

Kant's Empirical Psychology

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Chapter Outline

1. Introduction: Can Kant Have an Empirical Psychology? After briefly laying out the sources for Kant's empirical account of human action (primarily his lectures on empirical psychology and his *Anthropology* and related lectures), this chapter addresses four objections to the possibility of a Kantian empirical psychology: (1) a rigorous empirical psychology would be inconsistent with the sort of freedom Kant needs for his practical philosophy; (2) Kant claims in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* that psychology can never be a science;¹ (3) Kant's *Critique of Judgment* precludes the possibility of a completely mechanistic explanation of any living things (including human beings); and (4) Kant's *Anthropology* highlights numerous methodological problems that arise when empirically investigating human beings.² This chapter responds to these objections with an explanation of the nature, limits, and significance of any Kantian empirical "science" of human beings. I also briefly discuss differences and relations between Kant's *empirical* psychology and the sort of psychology directly involved in Kant's transcendental and moral philosophy and offer suggestions about the importance of Kant's empirical psychology.

I. Kant's Empirical Psychology: the basic account

2. Kant's Empirical Account of Human Action. This chapter lays out Kant's account of human action. It includes some discussion of the biological bases of human motivation in various natural predispositions, but it focuses on how particular sensations or cognitions give rise to particular actions. (This chapter is largely based on my "Kant's Empirical Account of Human Action," *Philosopher's Imprint* (2005).)

3. Kant's Empirical Account of Human Cognition. This chapter lays out Kant's account of human cognition. Whereas the account of action in the previous chapter started with human cognitions and showed how actions arise from those, this chapter shows how cognitions themselves arise. This both completes the general empirical psychology of action and presents an independently important empirical account of human cognition.

II. The Moral Significance of Empirical Psychology

4. Respect for the Moral Law: Kant's Empirical Account of Moral Motivation. This chapter takes the general account of human action offered in Part One and applies it specifically to the

¹ See Charles Gouax, "Kant's View on the Nature of Empirical Psychology." *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences* 8 (1972): 237-42; and Kenneth Westphal, *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism*. (Westphal's argument culminates in a discussion of MFNS but is fundamentally based on his reading of the first *Critique*. His argument will be discussed in detail.)

² See especially Robert Loudon's *Kant's Impure Ethics* and Allen Wood's "Kant and the Problem of Human Nature" in *Essays on Kant's Anthropology* (ed. Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain).

case of moral motivation. I show how Kant's empirical psychology clarifies the way in which – *within empirical psychology* – a feeling of respect is a necessary precondition for choosing in accordance with the moral law. I argue, however, that Kant's moral philosophy requires that he distinguish this empirical-psychological account from a first personal "practical" account within which choosing to obey the moral law necessarily precedes any feeling of respect, and I show how this account can be compatible with his psychology. Moreover, I suggest that Kant's interest in this practical account led him to rethink the role of feeling in human motivation in general, and I show how Kant begins in the *Critique of Practical Reason* to develop a new conception of feeling to account for the empirical-psychological feeling of respect.

5. Kant's Empirical Markers for Moral Responsibility. In this chapter, I show how Kant uses his empirical psychology to explain the empirical markers by which one can identify those entities that can be held morally responsible. After explaining the problem of discerning such markers within a Kantian framework, I show both the limits and the value of Kant's empirical psychology for articulating the nature of those markers. (This chapter is largely based on my "Empirical Psychology, Common Sense, and Kant's Empirical Markers for Moral Responsibility" in *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* (2008).)

III. Empirical Psychology and Human Defects

6. Defects of Cognition: Prejudice and Mental Illness. The empirical psychology of cognition laid out chapter 3 described an ideal functioning of human cognitive faculties. This chapter discusses two general ways in which that ideal functioning can fail. First, I look at Kant's account of ordinary ways in which the proper functioning of higher cognitive functions is side-stepped and compromised by various biases and prejudices. Second, I lay out Kant's elaborate taxonomy of extra-ordinary mental illnesses and discuss the implications of this taxonomy for Kant's empirical psychology as a whole. (The second part of this chapter is largely based on my "Kant's Theory of Mental Disorder I: An Overview" and "Kant's Theory of Mental Disorder II: Implications," *History of Psychiatry* 20 (2009): 267-310.)

7. Defects of Volition: Affects, Passions, and Weakness of Will. In this chapter, I apply Kant's empirical psychology to several related ways in which human volition can fall short of proper functioning, raising two issues that arise both in the interpretation of Kant and in moral psychology more generally. The first is the moral status of emotions, and in particular a distinction that Kant draws between "affects" and "passions," all of which are considered "mental illnesses" by Kant, but the former of which (for Kant) are "merely a lack of virtue" while the latter are "properly evil" (6:408). I argue that although Kant typically draws this distinction in terms of the difference between the faculty of feeling (in which affects are located) and the faculty of desire (which passions are said to affect), Kant's distinction between affects and passions is best understood as a difference between disorders that bypass the exercise of higher powers of choice and those that corrupt those higher powers. The second issue discussed

in this chapter is the status of weakness of will, both in Kant and in general. In the light of Kant's empirical psychology, I show how one with a weak will can have good maxims but fail to act on them. I use this account to suggest how Kant's account of weakness of the will, properly understood, provides for a bold reading of his transcendental idealism according to which human beings can be held morally responsible for aspects of our character that might not seem to directly result from choice, ordinarily understood.

8. Conclusion. The book concludes with brief reflections on what is distinctive both about Kant's empirical psychology and about how Kant uses that psychology. I also offer a brief overview of what a contemporary Kantian approach to philosophy and psychology should look like.