CHAPTER 1

Introduction: the nature and possibility of empirical psychology

Kant never published a book devoted to empirical psychology. But from his earliest years teaching at the University of Königsberg (starting in 1752) nearly until his retirement in 1796, he offered courses in metaphysics based on Alexander Baumgarten's textbook of the same name, courses that consistently included a significant section devoted to "Empirical Psychology," in which he discussed his empirical account of human psychology. And in 1772, when he first began teaching his new course in anthropology, the "Empirical Psychology" portion of Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* was used as his textbook, and the first part of this course developed Kant's empirical psychology lectures in a way he came to describe as "pragmatic." In his teaching throughout his life, he was concerned with problems and issues in empirical psychology and aimed to develop a comprehensive and empirical account of human beings. And this interest is reflected in his most important published works, the *Critiques of Pure Reason*, *of Practical Reason*, and *of the Power of Judgment*; *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*; *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*; *Metaphysics of Morals*; and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Numerous other works investigate human beings primarily as a historically developing species, but all of the above-mentioned works specifically discuss empirical psychology in ways continuous with Kant's lectures, ways that are recognizable today as properly "psychological" treatments of human thought and behavior.

Kant's empirical psychology must be distinguished from the much more famous philosophical views dubbed his "transcendental psychology" (Kitcher 1993) as well as from the rational psychology that he criticizes in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and the pragmatic anthropology on which he lectured and on which he wrote a book of the same name. His transcendental philosophy is psychological in the broad sense that it largely consists in a series of "critiques" of various human faculties – reason, the understanding, the faculty of feeling pleasure, and the faculty of desire. But whereas transcendental philosophy treats these human faculties "from

within," offering the conditions of possibility of their legitimacy and the normative rules governing them, empirical psychology describes the operation of human minds "from without," with empirical accounts of causal interactions between the world and various powers of the human mind treated as properties of an object of investigation. Rational psychology, as Kant describes and largely critiques it, is like empirical psychology in being a descriptive account of the human soul – identifying various properties of it as an object. But whereas rational psychology seeks a priori knowledge about the nature of the soul and its properties from very basic features of cognition (and volition), empirical psychology depends upon careful observation of the actual operations of the mind to infer laws of its operation that have at most an empirical generality. The Kantian discipline closest to empirical psychology is pragmatic anthropology. Much of the content of his lectures on pragmatic anthropology grew out of his lectures on empirical psychology, and he used the same textbook for his lectures on anthropology and empirical psychology. But pragmatic anthropology is specifically *pragmatic*; it puts empirical study of the human being to use for improving human lives. For instance, while empirical psychology would study the nature of memory and its relations to other cognitive powers, pragmatic anthropology "uses perceptions concerning what has been found to hinder or stimulate memory in order to enlarge it or make it agile" (7:119).[1]

Kant's most important contributions to thinking about human beings come from his transcendental philosophy and pragmatic anthropology, but getting clear on his empirical psychology is important for several reasons. For one thing, as we will see in succeeding chapters, his psychology offers an attractive alternative to empirical psychologies both in his day and our own. Moreover, while the findings of empirical psychology provide no direct support for his transcendental philosophy, they are presupposed in his articulations of that philosophy. As he says most clearly in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, even for key concepts in his philosophical project, the "explication as given in [empirical] psychology could reasonably be presupposed" (5:9n). But the most important reason that a clear articulation of his empirical psychology is needed today is that Kant's *philosophy* is increasingly criticized for being *psychologically* naïve.

[1] Moreover, pragmatic *anthropology* takes a broader scope than mere empirical psychology, offering not only accounts of characteristics of individual human minds but also classifications of different kinds of human beings (distinguishing men from women, for instance) and broad historical overviews of the human species as a whole. I discuss these differences further at the end of this chapter.

For example, Simon Blackburn has mocked the notion of the "Kantian Captain," "free of his or her natural and acquired dispositions" (Blackburn 1998: 252), as representing a "fundamental mistake about deliberation" (Blackburn 1998: 250; see also pp. 243–61). Joshua Greene, in his "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul," has argued that Kant mistakenly thinks that *reason* is the cause of deontological moral reasoning, when in fact such reasoning is – from the neurophysiological point of view – more like a brute emotional response than like rational cognition (Greene 2007). And recent philosophical critiques of notions of character (e.g. Doris 2002; Harman 2000) or epistemic integrity (e.g. Bishop and Trout 2005) raise psychological criticisms of the notions of responsibility and spontaneity at the center of Kant's epistemology and moral philosophy. These criticisms confuse transcendental philosophy with empirical psychology and fail to recognize how his own elaborate empirical psychology either anticipates or insightfully responds to these psychological critiques.[2] But Blackburn rightly diagnoses the cause of these misplaced critiques: "Kant, or perhaps his translators, cannot escape responsibility for the confusion here" (Blackburn 1998: 256). As we will see, his friends as much as his enemies often confuse Kant's transcendental philosophy with his empirical psychology, seeing the importance of freedom within the former as a denial of thoroughgoing empirical determination with respect to the latter. Thus clearly laying out his empirical psychology is an important part of defending his philosophy as a whole and clearly delineating his transcendental insights into the human condition with his insistence that the entire empirical world – including human psychology – is susceptible of study as a network of empirical causes and effects.

Before turning to the core of his account and some key applications, the rest of this Introduction takes up a set of challenges to the possibility of a thoroughly empirical Kantian psychology. In the course of responding to these challenges, I develop a general overview of the nature of Kant's empirical psychology, its motivations and goals, and its general methodology. This overview provides a basis for briefly describing the relation

[2] Direct responses to all these criticisms are beyond the scope of this book. For discussion of Doris, Harman, and Bishop and Trout, see Frierson 2013: 188–92 and Frierson 2010c. Blackburn's roughly empiricist alternative to what he takes Kant's psychology to be is similar to, but much more naïve than, Kant's own rich, elaborate, and broadly empiricist psychology, within which there is nothing like the Kantian Captain Blackburn attributes to him (see especially Chapter 2). And beyond problems with Greene's use of the neuroscientific data (see e.g. Berker 2009; Klein 2011), Kant's location of moral reasoning within a distinct and "immediate" natural predisposition suggests that such reasoning will, at least in some respects, more resemble instinctive responses than calculative reasoning (see Chapter 4).

of empirical psychology to three other sorts of psychology at play in his thought: transcendental, rational, and pragmatic. First, though, I present the general case for the possibility of a Kantian empirical psychology.

1.1 The nature and possibility of empirical psychology

Kant's most consistent explanations of empirical psychology are in his lectures on metaphysics, throughout which he repeatedly emphasizes that "There is also empirical psychology, where I must presuppose observations in order to say something about the soul" (29:756). He compares empirical psychology with empirical physics, saying for instance that "Psychology is thus a physiology of inner sense or of thinking beings, just as physics is a physiology of outer sense or corporeal beings" (28:224; see also 28:656).[3] The possibility of an empirical study of the human psyche is reiterated throughout his published writings. In particular, he consistently emphasizes that human thoughts and actions are susceptible of study in accordance with natural laws:

> [A]ll actions of a human being are determined in accord with the order of nature … [I]f we could investigate all the appearances … there would be no human action we could not predict with certainty. (A549/B577)

> [E]verything which takes place [is] determined without exception in accordance with laws of nature. (4:455)

> One can grant that if it were possible for us to have such deep insight into a human being's cast of mind, as shown by inner as well as outer actions, that we would know every incentive to action … as well as all the external occasions affecting them, we could calculate a human being's conduct for the future with as much certainty as a lunar or solar eclipse. (5:99)

> [H]uman actions are determined just as much as every other natural occurrence in accordance with universal laws of nature. (8:17)

Kant offers general parameters for empirical study in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, wherein he also clarifies the nature of any possible empirical psychology. For one thing, as seen already in his lectures on metaphysics, the object of empirical psychology is given in *inner sense*, that sensible form of intuition by which we introspect internal mental states: "through inner sense we intuit ourselves" (B156). Importantly, this means that the objects

[3] He also repeatedly points out in these lectures that empirical psychology belongs to "Metaphysics" no more than empirical physics does. He goes on, "But we will expound it here because the sciences are classified not only as to how reason sorts them, but rather as academic instruction demands. It has not yet matured enough that a special course of lectures can be made from it" (29:757).

of empirical psychology are ourselves "as we are internally affected by ourselves … [W]e cognize our own subject … as an appearance" rather than as a thing-in-itself (B156; see also B69, B153). Like everything else we cognize, the human mind is cognized as an empirical object constrained by the general laws of empirical cognition, and thus as what Kant elsewhere calls a "*homo phenomenon*" (6:418). For Kant, all appearances are governed by basic categories of thought and principles of understanding. Thus, for instance, it is true for all empirical objects – including the mind – that "all alterations occur in accordance with the law of cause and effect" (B232). More generally, empirical objects are substances that undergo alterations by virtue of causal powers operating in accordance with natural laws (see B224ff.). For the phenomena of inner sense in particular, this makes possible an empirical psychology that studies the powers of the human soul in accordance with natural laws of their operation.

Several aspects of this account of empirical psychology are important. First, because it investigates the object of inner sense, empirical psychology "is provided with a content by inner sense" (7:398; see also 25:252, 863–5):

> In psychology we investigate ourselves according to our ideas of inner sense. (7:134n)
>
> [T]he empirical doctrine of the soul can never become anything more than … a natural doctrine of inner sense which is as systematic as possible, that is, a natural description of the soul. (4:471)
>
> I consider thinking beings … through experience, which happens in part internally in myself, or externally, where I perceive other natures, and cognize according to the analogy that they have with me; and that is empirical psychology, where I consider thinking natures through experience. (28:224)
>
> [K]nowledge of the human being through inner experience, because to a large extent one also judges others according to it, is more important than correct judgment of others, but nevertheless at the same time perhaps more difficult … So it is advisable and even necessary to begin with observed *appearances* in oneself, and then to progress above all to the assertion of certain propositions that concern human nature; that is, to *inner experience*. (7:143)

While one can eventually move beyond mere observations about one's *own* inner states to an empirical psychology of human mental life in general, one always starts with introspection, with careful observation of mental states observable through inner sense.[4]

[4] The passages cited here show – contra Sturm 2009 – that Kant did not reject introspection as a primary source of psychological insight, even as late as his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of*

The changes in these mental states will, in accordance with his empirical methodology more generally, be described as alterations of substance (the soul) in accordance with natural laws of cause and effect, where these natural laws are the laws governing the operation of particular powers: "This causality leads to the concept of action, this to the concept of power [*Kraft*], and thereby to the concept of substance" (A204/B249). That is, "the concept of cause lies in the concept of power" (28:564), and each distinct causal power is governed by relevant causal laws (A194f./B239f.). Moreover, any empirical science will be governed by regulative ideals of completeness and simplicity. On the one hand, "reason prescribes and seeks to bring about … the **systematic** in cognition, i.e., its interconnection based on one principle" (A645/B675). Thus, for example, reason posits "[t]he idea of a **fundamental power**" to which all the variety of different powers can be reduced. In psychology, this would mean reducing all the variety of kinds of mental states to a single kind of mental power (A649/B677). On the other hand, to this logical principle "there is opposed another … which needs manifoldness and variety in things" (A654/B682). Where the first principle requires reducing powers to as few as possible – ideally a single fundamental power – this second principle requires highlighting the genuine diversity between powers: "This principle (of discrimination …) severely limits the rashness of the first principle …; and here reason shows two interests that conflict with each other" (A654/B682). Importantly, both principles are merely *ideals* of reason, not constitutive principles of the world. In demanding that one seek a single fundamental power, "logic does not at all ascertain whether there is such a thing" (A649/B677):

> [T]his unity of reason is merely hypothetical. One asserts not that such a power must in fact be found, but rather than one must seek it for the benefit of reason, namely for setting up certain principles for the many rules with which experience might furnish us. (A649/B677)

Kant thus suggests that there are two different aspects to empirical science, the pursuit of diverse phenomena and the reduction of that diversity to a systematic unity. In his metaphysics lectures, he highlights how empha-

View. Particularly the final passage (from 7:143) belies Sturm's claim that introspection is "neither a good idea … nor … the chief method for researching human beings and the human mind" (Sturm 2009: 205) along with his more specific claim that "introspection is less reliable than observing other people *and depends on it*" (Sturm 2009: 210, emphasis added). For Sturm's specific rejection of my earlier (Frierson 2003) endorsement of introspection in Kant, see Sturm 2009: 218n39. For further discussion, see notes 24 (p. 22) and 47 (p. 42) below.

sizing these aspects can give rise to different sorts of explanation with an illustration from physics.

> There are … two physical modes of explanation: (1) mechanical philosophy, which explains all phenomena from the shape and the general motive power of bodies.
>
> (2) The dynamical mode of explanation, when certain basic powers are assumed from which the phenomena are derived. This was first discovered by Newton and is more satisfactory and complete than the former. Thus to explain something mechanically means to explain something according to the laws of motion, dynamically, from the powers of bodies. With either explanation one never comes to an end. The correct mode of explanation is dynamical physics, which includes both in itself. That is the mode of explanation of the present time. The first is the mode of explanation of Descartes, the second that of the chemists. (29:935–6; see also A649–50/B677–8)

Descartes errs because he overemphasizes the reduction of phenomenal explanation to a single power (the "general motive power"). By contrast, Newton and the chemists rightly postulate additional basic powers when these are necessary to explain diverse phenomena.

When applying this general principle to human psychology, Kant argues against the overly simplistic reductionism of his predecessors Wolff and Baumgarten (both of whom sought to reduce all powers of soul to a single power of representation). While admitting that the regulative ideal of unity is still valid *as an ideal*, Kant's psychology follows the example of the chemists – and Crusius[5] – rather than strictly mechanistic physics. His focus is on *not* overly reducing powers to a single basic one. Thus while "psychology amounts to this: deriving diverse powers, which we know only through observations, as much as possible from basic powers" (28:564), Kant still insists that "there must be several [basic powers] because we cannot reduce everything to one" (29:773–822).[6]

Finally, his published works make clear the very wide *scope* of empirical psychology. As the quotations at the beginning of this section point out, *every* human action – including those governed by reason or liable to moral evaluation – is susceptible to empirical investigation in accordance with natural laws. The *Critique of Pure Reason* specifically emphasizes that,

[5] See Crusius 1745: §§73 and 444. Wolff and Baumgarten were leading neo-Leibnizian philosophers, and Kant used Baumgarten's textbook for his course in metaphysics. Crusius was an important Pietist critic of their neo-Leibnizian program. For discussion, see Watkins 2005: 91 and Hatfield 1990.

[6] Still, Kant leaves open the metaphysical possibility that "the unity of each substance requires that there be only one basic power" (29:822). See also Chapter 2, note 4.

for example, both "reason" and the "human … power of choice" have an "empirical character" (A549/B577, A553/B581). And Kant's most detailed example of the empirical investigation of a particular human action is specifically focused on an action with moral relevance:

> Let us take … a malicious lie … First, we endeavor to discover the motives to which it has been due, and secondly, we proceed to determine how far the action … can be imputed to the offender. As regards the first question, we trace the empirical character of the action to its sources, finding these in defective education, bad company, in part also in the viciousness of a natural disposition insensitive to shame … *We proceed in this enquiry just as we should in ascertaining for a given natural effect the series of its determining causes.* (A554–5/B582–3, emphasis added; see also 29:1019–20)

Overall, not only unpublished lectures but also published writings, and in particular his main *Critique*s, justify the possibility of an empirical psychology. Such a psychology would investigate the human mind in terms of natural causal laws that, in principle at least, would be capable of perfect predictive success. The primary data for this psychology would come from introspective investigation through inner sense, but – unlike other attempts at "empirical psychology" in the eighteenth century[7] – this introspection would necessarily be supplemented by observation and interpretation (by analogy) of others' actions. The goal would be a comprehensive account of the causal laws that govern human thought and behavior. The scope of such a causal account is complete; no human thoughts or actions would be exempt from prediction and explanation in terms of causal laws governing various powers of the soul. The account would be somewhat reductive, in that diverse phenomena would be reduced to a small set of causal powers, but not entirely reductive, in that a Kantian empirical psychology need neither reduce all phenomena to a single mental power (as the Wolffians tried to do) nor reduce mental phenomena to physical changes.

Despite the claims outlined in this section, many commentators have argued that Kant's philosophy cannot actually be reconciled with a genuinely empirical psychology. There are five general sorts of objections to the possibility of empirical psychology. First, a rigorous empirical psychology seems inconsistent with the sort of freedom he needs for his practical philosophy. Second, he directly states in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* that "The empirical doctrine of the soul can … never

[7] For an account of these alternative approaches to empirical psychology, and an (in my view overstated) analysis of Kant's rejection of them, see Sturm 2009.

become … a science of the soul, nor even a psychological experimental doctrine" (4:471), which seems to put empirical psychology in dire straits. Third, his *Critique of Judgment* precludes the possibility of completely mechanistic explanations of any living things (including human beings), which seems to rule out the sort of causal-law-based explanations of human thought and action described in this section. Fourth, his *Anthropology* highlights numerous methodological problems that arise when empirically investigating human beings. And finally, he occasionally raises ethical objections to the sorts of investigations – of others as well as of oneself – that seem necessary for empirical psychology. Over the course of the next several sections, I clarify the precise nature of Kant's empirical psychology through responding to each of these objections.

1.2 Empirical psychology and human freedom

Among his most well-known and important contributions to the history of philosophy is Kant's emphasis on human freedom. Within his epistemology and aesthetics, this emphasis shows up in the spontaneity of the understanding in cognition and the free play of human faculties in aesthetic enjoyment. But his moral philosophy is where freedom shows up most prominently, and it shows up in at least three important ways. First, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* emphasizes that the moral law is a law of autonomy. Human beings legislate the moral law to ourselves, and the law compels only because it is self-legislated: "the human being … is subject *only to laws given by himself* … and … he is bound only to act in conformity with his own will" (4:432). Acting morally is acting autonomously, acting according to a law one gives oneself. Second, and further emphasized in *Groundwork*, human beings, and in fact all rational agents, "cannot act otherwise than *under the idea of freedom*":

> Reason must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences; consequently, as practical reason or as the will of a rational being it must be regarded of itself as free, that is, the will of such a being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom, and such as will must in a practical respect thus be attributed to every rational being. (4:448)

That is, when one acts on the basis of reasons, as a rational agent, one must think of those reasons as being freely taken up by oneself, not as mere causes that determine one's behavior. Finally, moral obligation in particular depends upon *transcendental* freedom, that "absolute spontaneity of an action" that is "sensibly unconditioned" and "the real ground of [an

action's] imputability" (A448/B476, A558/B586):[8] "one would never have ventured to introduce freedom into science had not the moral law, and with it practical reason, come in and forced this concept upon us" (5:30).

This emphasis on human freedom, and especially on the necessity for human beings to act under the idea of freedom, is prominently highlighted by Henry Allison's "Incorporation Thesis," the claim – ascribed to Kant – that "the intentional actions of a rational agent are never '*merely*' the causal consequences of the agent's psychological state (or any other antecedent conditions for that matter) but require, as a necessary condition, an act of spontaneity" (Allison 1990: 5). Allison initially introduces this Incorporation Thesis after a clear endorsement of a parallel "empirical … conception of rational agency" that uses "the familiar belief-desire model … for the observation, causal explanation, and … prediction of human actions" (ibid.), but other commentators go further than Allison in ascribing to Kant a wholesale rejection of the empiricist models of explanation. Marcia Baron, for example, claims:

> This [causal picture of agency] is a familiar picture of agency from the empiricist tradition. Kant's theory of agency is very different. Our actions are not the result of a desire or some other incentive that impels us. An incentive can move us to act only if we let it. (Baron 1995: 189)[9]

Similarly, Andrews Reath claims that "Kant's conception of choice should not be understood on the analogy of a sum of vector forces (or of mechanical forces acting on an object). Kant can allow an incentive to have an affective force of some sort, but the role assigned to such force in motivation and the explanation of choice must be limited" (Reath 2006: 13). Even Jeanine Grenberg, who is more sensitive than most commentators to the details of his psychology, and who admits that Kant's "language of impulsion certainly does suggest that … he is … advocating a more mechanistic theory of action," nonetheless argues that "this is not in fact the case," that in fact human actions "do not follow the laws of nature" (Grenberg 2001: 151, 175).[10]

[8] His argument for this claim is contested, and shifts from his *Groundwork* to his *Critique of Practical Reason*. For further discussion, see Allison 1990; Ameriks 1981; and Korsgaard 1996a.

[9] For a similar dismissal of the possibility of a science of history on the grounds of Kant's account of freedom, see e.g. Fackenheim 1957: 384.

[10] At times, Grenberg is more careful to distinguish "theoretical knowledge of herself as an object" from the "practical" task: "when [an agent] judges her feeling of pleasure to be good … she attributes it to her own faculty of desire, not from a third person perspective, but from a first person perspective" (171). But she still seems to think that there is a conflict between Kantian freedom and a thoroughgoing natural necessity in psychological explanations of human action, a point reiterated in Grenberg 2013 (e.g. p. 60).