

Kant and Rational Psychology

Corey W. Dyck

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Introduction

When characterizing the rational psychology that is Kant's target in the Paralogisms of Pure Reason chapter of the *KrV*, commentators typically only refer to an approach to, and an account of, the soul found principally in the thought of Descartes and Leibniz. It was, after all, Descartes who cast into doubt all that can be known of the world through the senses and first turned his attention to what we can cognize of the thinking subject through reason alone. On this basis, Descartes attempted to demonstrate that the soul is essentially a thinking substance and that it is really distinct from the body such that the destruction of the body does not imply the destruction of the soul. Leibniz followed suit, arguing that the soul is a simple substance and, inasmuch as its power of thinking cannot be taken to inhere in a composite substance like matter, that it must be immaterial and so incorruptible. Of course, in presenting the specific topics of rational psychology in the Paralogisms, Kant would go beyond the fairly limited discussions of Descartes and Leibniz in certain respects, addressing issues like the foundation of our cognition of the soul's personal identity which Kant had recognized to be particularly important given the potential for misunderstanding his own claims regarding apperception in the Transcendental Deduction. In the end, however, it is thought that Kant's only concern in the Paralogisms is with that way of thinking about the soul inspired by his most illustrious rationalist predecessors.

In presenting the target of the Paralogisms in this way, the treatments of rational psychology to be found in the texts of Kant's immediate predecessors, such as Christian Wolff and Alexander Baumgarten, are frequently and quite deliberately overlooked. It is thought that there is no reason to concern oneself with the systems of these figures in particular since what they espouse is at bottom a narrowly rationalist psychology; that is, one which purports to consider only what can be known of the soul independently of experience. And while it might be acknowledged that Wolff and Baumgarten formulated their own more elaborate doctrines of the soul, it is thought that because these are constructed wholly on rationalistic

foundations they do not require, nor would they repay, closer consideration. It is even suspected that an understanding of the particular treatments of these figures would only prove to be an obstacle when it comes to making sense of Kant's discussion in the Paralogisms, since taking him to be addressing the sometimes eccentric, and always philosophically less sophisticated, doctrines of the soul advanced by Wolff and those influenced by him would be to needlessly sharpen the point of Kant's criticism in the chapter. Indeed, Kant himself apparently warns the reader off of such an approach when he asserts that the *KrV* is not a critique of particular "books and systems," but rather a critique of reason itself (Axii). As a result, many Kant scholars have come to believe that, when it comes to our understanding of rationalism's theory of mind and of Kant's subsequent incisive criticisms of it, there is nothing significant to be gained, and much to be lost, through a detailed consideration of these and other historical representatives of rational psychology.

This neglect of Kant's immediate predecessors is, however, unjustified, especially when it comes to understanding his criticism of rational psychology in the Paralogisms. In ignoring Wolff and the philosophers influenced by him, we ignore the tradition that would have invariably been called to mind for the readers of the *KrV* which is, after all, a book written in German for a German audience. More importantly, we ignore a tradition that developed a radically new methodology in investigating the soul, one that (as we will see) serves to distinguish it in a number of ways from that narrowly rationalistic approach to the soul attributed to Descartes and Leibniz. Far from dismissing this conception of rational psychology as the preserve of philosophical eccentrics and second-tier thinkers, Kant himself would adopt it well into his decade of work before the publication of the *KrV*, thus making the rational discipline of his immediate predecessors among the most natural, and important, targets of Kant's mature criticism. In addition, key features of Kant's discussion of the soul in the Transcendental Dialectic, including his characterization of the illusory ground for the rational psychologist's erroneous claims but also the specific arguments he targets, can only be fully understood once the psychology of this tradition is taken into account. Indeed, considering Kant's Critical treatment of rational psychology in its most proximate context is entirely consistent with his denial that the *KrV* is a critique of "books and systems," since I assume that Kant casts a net wide enough in his criticism in the Paralogisms that rationalist psychologies of every stripe, including the distinctive approach to the soul developed by the 18th-century German tradition, are caught up in it.

Accordingly, this study will elaborate and defend a rather different approach to Kant's discussion of rational psychology, though one that follows the lead of a number of recent studies that have shown that significant insight can be gained into a number of areas of Kant's thought by considering it in the context of the

German tradition that emerged in Leibniz's wake in the 18th century.¹ The chapters that follow will provide detailed arguments in favor of the relevance, and sophistication, of the rational psychology developed by Kant's immediate predecessors. In this Introduction, I will focus on making an initial case for considering Kant's treatment of the soul in the *KrV* in its most proximate historical context. In the first section, I provide a brief history of rational psychology in Germany, from its founding by Wolff, through to its last, but most prominent, adherents. In doing so, my purpose is only to show that the rational psychology that would have been most familiar to Kant and his readers constituted a distinct metaphysical discipline complete with an identifiable methodology and range of topics, but also with internal development and divisions. More ambitiously, in the second section I motivate the main contention of this study; namely, that the received conception of the aim and results of Kant's Paralogisms must be revised in light of a proper understanding of the rational psychology that is the most proximate target of Kant's attack. A final section provides an overview of the arguments made for this thesis in the following chapters.

0.1 Rational Psychology in German Metaphysics

Rational psychology, considered as a distinct area of systematic metaphysical inquiry, was founded and flourished in the German schools in the first half of the 18th century. In 1720, Wolff published his *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen* or *Deutsche Metaphysik*,² a general metaphysics textbook. Among its innovations were the inclusion of a discussion of cosmology (chapter 4: "Of the world"), and, more important for our purposes, the introduction of the twin doctrines of empirical psychology (chapter 3: "Of the soul in general and what we perceive of it") and rational psychology (chapter 5: "Of the essence of the soul and of a spirit in general").³ What, in particular, was novel in

¹ Examples in the English-language secondary literature can be found in Eric Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Manfred Kuehn, *Immanuel Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Martin Schönfeld, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Michael Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

² It should be noted that the first preface to this text bears a date of 1719; see *AN* §4.

³ Wolff does not yet refer specifically to empirical or rational psychology in the *DM*; rather, these terms first occur in Ludwig Philipp Thümmig's *Institutiones philosophiae Wolfianae* (1725; reprinted, Hildesheim: Olms, 1982), see *Institutiones psychologiae*, §2. This is not to say that Thümmig necessarily coined the terms as Wolff might have introduced them in his lectures—see Max Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulphilosophie im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1945), 212 and Falk

Wolff's treatment of psychology was, first of all, the rigid separation of the discussion of the human soul from the consideration of God, a clear departure from the antecedent scholastic tradition which treated both kinds of spirit (i.e., finite and infinite) under the rubric of *pneumatica* or *pneumatology*.⁴ In addition, Wolff's introduction of the distinction between empirical and rational psychology is without precedent, as Wolff himself would later point out:

If, then, we sought nothing more than what we need to serve as grounds in the demonstration of the rules of logic and morality, we could rest with what we have taught on the basis of experience [i.e., in empirical psychology]. Yet, since a philosopher is obliged to present the proper grounds of all of that which pertains to a matter or that occurs in it, I have also made an attempt to see whether, from a single concept of the soul, I could derive that which is found to be in it by means of experience. Since no one has yet performed this same task, but rather I am the first to undertake it, one might make allowances were I to have given way somewhere to an error. (*AzDM* §261)

In contrast to empirical psychology, which treated what could be known of the soul by means of observation, Wolff's rational psychology considers the essence of the soul and what can be derived from that essence. Accordingly, rational psychology takes up topics which experience alone cannot settle, such as the immateriality and immortality of the soul, and the controversial question of what system (i.e., the system of occasional causes or pre-established harmony) best explains the observed agreement between changes in the soul and those of the body. It was this division of labor that Wolff clearly regarded as his own innovation, and he frequently promoted its utility in separating those philosophical questions that can be answered with certainty given their solid foundation in observations of the soul (such as those of logic and morality) from those whose answers are more contestable given that they lack such a foundation (such as the question concerning which system accounts for the agreement of the soul and body).⁵

Consistent with his claim to be founding an entirely new discipline, Wolff's rational psychology borrows hardly anything from Descartes and much less than might be expected from Leibniz. As it happens, Descartes' influence upon Wolff is most evident in his discussions relating to *empirical* psychology, particularly in Wolff's account of how we can be certain that we exist (*DM* §1) and in his claim that the ground of the influence of the body upon the soul is not given to experience (*DM*

Wunderlich, *Kant und die Bewusstseinstheorien des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 36 n115.

⁴ As in, for instance, Georg Meier's *Pneumatica qua Scientia Spirituum Dei, Angeli & Animae hominis separatae Naturalis*, 2nd edn. (Wittenberg: Fincelius, 1666). Regarding pneumatology, Leibniz claims that it comprises "knowledge of God, souls, and simple substances in general" (*NE* 57).

⁵ See also *AN* §104 and *DP* §112.

§529; cf. *AzDM* §169). Leibniz, of course, exerted a wide-ranging, if complex, influence upon Wolff,⁶ yet it is important to note that Wolff had access to relatively few of Leibniz's texts at the time at which he composed the *Deutsche Metaphysik*. As Wolff recounts in his autobiography, before setting to work on his textbook only a handful of Leibniz's essays were available to him, including the "Meditationes de cognitione, veritate, et ideis" (1684), "De primae philosophiae emendatione, et de notione substantiae" (1694), the exchange with Bayle over the pre-established harmony, as well as the popular *Théodicée*, which was published in 1710.⁷ These texts were clearly important for Wolff, with the first serving as a major inspiration for his logic, the second informing the conception of substance he employed in his ontology (and by extension his rational psychology), the third set of texts framing Wolff's qualified endorsement of the doctrine of pre-established harmony which, for him, was exclusively a topic for rational psychology, and the *Théodicée* likely informing Wolff's discussion of personal immortality. However, the texts that form the core of our current understanding of what might be called Leibniz's rational psychology and which can lay claim to providing a focused treatment of the soul and its qualities (rather than only in the context of a general metaphysics) were either published only as Wolff was putting the finishing touches on his *Deutsche Metaphysik*, as was the case with the so-called "Monadology,"⁸ or were not published in Wolff's lifetime at all, as was the case with the *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*. That Wolff's rational psychology should appear to depart from Leibniz's in terms of many of its specific doctrines (and, we will see, its general methodology) is, for this reason, hardly surprising.

Following their teacher's pioneering lead, Wolff's first students published some of their most influential texts on topics in rational psychology. Ludwig Philipp Thümmig, the author of the first Wolffian textbook, wrote his dissertation on the issue of the immortality of the soul, which treatment influenced Wolff's own as he himself acknowledges.⁹ Georg Bernhard Bilfinger published an important book on the pre-established harmony,¹⁰ along with supplying an extended discussion of the soul in his *Dilucidationes philosophicae*. These were followed by less detailed treatments in the general metaphysical textbooks of Johann Christoph Gottsched

⁶ For a detailed discussion of this, see Charles A. Corr, "Christian Wolff and Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36(2) (1975), 241–62.

⁷ *Christian Wolffs eigene Lebensbeschreibung*, in Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, Pt. 1, Vol. 10, ed. Heinrich Wutke (Hildesheim: Olms, 1980), 141.

⁸ *Christian Wolffs eigene Lebensbeschreibung*, 141–2.

⁹ See Ludwig Philipp Thümmig, *Demonstratio immortalitatis animae ex intima eius natura deducta* (Marburg: 1737). For Wolff's mention of the dissertation, see *DM* §925 and *AzDM* §341.

¹⁰ Georg Bernhard Bilfinger, *De harmonia animi et corporis humani maxime praestabilita ex mente illustris Leibnitii, commentatio hypothetica* (1741; first edn., 1723), in Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, Pt. 3, Vol. 21 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1984).

and Johann Peter Reusch in the 1730s,¹¹ and this decade would also see the publication of Wolff's Latin tome devoted to the subject, *Psychologia rationalis* (1734) where, in addition to supplying much more detail than in the *DM*, Wolff is clearer on the specific topics of rational psychology, which are now treated in a more systematic fashion.¹² Thus, among the topics of rational psychology Wolff now lists: the nature and essence of the soul (including a discussion of the cognitive faculty), the appetitive faculty, the commerce between soul and body, and the various attributes of spirits in general, of the human soul (including its origin and state after death), and its distinction from the souls of animals. Alexander Baumgarten would further refine the specific topics of rational psychology in his *Metaphysica* of 1739, retaining the treatments of the soul's nature and its commerce with the body while relocating the consideration of faculties to empirical psychology, and devoting a section each to the discussions of the soul's origin, immortality, and state after death (as well as to the souls of animals and to other finite spirits).

Despite being a relatively new discipline, rational psychology had quickly become an established topic in metaphysics. Even as Wolff's most strident opponents, such as Christian August Crusius in his *Entwurf der nothwendigen Vernunft-Wahrheiten* of 1745, disputed its ordering before natural theology, the rightfulness of its claim to a distinct place in metaphysics was not contested. As a result of this widespread acceptance, the broad, systematic treatments of Wolff and his school soon gave way to the steady publication of shorter treatises devoted to specific topics, such as the immateriality and immortality of the soul, which extended, revised, and in some cases explicitly challenged Wolff's treatment. So, to name only a few that will be important in the chapters to follow, Johann Gustav Reinbeck's *Philosophische Gedancken über die vernünftige Seele und derselben Unsterblichkeit* of 1739, and Israel Gottlieb Canz's *Überzeugender Beweis aus der Vernunft von der Unsterblichkeit sowohl der Menschen Seele insgemein, als besonders der Kinder-Seelen* of 1744 offer more, and more detailed, proofs of the soul's immortality, while Martin Knutzen's *Commentatio philosophica de humanae mentis individua natura, sive Immaterialitate* of 1741 takes issue with what he views as Wolff's inadequate proof of the soul's immateriality. Among the most prolific, and provocative, writers on psychological topics was Georg Friedrich Meier,

¹¹ See Johann Christoph Gottsched's *Erste Gründe der gesammten Weltweisheit*, 7th edn. (1762; 1st edn., 1733), in Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, Pt. 3, Vols. 20.1–20.2 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1983) and Johann Peter Reusch's *Systema metaphysicum antiquiorum atque recentiorum item propria dogmata et hypotheses exhibens*, 2 vols. (1735), in Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, Pt. 3, Vol. 27 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1990).

¹² Thümmig, once again, receives partial credit for this; see AN §105.

whose earliest publication, *Beweis dass keine Materie denken könne* of 1742, sought to demonstrate that matter cannot think. A number of Meier's later treatises proved rather controversial in fact, especially his *Gedanken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode* of 1746 which challenged previous treatments in arguing that the soul's immortality could only be the object of belief, not knowledge. This treatise proved controversial enough to merit two separate defenses, first in the *Vertheidigung seiner Gedanken vom Zustande der Seelen nach dem Tode* of 1748 and then in the *Beweis dass die Menschliche Seele ewig lebt* of 1751. Meier's last publication on the topic was in the context of his expansive, four-volume *Metaphysik* (1755–57), the entire third volume of which was devoted to psychology (both empirical and rational).

Rational psychology continued to attract the attention of prominent German philosophers in the latter half of the 18th century, and this in spite of a growing interest in empirical, even experimental, approaches to the soul.¹³ Indeed, rational psychology would find its most important and vocal late proponent in Moses Mendelssohn who, in the second of his *Philosophische Gespräche* (1755), recognized that discussion of the soul's immateriality and immortality was in danger of becoming unfashionable:

PHILOPON: But what do we care whether conversations about metaphysics belong among those considered stylish and fashionable? It is enough that they contain for us as many matters of importance as of grace.

NEOPHIL: Only for us? The abstract basic truths must contain this importance and grace for all thinking beings. This is particularly the case for those truths that refer to the doctrine of spirits. They have, to be sure, no immediate influence on human life. Nevertheless, they are the noblest and worthiest knowledge since their themes are the noblest and worthiest.

PHILOPON: People at the present time must have completely forgotten to consider metaphysics from this perspective. God, in what disdain it languishes, this former queen of the sciences!¹⁴

¹³ See, for instance, Johann Gottlob Krüger's *Versuch einer Experimental-Seelenlehre* (Halle: Hemmerde 1756), and Johann Georg Sulzer's *Kurzer Begriff aller Wissenschaften und andern Theile der Gelehrsamkeit worin jeder nach seinem Inhalt, Nutzen und Vollkommenheit kürzlich beschrieben wird* (Frankfurt and Leipzig: 1745). For more detail on these, and other figures, see Carsten Zelle, "Experiment, Experience and Observation in Eighteenth-century Anthropology and Psychology—the Examples of Krüger's *Experimentalseelenlehre* and Moritz' *Erfahrungsseelenkunde*," *Orbis Litterarum*, 56(2) (2001), 93–105.

¹⁴ *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 105.

Significantly, Mendelssohn's monumental *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* in 1767, which finds its genesis in this period,¹⁵ can be understood at least in part as an attempt to spur an interest in rational psychology within a new generation of German philosophers. Among those influenced by Mendelssohn was Markus Herz who touches on issues relating to rational psychology in his *Betrachtungen aus der spekulativen Weltweisheit* of 1771. Mendelssohn found an unexpected, but not unwelcome, ally in Leibniz himself, whose *Nouveaux essais* were finally published in the Raspé edition of his works in 1765 and in which Leibniz claims that his doctrine of minute perceptions is "as important to pneumatology as insensible corpuscles are to natural science" (*NE* 56). Lastly, while Kant's lone publication directly relating to rational psychology in his pre-Critical period, the *Träume eines Geistersehers* of 1766, was outspoken in its opposition to a certain approach to the study of the soul, unpublished texts from the 1760s and 1770s betray a persistent interest in the simplicity, immateriality, personality, and immortality of the soul (as we will see in the chapters to follow).

This capsule history of rational psychology in 18th-century Germany already reveals the outlines of a rich tradition, robust enough to admit vigorous internal discussion and even occasional dissension. In contrast to its caricature as a monolithic doctrine dogmatically constructed on Leibnizian foundations, rational psychology was an evolving discipline, complete with a period of growth, maturation, and decline and fall (thanks ultimately to Kant). In taking on the extravagant claims of rational psychology in the *KrV*, Kant would undoubtedly have had this particular tradition in his crosshairs as well, making it an indispensable resource for any study of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason. Indeed, where many of the details of Descartes' and Leibniz's views on the soul, such as their specific arguments for its simplicity, immateriality, and personality, can only be conjectured on the basis of the few available texts, we find in the wealth of publications by the German rational psychologists of the 18th century focused and extensive treatments of the soul offering much more in the way of detail and discussion than those of their less expansive, if more distinguished, rationalist predecessors. To try, then, as many commentators do, to elucidate the Paralogisms apart from a thorough consideration of this historical context is only to add to the many existing opportunities for misunderstanding that challenging chapter.

¹⁵ Mendelssohn began work on the *Phädon* as early as 1760: in a letter to Lessing (December 19, 1760), he writes that "mein Phädon liegt mir immer noch in den Gedanken" (see Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Alabama University Press, 1973), 140).

0.2 Kant and Rational Psychology

It would be a mistake, however, to think that all that a consideration of the German tradition of rational psychology in the 18th century can yield is additional detail regarding what are, at bottom, Cartesian and Leibnizian positions on the soul. This is because the rational psychology developed by Wolff departs in a number of crucial respects from that which can be extrapolated from the texts of his classical rationalist predecessors. In contrast to the narrowly rationalistic approach to the soul which would proceed completely independently of experience, the rational psychology pioneered by the theorists of the German tradition relies essentially upon empirical psychology. The support for this claim will be exhaustively presented in the chapters to follow, but the importance assigned to experience in the rational investigation of the soul is already suggested in Wolff's claim, which was cited in the preceding section that his rational psychology seeks to "derive that which is found to be in [the soul] by means of experience" (*AZDM* §261), which is to say that (at least part of) the task of the rational psychologist is to exhibit, through inference, the grounds in the soul of that which has been cognized of it by means of experience, and so that the results of the empirical investigation of the soul serve as the initial points of departure for rational psychology. Indeed, Wolff will go as far as to assert that rational psychology is thoroughly beholden to empirical psychology for the confirmation of its results as well as for the provision of its principles. Consequently, as we will see, Wolff's rational psychology is to be considered rationalistic only in a much broader sense in that, when it comes to the soul, our investigation *is not limited to* what can be directly known through experience. In this respect the rational psychology developed by the 18th-century German tradition clearly departs in its essential method, but also in many of its arguments and findings, from that narrowly rationalistic approach to the soul developed by Descartes and Leibniz.

As unorthodox as this distinctive rational psychology might seem, there are both historical and philosophical reasons to seek a better understanding of it in its own right. There are monographs that explore many of the figures in this tradition within the context of the development of modern (which is to say, broadly speaking, a sort of *empirical*) psychology as well as treatments that take up parts of this tradition in the context of considering the history of a single issue such as the history of the soul-body problem, or the development of theories of sensation, perception, consciousness, and the subject.¹⁶ However, a focused examination

¹⁶ See for instance Robert Sommer, *Grundzüge einer Geschichte der deutschen Psychologie und Aesthetik von Wolff-Baumgarten bis Kant-Schiller: Nach einer von der Königlich preussischen Akademie*

of the relatively self-contained tradition of rational psychology stretching from Wolff to Kant, along with a consideration of Kant's arguments in the Paralogisms in light of this specific context, has not been undertaken previously. Accordingly, from an historical perspective, an examination of this tradition promises to expand and deepen our understanding of a previously under-studied discipline that is uniquely a creature of the German Enlightenment. From a philosophical perspective, the distinctive character of the rational psychology of this period is the natural outgrowth of a broadly rationalistic tradition which certainly drew its inspiration from Leibniz but nevertheless actively sought to incorporate what it took to be the key insights of empiricistic thinkers like Bacon, Newton, and especially Locke. As a result, the rational psychology it developed represents a novel, and I think vastly more interesting, conceptual alternative to the rather staid approach to the soul typically associated with philosophical rationalism. It therefore strikes me that exploring the general methodology, specific arguments, and inevitable limitations of this discipline is already a worthwhile philosophical endeavor, if only because it challenges us to expand our currently rather thin conception of the resources of philosophical rationalism when it comes to the investigation of the soul.

In addition, coming to grips with this tradition is essential for understanding Kant's views on rational psychology, and in what ways they changed, from the pre-Critical period to the *KrV*. Kant touches on matters relating to rational psychology—including the community between the soul and the body and the simplicity and immateriality of the soul—in a number of pre-Critical texts, but his interest in rational psychology reaches its high water mark in the 1770s, as is evident from the various unpublished texts of this period. Of particular importance are the sets of student lecture notes from his metaphysics and anthropology courses, and especially those notes from a metaphysics course in the mid- to late-1770s (ML), which contain the last (known) and most ambitious elaboration

der Wissenschaften in Berlin preisgekrönter Schrift des Verfassers (Würzburg: Stahel, 1892); Max Dessoir, *Geschichte der neueren deutschen Psychologie*, 2nd edn., Vol. 1 (Berlin: Duncker, 1902); Kurt Joachim Grau, *Die Entwicklung des Bewusstseinsbegriffes im XVII. und XVIII. Jh* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1916); Gerd Fabian, *Beitrag zur Geschichte des Leib-Seele-Problems (Lehre von der prästabilierten Harmonie und psychophysischen Parallelismus in der Leibniz-Wolffschen Schule)* (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer und Söhne, 1925); Heiner F. Klemme, *Kants Philosophie des Subjekts: Systematische und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Selbstbewusstsein und Selbsterkenntnis* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1996); Falk Wunderlich, *Kant und die Bewusstseinstheorien des 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005); Thomas Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2011); Udo Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Fernando Vidal, *The Sciences of the Soul: The Early Modern Origins of Psychology* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2011).

of Kant's rational psychology before the *KrV*.¹⁷ These texts represent a key contrast case, and an obvious target, for Kant's criticism of rational psychology in the Paralogisms. In spite of this, Kant's late pre-Critical rational psychology is not well understood, and I take it that this is in large part due to the fact that it does not sit comfortably within the context of the familiar classical rationalistic approach to the soul. Kant will claim, for instance, that the "concept of the soul is itself a concept of experience" (*ML*, 28:263) and will even emphasize that the cognition of the substantiality and the simplicity of the soul in rational psychology is possible only because of what can be known empirically of the thinking subject. While it is difficult to make sense of these and other claims considered from the perspective of, for instance, Descartes' approach to the soul, I will contend that they are readily understood when considered in the light of the conception of rational psychology developed by the German tradition and which I take Kant himself to have adopted during this period.

More ambitiously, I will argue that considering the Paralogisms of Pure Reason with this background in mind succeeds in casting new light on important features of Kant's criticism in that chapter, and even that Kant's central argument against the rational psychologist can only be fully understood once this context is taken into account. Kant's criticism of the rationalist account of the soul is typically thought to amount to the charge that the psychologist violates the conditions of human cognition in attempting to make materially informative claims regarding the soul without incorporating any empirical content. Yet this criticism clearly misses its target when applied to the rational psychologist of the German tradition, including Kant himself in the 1770s, who takes some reliance upon what is disclosed through experience to be necessary for whatever cognition of the soul rational psychology can offer, but also assumes that we do in fact have empirical access to the soul. If it is to address the extravagant claims of *this* discipline, then, Kant's criticism must be more complex than it is usually understood to be, as it must not only expose the erroneous metaphysical claims but also account for the grounds for the rational psychologist's mistaken reliance upon what, for Kant, amounts to an empirical intuition of the soul.

This is a tall order, but I will argue in what follows that Kant undertakes to do just this with his account of the illusory appearance of the idea of the soul. In particular, Kant will claim that it is in falling prey to this illusion insofar as it consists

¹⁷ For a discussion of the dating of this set of lecture notes, see Wolfgang Carl, *Der schweigende Kant: Die Entwürfe zu einer Deduktion der Kategorien von 1781* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1989), 119–20; and the translators' introduction to Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xxx–xxxiii.

in “taking the unity in the synthesis of thoughts for a *perceived* unity in the subject of these thoughts” (A402—my emphasis) that the rational psychologist of the German tradition is led to overstep the boundaries of experience in employing the categories in their empirical significations with respect to the soul. This is obviously a controversial interpretation of Kant’s criticism, running up as it does against the widely held view that Kant charges the rational psychologist merely with wrongly taking the soul to be intelligibly rather than sensibly given, but in the following I will present a variety of evidence in favor of attributing this view to Kant. Not only is it quite consistent with Kant’s general account of illusion and metaphysical error in the Transcendental Dialectic, but concerning the Paralogisms themselves I will argue that a number of details of Kant’s specific criticisms of the rational psychologist are properly understood only once this account of the illusory appearance of the soul is adopted. In addition, evidence for this conception of illusion can be found in the *KrV* outside of the Paralogisms, as we will see that the idea of the soul cannot do the important work Kant assigns to it in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic unless it is understood in the manner I have outlined. In this way, I will show that the rational psychology of the German tradition constitutes an important (if not the sole) focus for Kant’s discussion throughout the Dialectic and that it is in the course of engaging with it that Kant develops a number of key insights into the nature of reason’s idea of the soul, and what can be known about it and by means of it.

0.3 Overview

In what follows, I will develop an interpretation of Kant’s Paralogisms of Pure Reason considered in the context of that rational psychology developed by his immediate predecessors. Since I take this to be a novel approach to Kant’s discussion (even if an entirely natural one), my primary concern will be to provide a thorough exposition of this context and then consider how it serves to cast new light on a number of the key arguments of that chapter. As I hope to have suggested already, such a project is not solely of historical interest but promises significant philosophical payoffs as well. In accordance with this focus, I have not followed the lead of a number of other commentators on the section and made a case for the contemporary relevance of these newly illuminated aspects of Kant’s discussion in the Paralogisms, such as his views on personality or his account of mental causation. While I think such a case can often be made, the space required to make it convincingly would quickly dwarf that devoted to the original project given the expansive (and ever-expanding) literature on these topics. In addition, while I have certainly consulted the numerous texts and commentaries on Kant’s

Paralogisms, I have taken pains to square my interpretation with these alternative interpretations in the main body of my analysis only in cases where such comparisons prove helpful in clarifying what I take to be at issue in each section. Given that the interpretations I offer of the individual paralogisms depart from the received readings in a number of respects, I took my main responsibility to consist in showing that they were well supported by the primary texts and so, wary of distracting the reader, I have tried to limit discussion of other treatments to the footnotes.

This book is divided into seven chapters. In Chapters 1 and 2, I undertake to present a detailed account of the discipline of rational psychology, of its underlying method and its principal topics, from its foundation by Christian Wolff to its development through to the decade during which Kant worked on the *KrV*. With a few exceptions, the prevailing portrait of Wolffian rational psychology in the English-language secondary literature is that it is completely continuous with that of Leibniz (and by extension, that of Descartes);¹⁸ therefore, the first step for this study is to rebut this still widespread caricature, and this is accomplished by considering the various respects in which Wolffian rational psychology relies upon empirical psychology. As I have already indicated, Wolff holds that that which is discovered in the course of our observation of ourselves serves as the touchstone for what is discovered of the soul through inference. Wolff even compares empirical and rational psychology to the empirical and theoretical parts of astronomy in that rational psychology formulates theories on the basis of the observations catalogued in empirical psychology, which in turn yield predictions and explanations that serve to inform and direct our observation. Wolff also makes clear that this reliance upon experience is perfectly consistent with a properly *rational* discipline as he claims that sciences can be rational even if only in a mixed sense, as when they make use of inference to expand on what experience has to offer.

Accordingly, Wolff quite deliberately distinguishes his rational psychology, as a mixed discipline, from the narrowly rationalist psychology of his predecessors, which wholly eschewed observation in favor of what can be known through the application of pure reason alone. Hardly a momentary aberration, Wolff's conception of rational psychology was adopted and extended by his successors, including Baumgarten and Meier. Even staunch opponents, like Crusius, who went as far as

¹⁸ Notable exceptions in the English-language literature are Robert J. Richards (see "Christian Wolff's Prolegomena to Empirical and Rational Psychology: Translation and Commentary," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 124(3) (1980), 227–39); Richard Blackwell (see "Christian Wolff's Doctrine of the Soul," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 22(3) (1961), 339–54); Gary Hatfield (see *The Natural and the Normative: Theories of Spatial Perception from Kant to Helmholtz* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 73–4); and Patricia Kitcher (see *Kant's Transcendental Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 12 and *Kant's Thinker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35, 47–8).

to unceremoniously dismiss empirical psychology from among the proper subjects of metaphysics, nonetheless acknowledged the need to set out from a concept of the spirit acquired through observation. Moreover, Kant himself adopted such a conception of rational psychology, as is evident in his pre-Critical writings, handwritten *Nachlass*, and the student notes from his lectures on metaphysics. Thus, Kant will stress that there are certain questions, such as those concerning the soul's origin and state after death, regarding which rational psychology can offer little insight precisely on account of the limitations of our experience. Significantly, then, in the period just before the publication of the *KrV*, Kant differs from the rational psychologist of the tradition not in terms of whether rational psychology is ultimately reliant on what can be known of the soul through experience but only in terms of where, precisely, the boundaries of that experience are to be drawn.

With this background in hand, I turn in Chapters 3–6 to an analysis of Kant's Paralogisms of Pure Reason and argue that Kant's criticism of the rational psychologist hinges upon his exposure of an illusion fostered by reason afflicting the idea of the soul at the basis of that discipline. In doing so, I focus on the Paralogisms as they appear in the A edition of the *KrV*, where the theme of illusion is much more prominent and where the discussions of each of the paralogistic arguments offers much more by way of detail. Even with this focus, however, I do not pretend to offer anything like a comprehensive treatment of the section as there are a number of topics, such as the soul's immateriality (which takes up half of the Criticism of the Second Paralogism), the discussion of personal identity (which I contrast with personality) in connection with the Third Paralogism, and Kant's resolution of the soul–body problem (which is discussed in the Criticism of the Fourth Paralogism), that I do not take up, either because they were not topics that were treated by the rational psychologists of the Wolffian tradition (as is the case with the issue of personal identity), or because they are already adequately treated in the existing secondary literature (as is the case with the issue of the soul's immateriality, and the soul–body problem).

In Chapter 3, I argue that the basic contours of Kant's conception of rational psychology in the Paralogisms of Pure Reason remain essentially unchanged from his late, pre-Critical position, the key difference being that Kant no longer admits the availability of *any* experience of the soul to ground the rational psychologist's investigations. Along these lines, the most significant, and overlooked, change from the pre-Critical to Critical treatments of rational psychology is the account of the origin of its foundational concept. Whereas in the late pre-Critical metaphysics the concept of the soul was a "concept of experience," thought to be drawn from the resources of inner intuition, in the *KrV* the concept of the soul is now counted as an "inferred" concept, as opposed to a (reflected) concept of experience, where

it shares this inferential character with the concepts of the world and God. Given the a priori origin of its central concept, any rational psychology founded on the *I think* would now have to be a *pure* rational psychology in the sense that it brooks no empirical admixture. The newly purified discipline of rational psychology, which is only really inaugurated with the *KrV*, provides Kant with a new perspective on the doctrine of the soul articulated by his predecessors. Kant will claim that, unable to trade on a borrowed empirical concept, rational psychology can no longer purport to offer any cognition of the soul, not even concerning its nature as minimally determined through the transcendental predicates of ontology (which Kant had at least allowed in his pre-Critical lectures on metaphysics). In order to be persuasive, however, Kant's criticism must also explain *how* it is that the traditional rational psychologist (and especially he himself in the 1770s) could have been misled into assuming that he had empirical access to what is, at bottom, merely a formal representation. Key to this account is Kant's doctrine of transcendental illusion, and as I show, Kant consistently claims that the illusion of the soul uniquely involves the illusion of an intellectual object (the *I* of the *I think*) seeming to be given *empirically*. It is on account of the fact that the *I* or soul holds out the illusory appearance of being given in inner intuition that Kant thinks it serves as the "transcendental ground for inferring falsely" (A341/B399) on the part of the traditional rational psychologist. Having fallen prey to this illusion, the rational psychologist subsequently takes the subsumption of the soul under a category in its empirical signification to be warranted, and this generates the allegedly synthetic conclusion in each case, as I illustrate with reference to the claim of the soul's substantiality in the First Paralogism.

This account of illusion as it applies to the soul—as holding out the appearance of being given empirically—proves crucial for understanding Kant's criticism in the remaining three Paralogisms. In addition, considering these Paralogisms in their proper context discloses new details in the positions Kant targets and in the criticisms he levels. Chapter 4 is devoted to the topic of the Second Paralogism, the simplicity of the soul. There I show that while the argument dubbed the Achilles of rational psychology, and Kant's criticism of it, have long preoccupied commentators, it was not the only argument offered for this conclusion by rational psychologists nor, more importantly, is it the only argument Kant himself considers in his discussion. The Achilles was first employed in the context of rational psychology by Martin Knutzen, and later also used by Moses Mendelssohn, both of whom turned to it because of the many deficiencies of the argument for the soul's immateriality made popular by Wolff. Even so, the Achilles as formulated by Knutzen and Mendelssohn continues to turn upon the Wolffian conception of the soul as a power or force (*Kraft*); that is, as a causally efficacious ground of its

representations, and it is precisely this underlying notion of force that Kant targets in his criticism. Yet, its honorific title aside, Kant did not take the Achilles argument to be the only, or even the best, argument for the simplicity of the soul, as he was critical of the argument already by the time of the *Inaugural Dissertation*. As evidence from the *Nachlass* and student lecture notes makes clear, Kant came instead to contend that the soul's simplicity follows from the singular character of the *I* which was taken to be given in inner intuition and which therefore provided adequate empirical grounding for the rational psychologist's inference to simplicity. It is this argument which, according to Kant, is the only proper basis for disclosing the soul's simplicity that is presented as the second paralogism and that serves as the principal target for Kant's subsequent criticism, which consists in exposing the illusion that misleads the rational psychologist into taking the singular *I* as an object of intuition.

In Chapter 5, I show that the misunderstanding occasioned by overlooking the relevant context is rather more dramatic when it concerns the topic of the Third Paralogism. While it is typically assumed that the Third Paralogism has to do, first and foremost, with the issue of personal identity—whether we can know that the soul is in fact numerically identical over time—I argue that another question, that concerning the soul's *personality*, or its distinctive *capacity* to recognize its own identity over time, is in fact the primary (if not necessarily the only) focus of the section. The personality of the soul had been a topic of rational psychology since Wolff, and demonstrating the soul's continued personality after death was a particularly important (according to some the *most* important) task for any proof of its immortality. As I show, Kant's various pronouncements on the topic of personality recorded in the student notes of his lectures on anthropology and metaphysics are quite consistent with the foregoing context. With the Third Paralogism, Kant disputes the rational psychologist's account of how the soul is in fact conscious of its own identity, charging that the rational psychologist, in claiming that we cognize the identity of the soul through apprehending its persistence through time, falls victim to the illusory appearance of the soul as an empirically given object of intuition. Kant still allows, of course, that we are conscious of the necessary identity of the *I* of apperception in all time, and even that we can conceive how the soul might continue in its state of personality after death, yet he emphasizes that this does not amount to an empirical cognition of the soul's personality and, while sufficient for that concept's practical use, falls well short of a cognition of its immortality.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the Fourth Paralogism which, in dealing with the ideality of outer objects, seems (and, indeed, *is*) out of place in Kant's criticism of rational psychology; however, the fact that idealism is not an issue for rational psychology hardly implies that the Fourth Paralogism is not relevant to Kant's

ongoing criticism. To the contrary, I argue in this chapter that Kant's purpose in locating a discussion of idealism in the context of his criticism of the rational doctrine of the soul is to draw attention to the overlooked psychological ground for this philosophical position. As I show, Kant diagnoses a victimization at the hands of the illusory appearance of the soul as an important motivation for (skeptical) idealism. In particular, Kant will claim that it is a consequence of the idealist's assumption that the actual existence of the (*I* of the) *I think* in time is disclosed through immediate perception that he is led to inquire whether the actual existence of the objects of outer sense in space can be disclosed in the same way. In making this assumption, however, the idealist overlooks the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves as it applies to the object of inner sense, and thereby conflates the existence of the object of inner sense considered as an appearance in time (and cognized by means of immediate perception of a mental state) with its existence considered as something not given in time (and of which we can be conscious independently of a given representation). Consequently, it is just insofar as the idealist makes this assumption with respect to the object of inner sense that he is led to make a similar mistake with respect to the objects of *outer* sense. At the root of this mistaken belief is transcendental illusion, which Kant also characterizes in terms of conflating the formal *I think* with the empirical *I am*, a misidentification famously expressed in the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum*.

In Chapter 7, the final chapter, I turn to Kant's brief discussion of reason's use in guiding the investigation of inner appearances in the Appendix to the Dialectic. This is primarily with the aim of supplying indirect evidence for the foregoing account of the illusory appearance of the soul, since Kant will claim that it is only in seeming to be empirically given that the idea of the soul can function to bring a systematic unity into our cognitions of inner appearances. However, it also serves to show that, while Kant denies the pretensions of the rational psychologist to offer any cognition of the soul as such, Kant nonetheless permits him to lay claim to cognition of inner appearances, even if this claim must be qualified in an important way. As Kant details in the Appendix, the ideas of reason, though illusory, serve an essential role in guiding the understanding and, as it applies to the soul, this idea can only fulfill its function insofar as it appears to be empirically given. This is illustrated through consideration of the only example Kant gives in the Appendix of the use of reason in the domain of psychology; namely, the investigation into the soul's various forces and faculties. It is only in its illusory appearance of being the persistent, singular object of inner intuition that the idea of the soul can make what is, at bottom, an investigation into the causal grounds of the alterations among our representations possible, since just this is required for the application of the causal

principle (as presented in the Second Analogy). Given that the idea of the soul that guides these psychological inquiries is illusory, Kant is careful to warn the rational psychologist not to fall victim to it by confusing what is naturally represented as, for instance, a single cognitive force with an empirically discovered one.

In contrast, then, to the prevailing consensus, I take it that an understanding of the immediate historical context proves essential for grasping the broad contours and many of the finer details of Kant's criticism of rational psychology in the *KrV*, and in the end, I hope to show that there is in fact much to be gained and nothing to be lost by considering Kant's discussion of rational psychology in this context. Indeed, as long as it is simply assumed that the only rational psychology there at issue is that attributed to Descartes and Leibniz, we risk trivializing Kant's criticism by giving short shrift to philosophical rationalism in ascribing to it an unnecessarily narrow attitude towards the investigation of the soul. Having now outlined the principal contentions and the general argument of this study, in the chapters that follow I will provide the specific evidence for the relevance and significance of this tradition for understanding Kant's Paralogisms of Pure Reason.

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