lecturing cycle.

Now as far as Wolff approached it, philosophy was distinct from both historical and mathematical knowledge insofar as it alone offered the explanatory grounds for things. In his words, philosophy is "knowledge of the reason for things which are or occur" (Wolff 1963, p. 4). The initial task of the philosopher, according to him, was therefore to determine a set of metaphysical first principles which could form the basis for subsequent philosophical investigations. Once this "ontological" investigation was complete, then the whole of metaphysics – including, for Wolff, everything from empirical research to religion – could be developed.³ Wolff's closest disciple, Alexander Baumgarten, followed Wolff in taking this sort of ontological project to be the necessary preparatory work for any metaphysical investigation, and agreed that this work should be completed before any subsequent inquiry into mental cognition and its objects could begin. The main difference between them, for our purposes, lay in Baumgarten's attitude toward empirical investigations.⁴ That is, in his own metaphysics, Wolff had drawn a distinction between "empirical psychology," as the topic pertaining to what could be known of the soul on the basis of observation, and the contrasting a priori knowledge that was proper to "rational psychology."⁵ Despite this, Wolff did not see any difficulty in yoking observation to the work of an a priori investigation. "In rational psychology," as he explained, "we derive *a priori* from a unique concept of the human soul all of those features observed *a posteriori* to

the course on metaphysics. Last but not least, there is a critical edition of Alexander Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* textbook, which is at last available in English (Bloomsbury, 2013), making it easier than it has ever been to trace the trajectory of Kant's thoughts across his long teaching career.

³ A brisk overview of Wolff can be found in Lewis White Beck's *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors* (Beck 1969, pp. 256–75), and a relatively up-to-date (2014) bibliography of recent literature on Wolff is in Matt Hettche's fine entry on Wolff for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* online. A clear account of Wolff's views on the nature of the soul and its relation to the body is in Richard Blackwell's "Christian Wolff's Doctrine of the Soul" (Blackwell 1961).

⁴ A more detailed discussion of the differences between them can be found in Fugate and Hymer's Introduction to their edition of Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*. See also Beck (1969, pp. 283–6). With respect to Wolff's emphasis on empirical experience, Charles Corr has a helpful discussion in "Christian Wolff's Treatment of Scientific Discovery" (Corr 1972).

⁵ Corey Dyck focuses on the connection Wolff saw between empirical and rational psychology in the opening discussions of *Kant and Rational Psychology* (Dyck 2014). And Robert J. Richards offers an excellent running commentary on this issue in "Christian Wolff's Prolegomena to Empirical and Rational Psychology: Translation and Commentary" (Richards 1980).

pertain to it, as well as those deduced from these observations.”⁶ In this sense empirical and rational psychology were really two moments of the same discipline for Wolff.⁷ In his words,

Empirical psychology is similar to experimental physics; for we use experiments – either directly or by deducing something from them – to examine the tenets of dogmatic physics. Rational psychology considers those matters which we come to know *a priori* about the soul. Rational psychology obviously expands the space of empirical psychology, while borrowing principles from it: it returns with interest what it has borrowed. . . . In this instance, the psychologist imitates the astronomer, who derives theory from observations and corroborates theory through observations, and who, by the aid of theory, is led to observations which he otherwise might not make. . . . Thus the best thing is for one constantly to join the study of rational psychology with that of empirical psychology, even though we have considered it wise to treat them separately.⁸

Baumgarten resisted the ingrained empiricism of this approach and thus while he included a lengthy account of empirical psychology in his own metaphysics textbook, the discussion was noticeably missing any Wolffian-style propositions dedicated to the empirical instantiation of metaphysical principles, and contained rather examples of how metaphysics could work toward the further glorification of God.

As textbooks go, Baumgarten’s was in fact a neat composition. It contained 1000 numbered sections divided into four parts, starting with

⁶ Dp, §112; as translated in Richards (1980, p. 230, n. 2).

⁷ Richards captures Wolff’s position in this way: “Empirical psychology, while not neglecting observations of external behavior, has as its primary method the mind’s direct introspection of its own activities, either by catching on the wing its normal operations or by contriving experiments in order to elicit particular acts. [. . .] In complementary fashion, rational psychology proceeds *a priori* and deductively to demonstrate truths about the mind. The concepts and propositions which it uses are derived from the more fundamental disciplines – physics, metaphysics, and empirical psychology” (Richards 1980, p. 228).

⁸ Wolff translation in Richards (1980, pp. 232–3). This argument is strikingly similar to the advice Kant received from J. H. Lambert in response to Kant’s *Inaugural Dissertation*. Kant had appealed to Lambert for advice, and in a letter dated October 13, 1770 we read that Lambert was concerned that in his *Dissertation* Kant had put together a system that allowed for no possible connection between rational concepts and empirical experience. Resorting to experience had been essential to Lambert’s own ontological investigations, as he made clear to Kant, since it is “useful in ontology to take up concepts borrowed from appearance [*Schein*], since *the theory must finally be applied to phenomena again*. For that is also how the astronomer begins, with the phenomenon; deriving his theory of the construction of the world from phenomena, he applies it again to phenomena and their predictions in his *Ephemerides* [star calendar]. . . . In metaphysics, where the problem of appearance is so essential,” Lambert advised, “the method of the astronomer will surely be the safest” (Br 10:108). I discuss the importance of Lambert for the development of Kant’s developing theory of cognition in the lead-up to the *Critique of Pure Reason* in Mensch (2013), chapters 3 and 4. For more on Lambert see Beck (1969, pp. 402–12), and Beck (1978).

a long review of “ontology” (§4–350), and then moving on to the “special metaphysics” sections devoted to the topics of “cosmology” (§351–500), “psychology” – itself broken down into “empirical psychology” (§504–739) and “rational psychology” (§740–799) – and finally, “natural theology” (§800–1000). The topics of the *empirical* psychology portion of the text covered the existence of the soul, the cognitive and appetitive faculties, pleasure and displeasure, spontaneity, will and freedom, while the discussion of *rational* psychology focused on the nature of the human soul, the three traditional systems used for understanding the soul’s interaction with the body (physical influx, occasionalism and preestablished harmony), the origin of the human soul, its immortality, its state after death, and the nature of animal souls and disembodied spirits. While one must imagine that in his own lectures Kant sought to cover all four parts of Baumgarten’s book, the notes we have from Kant’s courses demonstrate also the extent to which he varied the lectures in tandem with his own interests over the years, devoting more or less class time, for example, to a given section, or changing his teaching examples in line with contemporary scientific discoveries.⁹

The most dramatic change to these occurred in the wake of Kant’s developing a course on anthropology in 1772, and understanding both why and how this affected the metaphysics course can get us a bit closer to discerning Kant’s growing sense of the difference between empirical and rational psychology. From the very start of his career as a university lecturer in the winter semester 1755–6, Kant had offered regular lectures on logic, metaphysics and natural history, the latter of which was a new course at the university consisting of a hybrid of geography and physical anthropology that he called “physical geography.” Kant taught these three courses more

⁹ The Cambridge edition of Kant’s lectures on metaphysics includes an overview of Baumgarten’s topics in connection with Kant’s discussions in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1997, p. xviii), a table indicating which of the four parts of Baumgarten’s text are discussed in each of the extant notes, with their location in the German editions noted as well (p. xxii) and an invaluable concordance of the subsection topics from Baumgarten in tandem with each set of the lecture notes (pp. 523–51). As for Kant’s interests determining a given lecture, there has to be no clearer example of this than in the notes taken during the winter semester 1784–5. These were the years during which Kant was drafting or in the midst of drafting essays on his philosophy of history, essays emphasizing his sense that the “vocation of mankind” required that each person seek at all points to improve themselves. This sense was behind not only Kant’s famous injunction against “rusting talents” in 1785’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (GMS 4:423, cf. IaG, 8:20; MAM, 8:116), it led him to complain about “indolent” islanders who might as well be happy sheep for all they had done toward the progress of the human race (RezHerder, 8:65; MAM, 8:122). With this in mind it is no surprise to read Kant’s comment in the *Volckmann* lectures: “why are there inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, or New Holland, or further, the children who are born? These have still not done anything good yet” (MVol, 28:443).

often than any others in his long teaching career, with the logic course offered some fifty-six times, metaphysics fifty-three times and physical geography forty-nine times, before he retired from teaching in 1796. Our first real sense of Kant's desire to make a change to these long-running courses comes from a semester course announcement that was posted by Kant in 1765.

As one reads through the course descriptions in this announcement, it becomes clear that in the wake of challenges recently advanced by the Scottish "common sense" school of philosophy, metaphysics in particular was due for some scrutiny.¹⁰ In 1765 Kant was convinced that it was the *method* of metaphysics that had opened it up to the empiricist's attack. And it was since realizing this, as he explained to his would-be students, that "Every step which I have taken along this path has revealed to me both the source of the errors which have been committed, and the criterion of judgement by reference to which alone those errors can be avoided, if they can be avoided at all" (NEV, 2:308).¹¹ Kant promised to provide the students "in the near future" with a textbook of his own for the lectures. "Until that time," he told them, "I can easily, by applying gentle pressure, induce A. G. Baumgarten, the author of the text book on which this course will be based – and that book has been chosen chiefly for the richness of its contents and the precision of its method – to follow the same path" (NEV, 2:308–9). Kant's new "criterion of judgement" in the case of metaphysical enquiries amounted to his discovery of "surreptitious concepts" or, as he later identified them in 1770's *Inaugural Dissertation*, the logical fallacies yielded up by "subreptive axioms." While Kant's precise definition of subreption evolved between 1765 and the appearance of the discussion of false inferences that would be central to the second half of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, the basic problem remained the same: Subreption occurred if one appealed to concepts taken up from experience when trying to make sense of things that could never themselves be the object of experience.¹² Kant rejected, in other words, the very method that had

¹⁰ The best account of the influence played by Hume et al. in Germany during these years remains Manfred Kuehn's *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800* (Kuehn 1987).

¹¹ "M. Immanuel Kant's announcement of the programme of his lectures for the winter semester 1765–66," in Kant (1992, pp. 287–300).

¹² To summarize the issue somewhat more concretely, by 1781 Kant was convinced that reason was simply fated to metaphysical speculation: It sought answers to questions that were beyond the limits of human knowledge because it was driven by a need for the theoretical completion of its philosophical systems, and a practical interest in securing the existence of human freedom, the immortality of human souls and knowledge of an all-wise creator. The central mistake made by reason, according to Kant, was that it took up something that was based in reason's own subjective

been explicitly endorsed by Wolff when it came to enlarging the scope of rational psychology.

Leaving that issue aside for the moment, the course announcement of 1765 shows that while metaphysics was undergoing retrenchment, the physical geography course, by contrast, was expanding. Whereas the earliest years of the course had been largely focused on the physical features of the earth, Kant was now more interested in the ways in which “moral and political geography” affected mankind. As Kant described it, moral geography “considers *man*, throughout the world, from the point of view of the variety of his natural properties and the differences of that feature of man which is moral in character,” an important set of considerations, he argued, since “The comparison of human beings with each other, and the comparison of man today with the moral state of man in earlier times, furnishes us with a comprehensive map of the human species” (NEV, 2:312–3). This shift in emphasis was no doubt a result, in part, of the successful publication of Kant’s *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* the year before.¹³ Kant’s first genuinely popular work, the *Observations* was more than anything else a precursor to what he would later call “anthropology from a pragmatic point of view.” After treating the difference between the beautiful and the sublime in Part One of the *Observations*, Kant had gone on to apply these concepts as the best means for discerning differences between the sexes (Part Two), the political nations (Part Three) and the races of mankind (Part Four). In Part Two Kant had devoted time to careful discussions of the moral emotions – of the beautiful feelings of love and sympathy toward others – before going on to identify the manner in which these needed to be distinguished from the sublimity of actions done on the basis of principle. This account, rightly taken to be an early forerunner of key parts of Kant’s ethics, was in 1764 still connected for Kant to the physical sex, the citizenry and the race of a person, such that moral characteristics could be meaningfully linked to humoral theory and its traditional division of characters into the phlegmatic, melancholic, sanguine and choleric personalities. It was from 1765 onward, then, that parts of these discussions would make their way into the newly expanded physical geography course.

needs and hypostasized it into something that it then took to be both possible and knowable. The specific manner by which reason did this was via “subreption” or the application of concepts meant only for human experience to things outside the boundaries of human experience altogether.

¹³ For the connection between the *Observations* and Kant’s anthropology see esp. Cohen (2012) and Loudon (2012). A helpful guide to the *Observations* is provided by Shell and Velkley (2012).

By 1772 the physical geography course had become so full, however, that Kant decided to start offering a companion course more explicitly devoted to the issues previously dealt with under “moral geography.” Kant went on to teach this course, which he called “anthropology,” every winter semester for the remaining twenty-four years of his teaching career. As for a textbook, here Kant turned back to Baumgarten’s *Metaphysics*, since by this point Kant took the included discussions of empirical psychology to be a species of anthropology, and thus foreign to metaphysics altogether. Given this, the question of why Kant would nonetheless continue to discuss empirical psychology throughout the next several decades of his lectures on metaphysics bears some thinking about. Kant himself suggests an answer near the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; namely, that until anthropology was more fully developed there was really no other place for the analyses provided by empirical psychology to go. Though empirical psychology is but “a stranger to metaphysics,” as he put it there, “it has long been accepted as a member of the household, and we allow it to stay for some time longer, until it is in a position to set up an establishment of its own in a complete anthropology, the pendant to the empirical doctrine of nature” (A849/B877). This makes sense of the fact that Kant opened the first lecture of his first anthropology course (at least so far as we have it recorded in the student notes from 1772 to 1773), with an account of empirical psychology’s proper location. With its focus on empirical observations of the soul, he says, one sees “how little this doctrine can constitute a part of metaphysics, since the latter has solely *conceptus puri* or concepts which are either given through reason or yet at least whose ground of cognition lies in reason as its theme” (APar, 25:243). Remarking next on the central role played by subjectivity in human life – “The first thought that arises in a human being when using his inner sense is the I” (APar, 25:244) – the anthropology course was begun. The content of the course itself would prove to be a combination of topics taken up from Baumgarten’s account of the soul: detailed discussions of the nature of one’s inner mental life, including the work done by imagination, memory, dreaming and understanding; the results of temper, desire and mood; and, in closing, an account of temperament and character in terms of the differences between the sexes, nations and races of mankind.¹⁴

¹⁴ Commentators on the anthropology lectures have typically emphasized one of the various influences on the course (e.g. its relation to the courses on metaphysics, physical geography or moral philosophy) at the expense of others. Holly Wilson describes the interpretive differences between attention to metaphysics versus physical geography in her book *Kant’s Pragmatic Anthropology: Its Origin, Meaning, and Critical Significance* (Wilson 2006). For discussion of the connection between the anthropology course and Kant’s ethical theory see especially Robert Loudon’s *Kant’s Impure*

Now just to remind ourselves of what was said earlier regarding the contents of Baumgarten's text: *Empirical* psychology is devoted to discussion of the existence of the soul, the cognitive and appetitive faculties, pleasure and displeasure, spontaneity, will and freedom, while *rational* psychology has as its proper focus the nature of the human soul, the soul's interaction with the body, its origin, its immortality, its state after death and the nature of animal souls and disembodied spirits. From this list we can see that for the anthropology courses Kant especially made use of Baumgarten as the starting point for his own take on the cognitive faculties, aesthetic feeling, the will and personal freedom. Of these, Kant's discussion of freedom is perhaps the most instructive for showing how careful Kant was in redirecting Baumgarten's text toward the particular aims of the lectures on anthropology. For when it came to an analysis of human life, Kant believed, the main task of the investigator was to identify two strains of influence: what *nature* had made of humankind in terms of its predispositions, aptitudes, temperament and physiognomy, and what *humankind* could make of itself, given the free development of its character or inner worth (e.g. AFr, 25:649; AMron, 25:1385). It was in line with the latter that anthropology served, for Kant, as the empirical counterpart to ethics so far as he understood moral theory to require empirical knowledge of human nature as much as it did any elucidation of the moral law.¹⁵ Anthropology described the subjective conditions which helped us to fulfill or prevented us from fulfilling our moral obligations and, through examples, it was able to demonstrate the great extent to which humankind was indeed capable of genuine moral behavior.

In the *Metaphysics L₁* set of lectures on metaphysics dating from 1777 to 1780, Kant began his discussion of psychology with the same point he had made when opening his anthropology lectures, regarding the mistake of including empirical psychology in a metaphysical investigation.¹⁶ Like

Ethics (Louden 2000), and Allen Wood (Wood 1991b). I discuss the role of "temperament" in linking physical geography and anthropology in Mensch (2017).

¹⁵ This lay behind Kant's later taxonomy regarding the metaphysics of morals as well, insofar as moral empiricism would be similarly determined to be a species of "practical anthropology" for its consideration of the will so far as it could be sensuously affected (GMS, 4:388).

¹⁶ As he put it, "Empirical psychology belongs to metaphysics no more than empirical physics does. For the doctrine of experience of inner sense is cognition of the appearances of inner sense, just as bodies are appearances of outer sense. Thus just the same happens in empirical psychology as happens in empirical physics; only that the stuff in empirical psychology is given through inner, and in empirical physics through outer, sense. Both are thus doctrines of experience" (MLI, 28:222–3). The set of notes from 1777–80 are referred to either as *Pölitz 1*, in line with their having been edited by Karl Pölitz for an 1821 edition published in Erfurt, or they are referred to as *Metaphysics L₁* or just *L₁*, in line with the German Academy's system of recording them simply as the (anonymous) Leibniz manuscript – full details can be found on Naragon's website, referred to earlier: www.manchester.edu/kant.

empirical physics, empirical psychology was based on experience, and yet, Kant told his students, despite the long history of metaphysical exposition, no one had thought to precisely determine the proper boundaries of metaphysics, and so an account of the manner in which we experience our inner lives had never received the scrutiny it deserved. For most of this history, Kant continued, empirical psychology had constituted a relatively small part of the investigations, so including it alongside a discussion of rational psychology had not been too much cause for alarm. “But now,” he explained,

it has already become quite large, and it will attain almost as great a magnitude as empirical physics. It also *deserves* to be separately expounded, just as empirical physics is; for the cognition of human beings is in no way inferior to the cognition of bodies . . . With time there will accordingly be trips undertaken in order to cognize human beings, such as have been undertaken to become acquainted with plants and animals. Psychology is thus a physiology of inner sense or of thinking beings, just as physics is a physiology of outer sense or of corporeal beings. (MLI, 28:224)

Kant’s comments here point to the need to develop an anthropology capable of taking its place alongside the many already existing natural historical investigations of plants and animals, investigations that were decades ahead of anthropology in the work being undertaken to understand and describe the life histories of their various subjects. But if that explains Kant’s work to develop anthropology as a “pendant to the empirical doctrine of nature,” where does it leave the content of empirical psychology so far as the lectures on metaphysics were concerned?

Without going too far into the difficult terrain between Kant’s lectures during the late 1770s and the work still left to be done by him on the account of cognition in the long-delayed *Critique of Pure Reason*, we might still sketch out the general problematic and Kant’s plan of attack since this will go some way toward explaining the specific challenge posed by empirical psychology – that “stranger” to metaphysics – for Kant. In terms of the work being done toward completion of the first *Critique*, the problem facing Kant turned on the status of his still-developing account of cognition. For Kant did not want his own “transcendental” position to be labeled psychology any more than he wanted it to be seen as an empiricist’s project, something along the lines of what he called Locke’s “physiological” dissection of the understanding. A separate, though related, difficulty was that the German metaphysical tradition, and Kant along with it, was wedded to a discussion of the various mental faculties responsible for cognition, a discussion that had traditionally fallen within an account of the soul. As we have just seen,

however, Kant connected the problems posed by subreption to just this kind of careless accounting by which empirical observations of one's mental life could be reasonably discussed alongside theories regarding the attributes of one's immortal soul. Regarding the latter, Kant was not yet suggesting that metaphysics should not be in the business of providing such theories in the first place; that complaint would come later, and be the focus of the Paralogisms in the first *Critique*. The objection, at this point in Kant's thinking, still had to do with empirical psychology's reliance on experience as the source of its knowledge of mental life. What Kant ultimately wanted was a portrait of cognition that, while focused on the conditions for the possibility of our everyday experience, was still capable of staving off the kind of skepticism that had dogged earlier accounts. Kant's solution was still being formulated during the 1770s, but he was at least certain that the key to the enterprise lay in assigning reason the task of generating its own concepts, concepts that were, therefore, neither "borrowed from experience" as in Locke's case, nor "implanted" by way of some supernatural intervention, as Kant understood to be Leibniz's position.¹⁷ Kant was not alone in wanting to do something different, however, and by the 1770s there were a number of competing accounts of mental life. The two most significant names worth mentioning here are Kant's former student J. G. Herder, and J. N. Tetens, a philosopher who Kant appreciated, in the mid-1770s in particular, for the positive manner in which he had embraced Kant's ideas.¹⁸ Their efforts introduced yet another aspect of the trouble posed by empirical psychology for Kant.

To see why this is the case, we can start by looking at a 1773 letter from Kant to his former student and later correspondent and friend, the Berlin physician Markus Herz. Herz had written an enthusiastic review of Ernst Platner's 1772 book, *Anthropologie für Ärzte und Weltweise*, which Kant had read. In his letter Kant praised Herz for his work on the review but was quick to demarcate the difference between Platner's agenda and his own. Telling Herz that he was teaching his course on anthropology for the

¹⁷ I discuss this at greater length in Mensch (2013), chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁸ This was in J. N. Tetens's *Über die allgemeine spekulativische Philosophie* (Tetens 1775). The best discussion of Tetens's own theory of cognition, of its connection to Kant and of the assessment made by both Kant's contemporaries and his successors regarding Tetens's influence on the *Critique* is in Wilhelm Uebele's *Johann Nicolaus Tetens nach seiner Gesamtentwicklung betrachtet, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Verhältnisses zu Kant* (Uebele 1911), esp. chap. 3, pp. 69–156. Uebele describes the specific nature of Kant's influence on Tetens's 1775 piece – an influence operating primarily through Kant's theory of spatial intuition – at 103ff. I describe the trouble Kant faced after reading Tetens in the late 1770s in Mensch (2013), chapter 6.

second time, he explained that it was a subject that he now intended to make into a proper academic discipline. “But,” he said,

my plan is quite unique. I intend to use it to disclose the sources of all the practical sciences, the science of morality, of skill, of human intercourse, of the way to educate and govern human beings, and thus of everything that pertains to the practical. I shall seek to discuss phenomena and their laws rather than the foundations of the possibility of human thinking in general. Hence the subtle and, to my view, eternally futile enquiries as to the manner in which bodily organs are connected with thought I omit entirely. (Br, 10:145)

Kant’s proposed anthropology, as he envisioned it here, would be practical, even sociological, and *not* therefore theoretical, *not* driven by a cognitive account of the conditions for thought; above all it would *not* entail some kind of anatomical search for material forces and their influence on mental life. It would not, in other words, look anything like Ernst Platner’s anthropology. But who was Platner? And what did he have to do with empirical psychology? Ernst Platner was an extremely successful and popular professor of medicine in Leipzig, and his book on anthropology would go on to define a trajectory of scientific investigations for years. Unlike Kant’s philosophical anthropology, Platner’s was closer to a proto-psychology, an effort to take up Albrecht von Haller’s work on “irritable” muscle tissue and “sensible” nerve fibers, and join it to William Cullen’s own development of Haller’s theory into a taxonomy of the nerve disorders that were capable of affecting a person’s mental state. Platner took anthropology, in other words, to be a synthesis of anatomy and physiology on the one hand, and psychology or mental science on the other, with the whole point of the field being to conceptualize “the ways and means by which, out of movements of matter ideas emerge in the soul, and out of ideas of the soul movements emerge in matter.”¹⁹ This made Platner into a strong proponent of the “physical influx” theory of mind–body interaction, and he took it to be almost axiomatic that the soul must reside in the brain.²⁰ As

¹⁹ Platner (2000, p. x). My remarks here are borrowed from John Zammito’s discussion of Platner in *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Zammito 2002), p. 250–3. Zammito has an excellent account of Albrecht von Haller’s many contributions to the nexus of scientific-philosophical discourse on this topic in *The Gestation of German Biology: Philosophy and Physiology from Stahl to Schelling* (Zammito 2018), chapters 3 and 4.

²⁰ Kant took it to be obvious that an immaterial soul could not be housed in one particular part of the body, but he was of course also aware of our tendency to connect the soul and the brain. As he rehearsed the typical course of reflections therefore: “Without the nerves we cannot sense anything outer. But the root of all nerves is the brain; the brain is accordingly aroused with each sensation because all nerves concentrate themselves in the brain. Thus the soul must put the *seat of its*

a doctor, Herz was attracted to Platner's attention to nervous disorders, since this certainly fit with many of his own patient's profiles.²¹ As a faithful student of Kant, however, Herz had to be wary of anything like a search for the location of a non-spatial entity like the soul, and this was to say nothing of Platner's full-throated endorsement of physical influx theory.²²

It must have been particularly galling to Kant, therefore, to discover that his most talented former student, Johann Gottfried Herder, was ready to embrace Platner's program. Indeed, Herder and Tetens each seemed to think that Platner had provided thinkers with a model for a refashioned psychology, one that could move discussions of mental life at last onto a more fruitful path, and correct the speculative excesses of dogmatic metaphysics at the same time. In an essay written for a prize competition in 1774, "On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul," Herder took up the project directly, arguing on the basis of analogy that there was no reason to believe that what nature was capable of in one instance, it could not pull off in another. Explaining that "We probably cannot accompany sensation in its origination further down than to the strange phenomenon that Haller has called 'irritation,'" Herder went on to show how easy it was to adapt such medical terminology to an account of a living force in all its expressions. "As small and obscure as this beginning of the noble capacity that we call sensing may seem," he wrote, "it must be equally important, so

sensations in the brain, as the location of all conditions of the sensations" (MLI, 28:281). But, as he went on to emphasize, we have no intuition to support this, we simply infer it, and that is a case of speculation, not knowledge.

²¹ Herz (1773).

²² Here we should be careful regarding Kant's position. Kant was always critical of what he took to be the "physical influx" theory espoused by empiricists like Locke with respect to identifying sensation as the starting place of cognition. When discussing "physical influx" in the context of the soul's interaction with the body, however, Kant accepted the idea that all living beings, qua animated, were ensouled and that the soul, by definition therefore, was engaged in constant interaction with the body (MLI, 28:273, 275). In his discussion of empirical psychology, this interaction was more directly noticeable, not only because the soul made choices upon which the body would act, but also because the body in turn determined a person's nature: "the body affects the mind through its corporeal constitution. The corporeal constitution is the cause of the person's character and the temperament of the mind" (MLI, 28:260). Kant discussed this kind of interaction in the anthropology lectures as well, for example when explaining that bodily events like indigestion can affect temperament (AMron, 25:1364–5). Kant's complaint against a treatment like Platner's or Tetens's turned on their inattention to the limits imposed by any speculation into the actual means by which mind and body might be interacting, since all available concepts for understanding this were either drawn from experience and thus inapplicable (MLI, 28:280), or were wholly speculative and thus amounted to "only a game of our concepts" (MLI, 28:278). Rational psychology was still useful because even "If this investigation has no positive use," as Kant put it in his 1782 lecture, "it still has a negative one, which consists in this, that we do not fall into the mistakes of the materialists and explain the actions of the soul physico-mechanically" (MMron, 29:905); indeed, "it is the business of anthropology to determine this interaction more closely," not metaphysics (MMron, 29:907).

much gets achieved through it. Without seeds there is no harvest, no plant without delicate roots and filaments, and perhaps without this sowing of obscure stirrings and irritations our most divine forces would not exist.”²³ It was because of this, because “nothing in nature is separated, everything flows onto and into everything else through imperceptible transitions,” that Herder took there to be no essential difficulty in Platner’s endorsement of a physical connection between mind and body.²⁴ Indeed this made far more sense than some sort of supernatural theory like that proposed by proponents (like Baumgarten) of a preestablished harmony. Herder’s disdain for such theories was clear. “People have had such strangely mechanical dreams ‘about the origin of human souls’ as though they were made from clay and dirt,” he began,

They lay formed in the moon, in limbo, and waited, doubtless naked and cold, for their preestablished sheaths, or clocks, or clothes, the not-yet-formed bodies; now the housing, garment, clock is ready and the poor, so long idle inhabitant gets added to it mechanically, that he may – *bei Liebe!* – not affect it, but only in preestablished harmony with it spin thoughts out of himself, just as he spun them there in limbo too, and that it, the clock of the body, may strike in agreement with him.²⁵

Decrying the “unnatural poverty” of this system, Herder was ready with the contrast case provided by experience: Sensation gives rise to representations, these lead to thoughts and a will for action and this in turn generates a mental call, and the physical body responds. If this much was obvious to everyone after a moment’s easy reflection, Herder reasoned, why such fussy refusals to admit its natural corollary? “Who is there,” he demanded,

who would suddenly here cut off the course of analogy, the great course of creation, with his pocket knife and say that the revealed deep abyss of irritation of two through-and-through organic, living beings, without which of course both would be nothing but dead clods of earth, cannot now in the greatest fervor of onward striving and unification produce an offprint of itself in which all its forces live?²⁶

²³ Herder (2002, p. 189). ²⁴ Herder (2002, p. 195).

²⁵ Herder (2002, p. 193). Although Kant took it that the spirit experienced the birth and death of the body as passing states only – “life” constituted simply the duration of an ensouled body (MLI, 28:283) – he did not think that it made sense to assume, with Plato, for example, that the soul might have had the full use of its capacities before the birth of the body. “Rather it follows that the soul was in a spiritual life, had a spiritual power of life, already possessed all abilities and faculties; but such that these abilities developed only through the body, and that it acquired all the cognitions that it has of the world only through the body . . . *the state of the soul before birth was thus without consciousness of the world and of itself*” (MLI, 28:284).

²⁶ Herder (2002, p. 194).

In comparison to the doctrine of preestablished harmony, Herder's appeal to organic, living beings urged readers to consult not just common sense but their own experience when considering the most likely origin of the soul.²⁷

In the two volumes devoted to *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung* (*Philosophical Essays on Human Nature and its Development*), Tetens came closer than Herder had to the specifics of Platner's "physiological psychology," but he agreed with Herder when it came to the important role played by analogy in understanding the nature of things, and more generally with Herder's efforts to describe the naturalness of a physical interaction between mind and body. In Tetens's discussion, this amounted to an account of the "embodied mind," and an emphasis on discussing the "whole man" instead of on the usual dissection of the mind into a set of discrete faculties with a list of the various mental tasks – apprehension, perception, retention, representation, etc. – for which each was responsible. As John Zammito characterizes Tetens's position in the *Philosophische Versuche*:

His conception of a "natural history of man" entailed a characterization of the stages of ontogenetic development that not only traced these in the development of the organism from embryo through adulthood to decline, but found a systematic analogy between the development of the bodily organism and the development of the mind or "soul." Empirical psychology needed to trace out how from the stimuli of sensations the innate faculties of consciousness were triggered into activity, thus developing the crucial plasticity and self-determination that were the distinguishing features of human beings, i.e., rationality and agential freedom.²⁸

This clarifies for us not only why Kant was ready to distinguish Platner's anthropology from his own plans for the discipline in 1773, it makes sense of Kant's work to distance his transcendental approach from both the empirical psychology being advanced by would-be neurophysiologists like Tetens, and the uncritical appeal to a generalized organic force by Herder. Kant was disparaging of Tetens's *Philosophische Versuche* when describing the volumes to Herz in a 1778 letter (Br, 10:232), and he complained about any possible comparison between the two programs in a note he wrote to

²⁷ Kant offered a flat rejection of this kind of argument, calling the organic creation or, to use Kant's phrasing, the "epigenesis" of the soul a complete absurdity given the impossibility of dividing or sharing a simple substance; a point that he was able to make repeatedly in tandem with Baumgarten's discussion of competing theories regarding the origin of the soul in the *Metaphysics* (R, 17:672; R, 18:189–90; R, 18:429; MDoh, 28:684; AA, 23:106–7).

²⁸ Zammito (2017, pp. 141–2).

himself at the time: “I am not concerned with the evolution of concepts like Tetens,” only “with their objective validity. Tetens investigates the concepts of mere reason merely subjectively (human nature), I objectively. The one analysis is empirical, the other transcendental” (R, 18:23). As for Herder, Kant kept his thoughts to himself for the time being, reserving his ire for a later date.²⁹

At this point it should be clear that Kant’s decision to create a course on anthropology – a course whose own origins were easy enough to trace through Kant’s lecturing and publication history – had helped to create an entirely different set of problems for the lectures on metaphysics. By the late 1770s, the entire “psychology” portion of the course had begun to look problematic, and Kant could not be sure of how to resolve the many issues surrounding it until he had at last worked out the theory of cognition meant for his own *Critique of Pure Reason*. For now he seemed certain only of the following negative conclusions: empirical psychology did not belong in metaphysics, it did not extend the analyses of rational psychology and as for its focus on empirical experience, this distinguished it from the project of transcendental philosophy altogether. Even as Kant was ready to reassign parts of empirical psychology to anthropology, moreover, he was still determined to insist that this amounted to nothing like the psychological anthropology being promoted by his contemporaries.

Indeed, it was in the wake of Tetens’s *Philosophische Versuche* that Kant made at last a series of advances regarding the theory of cognition, with the *Metaphysics L*, lecture notes describing for the first time a new set of distinctions in his account of the mental faculties. Given that the main difference between empirical and rational psychology turned on their respective source material, Kant was now ready to say that empirical psychology was necessarily bound up with an *empirical physiology* and rational psychology with a *rational physiology*. That is, while still maintaining his focus on an account of the mental faculties, Kant was newly attentive to delineating the roles assigned to those faculties responsible for processing empirical data, and alert enough to the potential for subreption that he walled off the separate work done by rational psychology. This was accomplished by way of a fresh distinction between lower and higher faculties. The lower faculties of representation, of desire, pleasure and displeasure were all fundamentally passive, depending on experience for their contents. The higher faculties, by comparison, were

²⁹ Kant would be explicitly critical of Herder’s appeal to living forces when reviewing Herder’s *Ideas for the Philosophy of a History of Humanity* for the *ALZ* in 1785 (Kant 2007, pp. 121–42). I reconstruct Kant’s complaints against Herder in *Mensch* (2018).

described as “self-active”: The higher faculty of cognition was “a power to have representations from ourselves”; the higher faculty of desire was “a power to desire something from ourselves independently of objects” (MLI, 28:228–9); and the higher faculty of pleasure and displeasure looked to the self as well, in this case toward its feelings of either the promotion or hindrance of life (MLI, 28:247). The capacity for representation at both levels was due to what he described as a “formative power” (*bildende Kraft*), one arising from the “spontaneity of the mind” (MLI, 28:230). “All of these acts [*actus*] of the formative power,” Kant explained, “can happen voluntarily and also involuntarily. Insofar as they happen involuntarily they belong wholly to sensibility; but so far as they happen voluntarily, they belong to the higher faculty of cognition” (MLI, 28:237). What is more, Kant seemed to know already that some separate capacity might be needed for linking the higher and lower forms of representation – “We have cognitions of objects of intuition by virtue of the formative power, which is between the understanding and sensibility” (MLI, 28:239) – but also that there had to be an explanation for the unity and coherence of experience. In these lectures, the issue was resolved by identifying the formative power as both “between understanding and sensibility,” and as understanding itself: “If this formative power is in the abstract, then it is the understanding” (MLI, 28:239). As he elaborated this point, “The higher faculty of cognition is also called the understanding, in the general sense. In this meaning the understanding is the faculty of concepts, or also the faculty of judgments, but also the faculty of rules. All three of these definitions are the same” (MLI, 28:240; cf. A126). Kant’s work here to distinguish the products of sense and thought in terms of newly described lower and higher faculties grew out of earlier work done in the *Inaugural Dissertation*. But the trouble caused by empirical psychology and its newly entangled relationships with anthropology, subreption and the rising fortunes of an “embodied mind” perspective, pushed Kant toward an articulation that would cause him trouble down the road. For where else but here can we see the first steps toward the 1781 Transcendental Deduction and its attention to the synthesis of sensible intuition by a formative power called “reproductive imagination” on the one hand, and the productive work accomplished by a higher faculty, the “transcendental imagination,” on the other – itself a *Doppelgänger* for the understanding.³⁰

³⁰ In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant assigned a foundational role to the imagination for its synthesis of empirical intuitions according to laws of association (e.g. A106–9), but he would remove all references to this kind of “reproductive” imagination from his account in the second edition of the *Critique* in 1787, since by then he had decided that even this discussion belonged more to empirical psychology than transcendental philosophy (B152).

As a field of inquiry, rational psychology was less problematic in terms of Kant's work to finalize his theory of mental cognition. In the 1770s he seems, moreover, to have been still satisfied with many of the conclusions he had reached in the wake of reading Hume in the mid-1760s, conclusions laid out by Kant in 1766's essay, *Dreams of a Spirit-seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*.³¹ In the forthcoming *Critique* Kant would continue, moreover, to employ the new linking of rational psychology to rational physiology. This is worth briefly expounding since it is bound up with Kant's ongoing effort to disentangle empirical psychology – whose source material stemmed from both inner and outer experience – from the transcendental project as a whole.³² To recall what was said at the start of this essay, the various characterizations of the soul that had dominated the psychology portion of the lectures on metaphysics would be held up as cases of false inferences in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. As Kant would describe the illusion generated by this kind of inference in the Paralogisms section of the *Critique*, it stemmed from the mistake of asserting reason's ideas regarding the soul to be actual descriptions of the soul, and to take the hypostasization of these ideas then as forming the basis for rational psychology's positive doctrine. The only positive reference to the soul that Kant was willing to accept in the *Critique*, however, was to a "bare I think"; that is, to a vague or "indeterminate" sense of oneself as a *cogito* or thinking thing (A118, A346/B404, A400, B423). This was all that was left of the soul so far as knowledge-claims were concerned, and it was totally distinct from, and thus not to be conflated with, the proper contents of empirical psychology. As he put it,

If our knowledge of thinking beings in general, by means of pure reason, were based on more than the *cogito*, if we likewise made use of observations concerning the play of our thoughts and the natural laws of the thinking self

³¹ Note that Kant directly refers to Swedenborg – the indirect object of Kant's reproach in the 1766 piece – in rational psychology's closing reminder regarding the necessary limits imposed on any of this discussion (ML1, 28:300). This was a reminder that brought the students full circle from Kant's opening remarks on the section: we are here "to cognize the limits of reason and of philosophy and to comprehend how far reason can go here. We will thus become acquainted here with our ignorance, and comprehend its ground; why it is impossible that any philosopher can go farther in this, and if we know that, then we already know a great deal" (ML2, 28:274).

³² In the first *Critique* Kant named Locke as the figurehead for this approach: "In more recent times, it has seemed as if an end might be put to all these controversies and the claims of metaphysics receive final judgment, through a certain *physiology* of the human understanding – that of the celebrated Locke. But it has turned out to be quite otherwise. For however the attempt be made to place doubt upon the pretensions of the supposed Queen by tracing her lineage to vulgar origins in common experience, this genealogy has, as a matter of fact, been fictitiously invented, and she has continued to uphold her claims" (Aix).

to be derived from these thoughts, there would arise an empirical psychology, which would be a kind of *physiology* of inner sense, capable perhaps of explaining the appearances of inner sense, but never of revealing such properties as do not in any way belong to possible experience (e.g., the properties of the simple), nor of yielding any *apodeictic* knowledge regarding the nature of thinking beings in general. It would not, therefore, be a *rational* psychology. (A347/B405)

Kant was not interested, however, in leaving rational psychology empty-handed. Believing that this sort of “transcendental illusion” was part and parcel of human life, Kant thought that while it could be usefully redirected, it would never be eliminated. His plans for redirection entailed, therefore, a kind of rehabilitation of dogmatic metaphysics since the traditional objects of its enquiry could be recast as regulative ideals to be sought after or, as he would later develop it in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), as postulates that were *regulative* for speculative reason, but *constitutive* and thus objectively necessary for practical reason. It was by identifying rational psychology with rational *physiology*, however, that Kant sought to create the necessary distance between empirical investigations and his own transcendental account. Kant did this by identifying rational physiology with the new transcendental theory of cognition as itself the non-empirical ground of experience. It was in this sense only that Kant could say, “Metaphysics, in the narrower meaning of the term, consists of *transcendental philosophy* and *physiology* of pure reason” (A845/B873). Defined in this way, rational physiology was able to ground both a “rational physics” of corporeal nature and a “rational psychology” for the soul (A846/B874). Thus, although Kant continued to be critical of empirical psychology in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (e.g. A347/B405, A1x), he included rational physiology as part of a transcendentially grounded account of nature, and he was ready to reorient rational psychology as the only safe route toward the practical employment of ideas regarding the soul.

Kant’s account of rational psychology – both in terms of our predilection for this type of thinking, and in light of the manner in which its goals would be not only redirected in the first *Critique*, but assume constitutive importance in the moral writings to come afterwards – has become a reliable fixture in our understanding of Kant’s Critical system. By focusing instead on the lectures on metaphysics leading up to this account, my effort has been to highlight the many complications arising for Kant once he recognized that the traditional approach to psychology would need to be entirely reconceived. This was especially true in the case of empirical

psychology, for Kant, since its topics seemed to belong more to anthropology than they did to metaphysics. Kant's problems regarding this were, moreover, compounded by the success of medical anthropology as a physiological investigation into the "embodied mind" during these years. In spite of this, Kant still needed to make use of the faculty psychology or mental faculties contained in the empirical psychology portions of his lectures on metaphysics in order to move forward with his own transcendental theory of cognition. The study of these materials is important, therefore, for revealing not just the many cross-currents running through Kant's lectures on anthropology and metaphysics, but for showing just how many problems Kant was able to successfully resolve before arriving at the system we are familiar with in the *Critique*.