Handbuch Christian Wolff

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6.3 Empirical Psychology

Paola Rumore

Keywords

empirical psychology, rational psychology, soul, connubium rationis et experientiae, cognitive faculty, appetitive faculty, anthropology

Abstract

The paper focuses on Wolff’s empirical psychology, analyzing its contents both from an historical, and a theoretical point of view. Considering the discipline the main innovation that Wolff introduced in the ‘science of the soul’ in his time, the paper presents on the one hand the distance it displays between Wolff’s metaphysical statements and Leibniz’s monadology, and on the other hand the central role played by the connubium rationis et experientiae. This peculiar methodological purpose of Wolff’s philosophy finds in the relation between the empirical and the rational science of the soul one of its most remarkable realizations. The final part of the paper presents the contents of the main sections of Wolff’s Psychologia empirica, and briefly sketches the stages of its influence on the later philosophical and anthropological discussion.
1 The metaphysical premise of Wolff’s empirical psychology

The introduction of an empirical investigation of the soul into the realm of metaphysics represents one of Wolff’s most remarkable contributions to the history of Western philosophy, and at the same time one of the most long-lasting effects of his reform in metaphysics.

The distinction between an empirical and a rational branch of psychology in terms of two correlated but distinct sciences can be understood as one of the most obvious effects of his attempt to distance himself from Leibniz’s panpsychism, i.e. from the idea that the very basic and simple metaphysical elements (monads) are nothing but centers of perception and spontaneous activity. The different degrees in the clarity of the perceptions, as well as the emergence of consciousness determine the progression of the monads in a hierarchy that moves from the very low level of matter to the higher level of rational souls and spirits. In the mid-1730s Wolff clearly rejects Leibniz’s idea that the simple elements bodies are made of are endowed with a power of perception. Differently from souls and spirits, which do have perceptions and appetitions, Wolff conceives the elements of bodies as merely simple substances: “Falluntur autem, qui sibi aliisque persuadere conantur, quasi iuxta Leibnitium materia ex spiritibus tanquam totum ex partibus componatur, et multo magis falluntur, qui nobis hanc sententiam tribuunt, cum elementis rerum materialium, nonnisi simplici-tatem vindicemus, qualis vero sit vis ipsis insita in dubio relinquamus” (whereas those who try to convince themselves and other people that, as Leibniz states, matter is composed of spirits as a whole is composed of its parts, are mistaken and those who ascribe to us that judgment are even more mistaken, since I don’t claim anything else than simplicity for the elements of material things, and I am in doubt as to the nature of the power they are endowed with). In order to stress his distance from Leibniz’s monadology, Wolff calls these simple immaterial elements, which are not endowed with perceptions, “atomi naturae” (atoms of nature) or “elementa rerum materialium” (elements of material things). The main consequence of Wolff’s new conception of the elements of the physical world is that they don’t change by means of an internal power, but through external inputs. In this way Wolff introduces a kind of metaphysical dualism in his philosophy, in which he combines both the Cartesian and the Leibnizian legacies: the communication between the ontological realms of spiritual and physical substances is no longer explained by means of physical influx, nor in terms of oc-

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3 Ibid., § 644 n, p. 589.
casional causes, but through Leibniz’s ‘very probable’ hypothesis of pre-established harmony. Nevertheless in Wolff’s system this general principle of accordance of substances no longer concerns the realm of beings in its entirety, but exclusively the connection between souls and bodies.

As both the physical and the spiritual realm are subjected to certain analogous powers, the ontological divide leads Wolff to an epistemic divide, so that he introduces besides the science of bodies (a science he terms cosmology), a science of finite spirits that he, going back to an old but neglected tradition, names psychology. Following his own idea of philosophy as the science of the possible, in the Discursus praeliminaris Wolff defines it as follows:

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Pars philosophiae, quae de anima agit, Psychologia a me appellari solet. Est itaque Psychologia scientia eorum, quae per animas humanas possibilia sunt. Ratio definitionis patet, ut ante. Est enim philosophia in genere scientia possibilium, quatenus esse possunt. Quare cum Psychologia sit ea philosophiae pars, quae de anima agit; erit ea scientia eorum, quae per animam humanam possibilia sunt (I call the part of philosophy that concerns the soul Psychology. Psychology is therefore the science of what is possible by means of the human soul. The reason of the definition is clear. Philosophy being in general the science of the possible insofar as it can be; [and] psychology being the part of philosophy that deals with the soul, so this will be the science of what is possible by means of the human soul).
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2 The mutual relation between empirical and rational psychology

The distinction between empirical and rational psychology rests on Wolff’s idea that science in general must rely on principles that cannot be demonstrated a priori (according to the rational, dogmatic way), but must be taken from experience. Experience indeed offers the principles by means of which we understand the reason of what can be by means of human souls. Thus understood, empirical psychology corre-

5 Cf. Psychologia rationalis, § 638 n, p. 580 (GW II 6).
6 Cf. ibid., § 76 n, p. 54.
7 In the Discursus praeliminaris Wolff explains that the old pneumatology included both psychology and natural theology, and it was therefore the science of spirits in general (§ 79), whereas Wolff’s psychology is the part of metaphysics that concerns exclusively the finite spirits (Discursus praeliminaris, § 79, p. 36 [GW II 1]). On the previous uses of the term “psychologia” cf. Jean Ecole, “Des rapports de l’expérience et de la raison dans l’analyse de l’âme ou la Psychologie empirica de Christian Wolff”, in: Giornale di metafisica, 21 (1966), pp. 589–617.
9 Cf. Discursus praeliminaris, § 111, pp. 50–51 (GW II 1).
sponds perfectly to experimental physics: as the latter provides to dogmatic physics the very first and immediate evidence that represent both the starting-point and the test bed (Probier-Stein) of its deductive reasoning a priori in order to achieve a scientific knowledge of nature, empirical psychology provides rational psychology with both the certain empirical ground and the final confirmation of its a priori deductions. Physics concerns the laws that govern movements of bodies, whereas psychology deals with the laws of perception as occurring in the soul.

In the Prolegomena to his Latin Psychologia empirica Wolff defines this as follows: “Psychologia empirica est scientia stabilendi principia per experientiam, unde ratio redditur eorum, quae in anima humana sunt” (Empirical psychology is the science that establishes principles through experience, whence reason is given for what occurs in the human soul). And, moreover, “[p]sychologia empirica inservit examinandis et confirmandis iis, quae de anima humana a priori eruuntur” (empirical psychology serves to examine and confirm discoveries made a priori concerning the human soul). The immediate reference to experience provides the empirical science of the soul with a higher degree of certainty than its rational correlate: even if a priori deductions of reason or its metaphysical hypothesis were wrong, “still, all the knowledge about the soul achieved through experience and presented in the Psychologia empirica remains unaffected”. Indeed, according to Wolff, since empirical psychology provides facta that we acknowledge as soon as we pay attention to the modifications of the soul we are conscious of, each discovery made a priori by rational psychology should be compared with those facta established by experience; and in case there was no agreement between them, we were legitimately entitled to put into doubt the discoveries we made a priori. The priority of what is established through experience is at the basis of Wolff’s idea of developing a psychological investigation on the model of the philosophy of nature:

Quodsi in Psychologia empirica nondum reperitur, quod a priori de anima fuit evictum […] attentio ad mentem nostra dirigenda et in eo dirigenda, quod eidem respondere debet, ut appareat, utrum eidem conveniat, nec ne. Et si quid occurrat, quod ad observationem reduci nequit; videre licet, num cum eo, quod ex principio in Psychologia empirica stabilito consequitur, idem sit, vel num ex eo, quod a priori erutum, sequatur aliquid in Psychologia empirica stabilitum. Apparat itaque Psychologiam empiricam inservire ex-

10 Cf. Deutsche Metaphysik, § 727, pp. 453–454 (GW I 2.2).
12 Psychologia empirica, § 1, p. 1 (GW II 5).
13 Ibid., § 5, p. 3.
14 Ausführliche Nachricht, § 104, p. 291 (GW I 9).
minandis atque confermandis iis, quae de anima humana a priori eruuntur. If something demonstrated of the soul a priori has not yet been recognized in empirical psychology [...] our attention should be directed to our mind and focused upon that which ought to correspond to the a priori discovery, so that it becomes clear whether it agrees with the a priori discovery or not. But if it happens that something cannot be reduced to observation, then one can see whether it is the same as that which follows from a principle established in empirical psychology, or whether from what is discovered a priori, something established in empirical psychology should follow. Clearly, therefore, empirical psychology serves to examine and confirm discoveries made a priori.

As the task of experimental physics is to supply experiments in order to examine the tenets of dogmatic physics, the task of empirical psychology is to provide a general foundation for the activity of mind investigated a priori by rational psychology. The intimate connection between these two parts of psychology was already presented in the Discursus praeliminarius:

In Psychologia rationali ex unico animae humanae conceptu derivamus a priori omnia, quae eidem competere a posteriori observantur et ex quibusdam observatis deductur, quemadmodum decet Philosophum. In rational psychology we derive a priori from a single concept of the human soul all of those features observed a posteriori to pertain to it, as well as those deduced by these observations, insofar as this is proper to a philosopher.

This idea was at the basis of the titles of chapters III and V of the early German Metaphysics, where Wolff first introduced the original distinction between the two disciplines: the future psychologia empirica is here presented as the science “[o]f the soul in general, of what we namely perceive of it”, whereas psychologia rationalis is described as the science “of the essence of the soul and of a spirit in general”. The first one deals with the ‘perception’ (Wahrnehmung) of what occurs in the soul, whereas the latter investigates its essence (Wesen). The first investigation is based on observation and description; the latter is developed by means of rational deductions. This difference is remarkable, since it stresses the fact that empirical psychology provides a “merely narrative description (erzählen) of what we perceive of the soul in our daily experience”, whereas rational psychology aims at “showing what the soul is, and how its modifications originate”. To elaborate its description, empirical psychology doesn’t require any further means than a careful observation of what happens in the soul, an

15 Psychologia empirica, § 5, p. 4 (GW II 5).
16 Discursus praeliminaris, § 112 n, p. 51 (GW II 1).
17 Wolff’s usage of the German term “erzählen” amounts to the original meaning of the Latin historia, in the sense of description, enumeration, and witness. This is the reason at the basis of my choice to translate Wolff’s “erzählen” with the English expression “narrative description”.
18 Deutsche Metaphysik, § 191, pp. 106–107 (GW I 2.1).
observation that should be carried on in the same way usually adopted within the realm of physical phenomena.

Nevertheless empirical psychology cannot properly be understood as a mere ‘history of the soul’, since it doesn’t simply collect evidence as offered by experience, but rather

notiones facultatum atque habituum inde formantur et principia alia stabiliuntur, immo etiam nonnullorum ratio redditur: quae utique ad philosophicam cognitionem spectant, minime ad solam historicam referri possunt (builds out of them concepts of faculties and habits of the soul, and sets further principles, and even provides the reason for what belongs for sure to the philosophical knowledge, and that cannot be included at all in the historical one)\textsuperscript{19}.

The reference to the divide between philosophical and historical knowledge recalls Wolff’s general idea about the different kinds of knowledge one can achieve depending on the objects of the investigation and on the sources one considers. In the first chapter of the \textit{Discursus praeliminaris} Wolff explains indeed that knowledge can be either \textit{historical}, when understood as a gathering of empirical facts; or \textit{philosophical} and \textit{scientific}, when it concerns the reasons (\textit{rationes}) of the mentioned facts; or even \textit{mathematical}, when those facts are expressed in quantitative terms. The idea that these different kinds of knowledge, especially the first ones, can and must be connected in a sort of virtuous circle is at the very basis of what Wolff calls without any hesitation the “sanctum connubium” (\textit{holy bond})\textsuperscript{20} between reason and experience, often disregarded by the long-lasting near-sighted and misleading interpretation of Wolff as the promoter of a barren deductive and pure dogmatic philosophy.\textsuperscript{21} On the contrary, in Wolff’s eyes experience and reason stay in a mutual prolific relationship: on the one hand experience offers \textit{a posteriori} the basic materials for the development of \textit{a priori} rational deductions; on the other hand reason provides those materials with rational hypothesis concerning their metaphysical ground, and links them up in a scientific system of connections (\textit{nexus}) where what follows has its grounds in what precedes. Taking the proper task of reason as the \textit{reddere rationem} of what is stated by the senses, Wolff raises experience to the role of unavoidable starting point of any rational investigation. The prolific cooperation between reason and experience, the bond between \textit{cognitio a priori} and \textit{cognitio a posteriori}, produces the high desirable \textit{cognitio mixta}, which most contributes to the development of science in general.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Discursus praeliminaris}, § 111 n, p. 51 (GW II 1).
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, § 12, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{22} Cf. \textit{Psychologia empirica}, § 434, pp. 342–343 (GW II 5). On the concept of ’non-pure reason’ cf. Jean-
The dynamics between reason and experience are realized in a remarkable way by
the connection between empirical and rational psychology, insofar as the descriptive,
narrative approach of the first provides the basis for the rational arguments of the lat-
ter. To put it in a synthetic formula: Rational psychology explains a priori what em-
pirical psychology states a posteriori. In this sense, as Wolff claims, both parts of
the science of the soul are in fact by themselves types of philosophical knowledge: indeed
the task of empirical psychology is not the mere accumulation of empirical data con-
cerning the soul (which would make it historical knowledge), but rather a much deeper
investigation that implies the deduction of “something else that one cannot immedi-
ately see by himself”, i.e. the achievement of “distinct concepts of what we perceive in
the soul” and “important truths that can be derived from them”23 — truths which are
the ground (Grund) of the laws that govern the main operations of the soul when it
is engaged with knowledge (in logic), and with action (in morals and politics).24 This
statement explains Wolff’s definition of psychology as the science in which “reddenda
ratio est eorum, quae per animas humanas possibilia sunt” (is provided the reason of
what is possible by means of human souls)25: “Principia psychologiae, quae a posteri-
ori stabiluntur, maximam habent per universam philosophiam practicam, immo per
omnem quoque Theologiam tam naturalem, quam revelatam, utilitatem” (principles
of psychology established a posteriori have the greatest utility for universal practical phi-
losophy and, indeed, for all of theology, natural as well as revealed)26. Therefore it has
to be considered a part of the philosophical system, whose investigation must precede
the investigation of those other disciplines.

But empirical psychology doesn’t only endorse the scientific method of any philo-
sophical knowledge; rather, it provides the law of the functioning of the soul: accord-
ing to Wolff it can also rise to the level of mathematical knowledge inasmuch it can
express the mechanism of the soul in quantitative terms. In fact Wolff introduces a
hierarchy among the degrees of intensity of sensations, so that the ‘stronger’ one can
overshadow the ‘weaker’ one.27 This idea, developed in the wake of Leibniz’s classi-
fication between obscure, clear, confused, and distinct perceptions, relies on an anal-
ogy between the degrees of the ‘physical light’ that illuminates external things, and
the ‘light of the soul’ that enlightens our mental representations. The quantification
of the intensity of sense perceptions can be extended to the realm of both higher and
lower faculties of cognition and appetition, in the large variety of their manifesta-
tions presented in the Psychologia empirica. Introducing the possibility of a mathe-

Paul Paccioni, Cet esprit de profondeur: Christian Wolff, l’ontologie et la métaphysique, Paris, 2006,
ch. VII: “Psychologie empirique et psychologie rationelle: l’activité d’une raison non pure”.
23 Deutsche Metaphysik, § 191, p. 107 (GW I 2.1).
24 Ibid.
25 Discursus præliminaris, § 111, p. 50 (GW II 1).
26 Psychologia empirica, § 1 n, p. 1 (GW II 5).
27 Cf. ibid., § 76, pp. 41–43.
matical knowledge of the laws of the soul (what he calls *psychometry*). Wolff stresses the continuity between the method of investigation of the physical and of the mental realm, and once more empirical psychology confirms its tight relation to experimental physics.

### 3 An empirical investigation of the soul

As stated in the *Prolegomena* to empirical psychology, the investigation of the soul begins with a kind of introspection, i.e. with the observation and description of what occurs in the soul. In the *Psychologia empirica*, Wolff states the existence of the soul by means of a revised version of Descartes’ *cogito* argument. Indeed he affirms that “non esse nostri rerumque aliarum extra nos constitutarum conscios quovis momento expe- rimus. Non opus est nisi attentione ad perceptiones nostras, ut ea de re certi simus” (we experience in every moment that we are conscious of ourselves, and of other external things. To be conscious of this we don’t need anything else than to pay attention to our perceptions)\(^{29}\). The certainty of our existence is highly evident, and doesn’t require any further demonstration. The same statement can be found in the opening paragraph of the *German Metaphysics*, where Wolff affirmed that:

> We are conscious (*bewusst*) of ourselves and of other things. No one who is not completely out of his mind can doubt that, and should someone want to deny it by pretending, through his words, that things are other than he finds within himself, that person could quickly be shown that his pretense is absurd. For how could he deny something or call something into doubt if he were not conscious of himself and other things? But whoever is conscious of what he denies or calls into doubt, exists. And consequently it is clear that we exist\(^{30}\).

Differently from Descartes’ *cogito* argument, which rests on an immediate evidence provided by the *lumen naturale*, Wolff’s argument rests on deductive reasoning, which is articulated as follows: “1. We undeniably experience that we are conscious of ourselves and of other things. 2. It is clear to us that whoever is conscious of himself and other things exists. Consequently, we are 3. certain that we exist”\(^{31}\). The argument is formulated in the form of a syllogism: “Whoever is conscious of himself and other things, exists. We are conscious of ourselves and other things. Therefore, we

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29 *Psychologia empirica*, § 11, p. 9 (GW II 5).

30 *Deutsche Metaphysik*, § 1, pp. 1–2 (GW I 2.1).

exist”32. The thing in us that is conscious of itself and of other external things is the soul (anima, mens), which therefore exists.33 The soul is here defined as a thing (ens), which shows the double level of perception (the act of representing something)34 and apperception (the awareness of its own perceptions)35. Thanks to this direct access to our perceptions, ‘introspection’ represents a privileged form of experience that leads us to the immediate knowledge of the existence of soul, which for Wolff precedes the knowledge we have of the existence of bodies, in complete accordance with the Cartesian doubt.36 The capacity of thinking is nothing but the capacity the soul has of being conscious of what occurs in it, so that “Cogitatio igitur est actus animae, quo sibi sui rerumque aliarum extra se conscia est” (Thought is an act of the soul, by means of which it is conscious of itself and of other external things)37; it means that every thought requires both perception and apperception.38 The identification of thought with apperception distances Wolff from Descartes’ idea of the cogito as an essential feature of the soul; in accordance with Leibniz Wolff admits rather that a huge part of our perceptions occurs in a state of obscurity and doesn’t reach the threshold of our consciousness.39 The scale of clarity of perceptions is modeled according to Leibniz’s Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis (1684), and goes from the degree of obscurity (when we are not aware of our perception, or we don’t recognize what we perceive),40 to clarity (when we are aware of our perception),41 confusion (when we cannot distinguish clearly the parts of a clear perception),42 and distinctness (when we do distinguish clearly among the parts of a clear perception).43

At the basis of this hierarchy of the degrees of clarity of perception is the Leibnizian idea that this fundamental activity of the soul must be conceived as a reductio ad unum, i.e. a unification of the multiplicity of what is represented (the external object) in the unity of the (mental) representation. In his rational psychology Wolff will explain this feature by means of the simple nature of the soul, whose modifications are repraesentationes compositi in simplici and not repraesentationes compositi in compo-

33 Cf. Psychologia empirica, §§ 20–21, p. 15 (GW II 5).
34 Cf. ibid., § 24, p. 17.
35 Cf. ibid., § 25, p. 17.
36 Cf. ibid., § 22, pp. 15–16.
37 Ibid., § 23, p. 16.
38 Cf. ibid., § 26, pp. 17–18.
39 Cf. ibid., § 30, p. 21.
40 Cf. ibid., § 32, p. 22.
41 Cf. ibid., § 31, p. 22.
42 Cf. ibid., § 37, pp. 24–25.
43 Cf. ibid., § 38, p. 25.
sito like the ones that occur in physical substances, e.g. in a mirror.\textsuperscript{44} But such statements about the nature of the soul as a simple substance cannot be introduced within the realm of empirical psychology, where Wolff only attempts to infer the presence of powers in the soul on the basis of the effects he can observe through internal experience. Once we observe our soul, we notice we have perceptions, i.e. the faculty of perceiving which can work on different levels of clarity, and can express itself in different ways. So, if perception is the act of representing, we call our representations ideas when we consider them objectively, i.e. as far as they concern a specific object,\textsuperscript{45} or notiones, when they represent universals like genera and species.\textsuperscript{46} Knowledge (cognitio) is therefore an expression of our act of perceiving when it concerns the acquisition of the idea or of the notion of something. The internal articulation of knowledge into sensitive and intellectual follows Leibniz’s identification of the former with the realm of obscure and confuse representations,\textsuperscript{47} and the latter with the realm of distinctness.\textsuperscript{48} Considering the presence of these ideas and notions in the mind, Wolff infers the presence in it of a faculty in charge of their origin: the facultas cognoscendi,\textsuperscript{49} to which he devotes the first part of the Psychologia empirica. Proceeding in the same way Wolff observes in the mind the presence of appetites (appetitus) and repulsions (adversiones), i.e. of inclinations towards what we consider good, and aversions from what we consider bad, and thereby considers the soul possesses a facultas appetendi, which is the subject of the second part of the work.

4 The cognitive faculty

Sections II and III of the first part of the Psychologia empirica concern respectively the inferior (lower) and the superior (higher) part of the cognitive faculty that Wolff identifies in the wake of Leibniz with the realms of sensitive and intellectual knowledge, i.e. with our capacity to deal either with obscure and confused, or with distinct ideas and notions.

The investigation of the facultas cognoscendi pars inferior\textsuperscript{50} is articulated in four chapters, which focus on the main manifestations of this part of the soul: sense (De

\textsuperscript{45} Cf. Psychologia empirica, § 48, pp. 30–31 (GW II 5).
\textsuperscript{46} Cf. ibid., § 49, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{47} Cf. ibid., § 54, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{48} Cf. ibid., § 55, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{49} Cf. ibid., § 53, pp. 32–33.
\textsuperscript{50} Cf. ibid., § 54, p. 33.
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sensu), imagination (De imaginatione), fictive faculty (De facultate fingendi), and memory, forgetting and reminiscence (De memoria, oblivione et reminiscencia). In each chapter Wolff defines the single faculties, pointing out the peculiarity of their representations, but focuses primarily on his attempt to identify the set of rules and laws that govern each specific field.

Sensation (sensatio) is “perceptio per mutationem, quae sit in organo aliquo corporis nostri qua tali, intelligibili modo explicabilis” (the perception which originates by means of a modification which occurs in a certain organ of our body), so that the facultas sentiendi is the faculty of perceiving external objects insofar they provoke a mutation in our sense organs, and can therefore concern the five usual senses. Wolff then lists a facultas videndi (sight), a facultas audiendi (hearing), a facultas olfaciendi (smell), a facultas gustandi (taste), and a facultas tangendi (touch). All these faculties are subjected to the rules of sensations (regulae sensationum), which are a species of the rules of perceptions, according to which one can explain sensations occurring in the soul.

Wolff lists them as follows, inspired by the idea that the soul behaves in a merely passive way towards its sensations: “Anima in sensationibus suis nihil im-mutare potest, nec unam alteri pro arbitrio substitueret valet, dum objectum sensibile in organum sensorium agit”; “Si objectum sensibile in organum sensorium rite constitutum agit; necessario sentimus, seu in animae potestate positum non est, utrum velit sentire, nec ne”; “Si organum sensorium ab objecto avertimus, sensatio impeditur”; “Sensatio enim fortior ita obscura-re potest debiliorem, ut hanc prorsus non appercipiamus” (the stronger sensation can obscure the weaker, up to the point that we don’t apperceive it anymore). These rules are in turn subjected to the law of sensations, again a species of the laws of perceptions, which provides the general principles (principia generalia) that govern the corresponding rules.

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51 Cf. ibid., §§ 56–90, pp. 34–53.
52 Cf. ibid., §§ 91–137, pp. 53–90.
53 Cf. ibid., §§ 138–172, pp. 90–120.
55 Cf. ibid., § 65, pp. 37–38.
56 Cf. ibid., § 67, p. 38.
58 Cf. ibid., § 83, p. 49.
59 Ibid., § 78, p. 43.
60 Ibid., § 79, p. 45.
61 Ibid., § 80, p. 46.
62 Ibid., § 83, p. 48.
63 Cf. ibid., § 84, p. 49.
Si in organo aliquo sensorio ab objecto aliquo sensibili quaedam producitur mutatio; in mente eidem coexistit sensatio per illam intelligibili modo explicantem, seu rationem sufficientem, cur sit et cur talis sit, in illa agnoscens (If in a certain sense organ a modification is produced by a certain sensitive object; in the mind there coexists a sensation that can be explained by means of that modification, or which has in it the sufficient reason that determines it to be, and to be as it is)\textsuperscript{64}.

According to this law there is a constant correlation between the sensation in the soul and the modification in the body, that Wolff describes as an empirical evidence: whenever a modification is produced in the body, a sensation arises in the soul. And this coexistence seems to follow the general principle stated by the law of sensations, since the sensitive representation of the soul has its sufficient reason in the modification of the body, and we explain the first by means of the second. Nevertheless the ground of this connection moves beyond the borders of empirical psychology, and belongs rather to the realm of the metaphysical hypothesis developed a priori by reason on the basis of the empirical evidences.

The following chapter concerns \textit{imaginatio}, i.e. the faculty to reproduce in the mind the ideas of sensitive objects when they are no longer affecting our senses.\textsuperscript{65} The ideas of objects we once perceived but which are now absent are called \textit{phantasmata}.\textsuperscript{66} As in the case of the \textit{ideae sensuales}, Wolff also investigates for these new kind of representations the rules and laws the mind is subjected to when it operates on them through connections or separations. The rules Wolff mentions concern first of all the tight link between \textit{phantasmata} and \textit{sensationes}, since the former always proceed from the latter,\textsuperscript{67} and the reiteration or duration of the latter facilitates the production of the former.\textsuperscript{68} These rules work under the general principle of association on the basis of the contiguity and resemblance of representations; Wolff calls this general principle the \textit{law of imagination}, which affirms that if we perceive more things at one time, and the perception of one of those things is reproduced either by the sensation or by the imagination, the imagination itself produces the perception of the other thing too\textsuperscript{69}. But the imagination doesn’t only work when we are awake; indeed this is the faculty that rules the association of our representations that occurs in dreams. During the sleep \textit{phantasmata} of the imagination are connected by means of that same rule that works when we are awake, even though now we are unable to distinguish them from the \textit{ideae sensulae} (sensations) they originated from, and we then represent absent things as if they were present to us.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., § 85, p. 49. \\
\textsuperscript{65} Cf. ibid., § 92, pp. 54–55. \\
\textsuperscript{66} Cf. ibid., § 93, p. 55. \\
\textsuperscript{67} Cf. ibid., § 106, p. 65. \\
\textsuperscript{68} Cf. ibid., §§ 107, 108, 113, pp. 65–74. \\
\textsuperscript{69} Cf. ibid., §§ 104, 117, pp. 61–63, 76. \\
\textsuperscript{70} Cf. ibid., § 127, p. 81. For a detailed analysis of the working of the imagination in dreams, cf. Sonia
Whereas this proceeding of the imagination *reproduces* our past sensations in a series according to the law of association, the *facultas fingendi* behaves in a more autonomous way, *producing new phantasmata* which have no direct connection to the original sensations.\(^{71}\) The main difference between the reproductive and productive acts of these faculties consists in the possibility the mind has to intervene in the connection of the representations; indeed the imagination reproduces the former sensations in the same order or connection they were experienced in, whereas in the case of the fictive faculty the mind has the capacity to change their order, as it happens in different forms of artworks.\(^{72}\) This faculty is also responsible for the production of ‘artificial signs’, i.e. of *phantasmata* which are meant to refer to certain things they have no natural connection to. These Wolff calls *figurae hieroglyphicae*.\(^{73}\)

The last chapter of the *facultas cognoscendi inferior* concerns the faculty of *memory*, which Wolff distinguishes from the reproductive imagination we have just mentioned, on the basis of its capacity to *recognize* what the mind reproduced as something that has already been represented.\(^{74}\) “*Ideam reproductam recognoscere dicimur, quando nobis conscii sumus, nos eam jam antea habuisse*” (We say we recognize a reproduced idea when we are conscious we have already had it before)\(^{75}\). Stressing the role played by consciousness in the exercise of memory Wolff puts this faculty on a higher rank than the bare imagination, to whom it is thought necessarily connected;\(^{76}\) memory is actually the capacity the mind has to ‘recall’ and retain past representations ‘on demand’. Wolff defines therefore *good memory* (*bona memoria*) as the capacity to recall our past representations *easily* (*facile*) and to bear them in mind for a long time (*diu*).\(^{77}\) It can work on different degrees depending on the time and the number of acts required to recall and to bear in mind the *phantasmata* of the imagination.\(^{78}\) The *magnitude of memory* (*magnitudo memoriae*) concerns, on the contrary, the amount of reproduced ideas the mind can hold in itself at one time. Both the *bonitas* and the *magnitudo memoriae* can be improved by means of what Wolff, invoking a long tradition that goes back to ancient philosophy, calls *ars mnemonica*,\(^{79}\) i.e. the art of extending memory by means of actions that assist in reproducing and recognizing ideas (*artificium memoriae*).\(^{80}\) Forgetting (*oblivio*) and reminiscence (*reminiscencia sive recordatio*) are respectively the “impotentia ideas reproductas (consequenter res per eas

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\(^{71}\) Cf. *Psychologia empirica*, § 144, p. 97 (GW II 6).

\(^{72}\) Cf. *ibid.*, §§ 148–150, pp. 100–104.


\(^{75}\) *Ibid.*, § 173, p. 121.


\(^{77}\) Cf. *ibid.*, § 189, p. 129.


\(^{79}\) Cf. *ibid.*, § 204, p. 142.

\(^{80}\) Cf. *ibid.*, § 202, p. 141.
repraesentatas) recognoscendi” (*incapacity to recognize reproduced ideas* [and thereon the things they represent]), and the “facultas perceptiones præteritas mediate reproducendi et recognoscendi” (*the faculty to reproduce and recognize past perceptions in a mediate way*)\(^8\), i.e. by means of certain conditions that can concern the place and the time of the perceptions we had once.

The faculty of memory and its correlated capacity of the mind completes Wolff’s investigation of the inferior part of the cognitive faculty, which is related to the superior one by means of two ‘capacities’ of the soul that play a sort of intermediary role between the sensitive and the intellectual knowledge. These capacities are *attention* and *reflection*, and Wolff devotes to them the first of the four chapters of this new section of his work (“De attentione et reflexione”). *Attention* is the faculty of improving the degree of clarity in composite perceptions, i.e. of obtaining a clear or distinct representation of their internal parts.\(^8\) It implies an improvement of our *apperception*, which can be facilitated or hindered by many circumstances and means (e.g. hindered because of a temporary distraction due to the presence of stronger sensations and *phantasmata* in our soul; or, on the contrary, improved by means of enumeration and other artificial tricks). *Reflection* is the second intermediary level between sensitive and intellectual knowledge, and is defined by Wolff as the faculty to direct our attention to the different aspects of the things we perceive in order to compare them.\(^8\) Understood as the capacity the soul has in order to reflect on itself and on its actions, Wolff’s idea of reflection takes inspiration from what Locke identified as the second source of our simple ideas in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*,\(^8\) and it becomes the main instrument of the introspection at the basis of the investigation of empirical psychology.

The distinction in perception is what characterizes the activity of the intellect, which represents the *pars superior* of the *facultas cognoscendi*. The three following chapters of this section of Wolff’s work are devoted to the analysis of the nature of the intellect, and to its operations. Intellect is defined as the “facultas res distincte repraesentandi” (*the faculty of distinct representations*)\(^8\); the degree of the intellect increases in accordance with the degree of distinction of its representations; this capacity to perceive distinctly is also the ground of the “facultas abstrahendi”\(^8\), that Wolff defines as the capacity to conceive as separate what is connected in our representations and in the things we represent.\(^8\) Understood as the faculty of distinct representations, Wolff’s intellect is never *pure*, but always connected to the senses and to the imagina-

\(^8\) Cf. *ibid.*, § 257, p. 187.
\(^8\) *Psychologia empirica*, § 275, p. 197 (GW I 5).
\(^8\) Cf. *ibid.*, § 282, pp. 200–201.
tion, which provide it with obscure and confused representations it has to operate on in order to increase their degree of distinctness.  

According to Leibniz, Wolff distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge we can achieve by means of the intellect: the cognitio intuitiva, when we are immediately conscious of our ideas and of what they represent, and the cognitio symbolica, when we recur to words or other signs to refer to them. The introduction of signs in cognition allows to discover new unknown truths on the basis of the ones we already own (ars inveniendi), and is the origin of the ars characteristica combinatoria, which represents for Wolff, as for Leibniz, the ideal of a universal language in philosophy modeled on the one of algebra. The combination of signs connected to distinct notions will then ideally allow us to bestow the cognitio symbolica—as much as possible—with the immediateness and the degree of certainty of the cognitio intuitiva.

The path of the intellect towards the achievement of its distinct knowledge is described by Wolff in the wake of the traditional distinction adopted in logic between the “three operations of the intellect” (“De tribus intellectus operationibus in specie”), i.e. the notio cum simplici apprehensione (notion with simple apprehension, or concept), the judicium (judgement), and discursus (syllogism). This investigation represents the basis of Wolff’s so-called ‘psychologism’, i.e. the idea that the workings of the mind presented in logic are grounded in the nature of the mind as described in psychology. The gap between the investigations of the two disciplines has to be found in their different tasks: whereas psychology describes the functioning of the mind, inducing from the observation of its operations the rules they are subjected to, and therefore offers a natural logic of the intellect; artificial logic, from its point of view, prescribes the mind the laws it has to follow in executing its operations in order to achieve true knowledge.

The notio cum simplici apprehensione always concerns the capacity of the soul to connect the multiplicity of what we represent in the unity of a representation, i.e. to produce a concept as a general representation that includes the variety of its realizations; it can happen in an ‘intuitive’ way, when we form the distinct notions of genera and species connecting features two or more things have in common; or in a ‘symbolic’ way, when we choose a sign (e.g. a word) to express the distinct notion of a certain thing. The judicium is a form of comparison that states the agreement (affirmative judgment) or disagreement (negative judgment) between a subject and a predicate.

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89 Cf. ibid., § 286, p. 203.
90 Cf. ibid., § 289, pp. 204–205.
92 Cf. ibid., §§ 29–297, pp. 209–211.
93 Cf. ibid., § 312, pp. 226–228.
94 Cf. ibid., § 325 n, p. 236.
95 Cf. ibid., §§ 326–328, pp. 236–239.
and can concern both intuitive and symbolic knowledge insofar it concerns either the connection between our concepts, or the expression of that connection by means of signs or words.\textsuperscript{97} The \textit{discursus} is investigated in the form of the syllogism, which represents the connection of judgments expressed by means of words, i. e. in the realm of symbolic knowledge.\textsuperscript{98} As Wolff had already clarified in his \textit{Logica}, there are four types of syllogism (affirmative, negative, hypothetic and disjunctive) that he considers the natural ways in which our mind connects its judgments. The laws the mind follows in completing its reasoning, i. e. the general principles of this operation, are listed in § 374 and can be summarized in the general idea that the thing which belongs (or doesn't belong) to certain genera or species will present (or will not present) the same predicates of its genera and species, and vice versa.

In the final chapter of the section (“\textit{De dispositionibus naturalibus et habitibus intellectus}”),\textsuperscript{99} Wolff explains the grounds of some ‘natural’ dispositions and habits of the intellect, by means of the laws that govern the functioning of the mind. Among them Wolff mentions its capacity to elaborate the three types of knowledge we have already considered above (\textit{a priori, a posteriori} and \textit{mixta}), the \textit{ars inveniendi},\textsuperscript{100} the \textit{ars observandi et experimentandi},\textsuperscript{101} the \textit{artificia heuristica},\textsuperscript{102} the role of \textit{ingenium}.\textsuperscript{103} All these dispositions and habits are grounded in a fundamental idea Wolff declares at the end of the section: “Veritates universales inter se connectuntur” (Universal truths are connected to each other),\textsuperscript{104} since the \textit{nexus} between them has its ground in the same \textit{nexus universalis} he illustrated in his \textit{Cosmologia}, so that the \textit{veritas logica} is grounded in the \textit{veritas transcendentalis}.\textsuperscript{105} The faculty to intuit or perceive the \textit{nexus} between universal truths is what Wolff calls \textit{reason (ratio)},\textsuperscript{106} which he understands differently from Leibniz as a \textit{faculty} of the soul, and not as the object the soul is directed to when it perceives the chain of truths (\textit{catena veritatum}).\textsuperscript{107} Reason represents for Wolff the highest faculty of the mind, and therefore its knowledge is the highest form of knowledge ever possible. But reason can never operate without a direct and recurrent reference to experience, as the investigation in psychology shows at best.

\textsuperscript{97} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, § 350, pp. 257–258.
\textsuperscript{98} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, § 368, pp. 276–277.
\textsuperscript{100} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, §§ 454–462, pp. 356–359.
\textsuperscript{103} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, §§ 476–481, pp. 367–371.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Ibid.}, § 482, p. 371.
\textsuperscript{105} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, § 482 n. p. 371.
\textsuperscript{106} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, § 483, p. 372.
\textsuperscript{107} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, § 483 n. p. 372.
5 The appetitive faculty

The second part of the Psychologia empirica is entirely devoted to the facultas appetendi, which is again divided into an inferior part (sect. I), and a superior part (sect. II). The inferior part is presented in three chapters dealing respectively with Pleasure and displeasure, and the notion of good and evil ("De voluptate ac taedio, nec non notione boni ac mali"),

Sensitive appetite and aversion ("De appetitu sensitivo et aversatone sensitiva"), and Passions ("De affectibus"). The superior part consists again in three chapters: Will and 'noluntas' ("De voluntate ac noluntate"), Freedom ("De libertate"), Mind-Body relations ("De commercio inter mentem et corpus").

The division of the facultas appetendi in these two parts is grounded on the idea that "appetitus nascitur ex cognitione" (appetite originates from cognition), and follows therefore its articulation. In the sensitive realm, pleasure and displeasure are both defined as "intuitive cognitions", respectively of a true or apparent (false) perfection or imperfection. Since the cognition of the perfection or imperfection at the basis of the pleasure or displeasure is confused, we can mistake an apparent pleasure or displeasure for a true one. If considered objectively, in relation to external things, perfection is identified with beauty and imperfection with ugliness, whereas when it's considered in relation to the subject, what improves perfection is called good and what hinders it evil. Our judgment concerning what is good and what is evil is then related to what we perceive to be capable of improving or hindering our own perfection, and this judgment is itself related to the state of confusion or clarity of our perceptions. That is why the pleasures and displeasures we get from those perceptions can be either merely apparent or true, and therefore also what we judge as good or bad for us.

The same idea Wolff has of appetites relies on our judgment about what is good and what is evil, since he defines appetitus as "inclinatio animae ad objectum pro ratione boni in eadem percepti" (an inclination of the soul towards an object grounded on what it perceives to be good in it), and aversatio as "reclinatio animae ab objecto, pro ratione mali in eodem percepti" (an aversion of the soul from...
the object grounded on what it perceives to be bad in it)\textsuperscript{121}. Depending on the state of the perceptions of good and evil, appetites and aversions are sensitive or rational. These attitudes are both justified by means of the general tendency Wolff recognizes in the soul to strive at good and shy away from evil, what he presents as the law of appetite and aversion.\textsuperscript{122} The two inclinations of the soul are always accompanied by an act, a force, which is what Wolff calls affectus or passion, and concerns exclusively the manifestations of the sensitive part of the facultas appetendi, since it originates from a confused perception of good and evil.\textsuperscript{123} Passions are always connected to physical modifications in the body, which concern the movements of blood and nerves, and do not pertain to the analysis of the soul that psychology is in charge of; nevertheless Wolff’s investigation of the passions occupies, to be sure, the largest part of the whole second part of his work, since he specifies each possible manifestation of the variety of passions that can occur in the soul, labeling them under three different general categories: affectus iucundi, molesti, and mixti.\textsuperscript{124}

The section devoted to the superior part of the facultas appetendi presents the two central notions of Voluntas et Noluntas, which Wolff also calls appetitus et adversatio rationalis in order to show that they behave in the rational realm in the same way appetites and aversions behave in the sensitive one.\textsuperscript{125} Their sufficient reason is the distinct perception of good and evil,\textsuperscript{126} and the law that rules their acts prescribes that “Quicquid nobis repraesentamus tanquam bonum quoad nos, id appetimus” (we want what we represent distinctively as good for us)\textsuperscript{127}, and “Quicquid nobis repraesentamus tanquam malum quoad nos, id adversamur” (we don’t want what we represent distinctively as bad for us)\textsuperscript{128}. The accordance between the two parts of the facultas appetendi strives at a form of consensus,\textsuperscript{129} a harmony between what we desire and what is truly good for us, which is our highest scope in this life.

Beside pleasure and displeasure Wolff recognizes the possibility for the soul to find itself in a state of indifference he describes as a form of ‘balance’ (equilibrium) determined by the absence of any sufficient reason that can determine our inclination in one sense or in the other.\textsuperscript{130} As we have seen, our volitions and nolitions don’t have their sufficient reason directly in their objects, but in our judgments concerning the conformity of those objects to our perfection or imperfection, i.e. in our perceptions of what is good or bad in them for us. It means that external objects do not

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., § 581, p. 441.
\textsuperscript{122} Cf. ibid., §§ 903–907, pp. 683–684.
\textsuperscript{123} Cf. ibid., §§ 603–605, pp. 457–459.
\textsuperscript{124} Cf. ibid., §§ 608–854, pp. 460–648.
\textsuperscript{125} Cf. ibid., §§ 880–881, pp. 663–664.
\textsuperscript{126} Cf. ibid., §§ 887–890, pp. 669–671.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., § 904, p. 683.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., § 907, p. 684.
\textsuperscript{129} Cf. ibid., § 909, pp. 685–686.
\textsuperscript{130} Cf. ibid., § 925, pp. 694–695.
act directly on our will, and that therefore we can direct our will independently from any external constraint: we can, for example, want something we cannot have, or do something we don’t want to. Wolff explains these conditions by means of the *spontaneous* nature of the manifestations of our will: *spontaneitas* is the “principium sese ad agendum determinandi intrinsecum” (*internal principle that determines ourselves to act*)\(^{131}\), and “volitiones ac nolitiones animae spontaneae sunt” (*volitions and nolitions of the soul are spontaneous*)\(^{132}\). Spontaneity is for Wolff one of the preconditions of freedom, the others being the distinct cognition of the object, and the contingency of our volitions which are not determined necessarily by the essence of the soul, but can change in different circumstances.\(^{133}\) Wolff indeed defines the “freedom of the soul (*libertas animae*)” as the “facultas ex pluribus possibilibus sponte eligendi, quod ipsi placet, cum ad nullum eorum per essentiam determinata sit” (*faculty to choose what we like, spontaneously, and among many possibilities, since [the soul] is not determined by its essence to any of them*)\(^{134}\).

Both parts of the *Psychologia empirica*, especially the theory of sensation and of affects, show a remarkable interdependence between mind and body, since the former seems to be continuously determined by what occurs in the latter,\(^{135}\) and the latter seems to change continuously its state depending on what occurs in the soul.\(^{136}\) As we already remarked, the analysis of empirical psychology are not allowed to move beyond these mere descriptions; it is the task of the rational science of the soul to provide its metaphysical hypothesis *a priori*, but on the basis of an undeniable observation, in order to point out the *reason* that determines on a transcendental level what our observation shows on the level of experience. This is the highest realization of the *connubium* that animates Wolff’s investigation.

### 6 The legacy of empirical psychology

Wolff’s empirical psychology was immediately perceived as a pioneering way to investigate the soul and its capacities. The idea that the science of the soul can use the same method commonly adopted in the investigation of natural phenomena had a revolutionary echo even among a large number of Wolff’s contemporaries who were not well disposed towards the metaphysical frame of his empirical analysis. Especially remarkable was the attempt to develop the empirical investigation in psychology in the direction of a proper *experimental* science, which did not merely observe and describe mental phenomena, but carried out ‘experiments’ artificially, recreating certain

situations in the body in order to observe the ensuing behavior of the soul.\textsuperscript{137} Such an attempt was at the basis of the \textit{Versuch einer Experimental-Seelenlehre} published by the physician Johann Gottlob Krüger in Halle in 1756, who followed Wolff’s path, although he firmly rejected the metaphysical hypothesis of pre-established harmony.\textsuperscript{138} In the following decades the attempts to extend the investigations of the soul on an empirical basis were numerous and somehow successful, going from the so-called “rational physicians” (\textit{vernünftige Ärzte}) active in Halle from the 1750s, to the later \textit{Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde} by Karl Philipp Moritz (1783–1793).\textsuperscript{139} Beside these recoveries within the realm of a ‘science of the soul’, the empirical psychology elaborated in the wake of Wolff’s original idea had a further development in Kant’s project to expel such an empirical science, which only describes internal phenomena, from the realm of pure \textit{a priori} transcendental philosophy, in order to integrate it—as Kant claims in the “Architectonic” of the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}—in the field of anthropology.\textsuperscript{140} In fact his late \textit{Anthropology from an empirical point of view} (1798) collects in its first part (“The anthropological didactic”) Kant’s long-lasting reflections on Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s empirical psychology, which was sketched in principles on the model of Wolff’s.\textsuperscript{141} But the \textit{pragmatic} perspective of Kant’s anthropology assigns the original psychological investigation to a task that differs radically from that of Wolff’s empirical science of the soul. Kant’s “Anthropological didactic”, understood as “The way of cognizing the internal as well as the external of the human being” doesn’t aim at providing the empirical basis of a complete science of the soul.

\textsuperscript{137} It might be of some interest that the first French partial translation of Wolff’s \textit{Psychologia empirica} named it “\textit{psychologie expérimentale}”, cf. \textit{Psychologie ou traité sur l’âme, contenant les connoissances, que nous en donne l’expérience, par M. Wolff}, Amsterdam, 1745, Repr.: Hildesheim, 1998 (GW III 46).


conceived under the aegis of Wolff’s *connubium rationis et experientiae*; free from any
metaphysical implication, Kant’s *pragmatic* anthropology dismisses the ideal of an *a
priori* science of the soul in favor of a much broader comprehension of the human
being: it investigates the functioning of the mind in order to make a pragmatic use of
the knowledge thus achieved, i.e. in order to teach people what to do with themselves
as free agents, how to behave in society, and how to contribute to the realization of a
cosmopolitan society.

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