

Patrick R. Frierson. *Kant's Empirical Psychology*. Cambridge University Press 2014. 288 pp. \$99.99 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781107032651).

Patrick Frierson's book *Kant and Empirical Psychology* exemplifies the best tendencies of contemporary Kant scholarship. Frierson goes beyond the *Groundwork* and the three *Critiques* to reconstruct Kant's views on empirical psychology using the transcripts of Kant's lectures and his literary remains as well as his published works. The result is an important contribution to the scholarly literature on Kant's psychology, the sources of his anthropology, his views on the human sciences, and his approach to empirical science more generally. It is perhaps most important for the light it sheds on the relationship between Kant's empirical psychology and his moral philosophy.

Frierson begins with an introductory chapter in which he describes the background of Kant's empirical psychology (1-18), its status as a science (18-43), and the relationship between empirical psychology, transcendental psychology, rational psychology, and pragmatic anthropology (43-51). While the transcendental psychology articulated in Kant's three *Critiques* traces the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of knowledge, morality, and taste back to the faculties of cognition, desire, and feeling, his discussions of rational psychology present a more traditional account of our *a priori* knowledge of the soul as a thinking substance. Kant's empirical psychology and his pragmatic anthropology are more closely related to one another than they are to transcendental psychology or rational psychology, but there are still important differences between them. Frierson points out that Kant's pragmatic anthropology provides practical advice one can use in interactions with others, while his empirical psychology is meant to provide a theoretical explanation of the causal interactions between the world and the powers of the human mind (47). Many scholars suspect an empirical account of the causal interaction between the mind and the world would create problems for Kant's defense of freedom in his practical philosophy, but Frierson convincingly argues that Kant's views on empirical psychology and his practical philosophy are complementary (9-18). While Kant insists that freedom is a necessary condition of morality, he also recognizes that human actions are not always expressions of our autonomy. These actions are the effects of causes that can be understood mechanistically, because they are governed by the same causal laws that govern the natural world. Frierson shows that Kant recognized the affinity between empirical psychology and natural science, even though he denied that psychology could ever become a science in the strict sense. Frierson identifies a variety of reasons for this claim (18-43), but the most important reason Kant thinks empirical psychology cannot be a science is simply because it is empirical. Empirical sciences are based on particular, contingent experiences. As such, they lack the universal and necessary laws that sciences like logic, mathematics, physics, and metaphysics derive from *a priori* principles. Lacking these principles, empirical sciences try to formulate general principles that can be used to describe the mental lives of human beings and guide their interactions with the world.

In chapters two and three, Frierson present Kant's empirical account of human action, cognition, and moral motivation. His account is based on this schema: cognition → feeling → desire → action (56). The order of presentation in these chapters is a bit confusing, since Frierson discusses the relation between desire and action first, proceeds to discuss the relation between feeling and desire, and then moves on to a discussion of the differences between the higher and lower faculties of cognition, desire, and feeling. This presentation is helpful for explaining the role instincts, inclinations, and character play in desire, but it is confusing to focus so much on desire in chapter two, before the discussion of cognition in chapter three. When he does turn his attention to cognition, Frierson draws on Kant's lectures on anthropology, logic, and metaphysics to show that Kant believed

there were ‘empirical correlates of transcendental cognitive structures’ (86). Kant explains these correlates in his lectures, where he describes the proper function of the faculties and the ways in which our mental powers sometimes deviate from their proper function (92). In his discussions of the lower cognitive faculties of sensibility and the imagination, Frierson shows that Kant sought ‘to trace the origin of particular cognitions...to their occasioning causes and to discern the general laws that govern the cognitive powers...by which one state occasions its subsequent cognitive state’ (96-97). Kant’s attitude toward the higher cognitive faculties of understanding and reason is rather different, since their activity is spontaneous and proceeds independently of external causes. Still, he insists there are laws governing this activity, especially the way the understanding forms concepts and produces judgments. His account of empirical concept formation is schematic at best, but Kant states in a number of places that it involves logical acts of comparison, reflection, and abstraction that are triggered or occasioned, but not directly caused, by sensation (104). Once the understanding has produced a concept, it can be used in judgments, which are then linked together by principles of reason. Frierson stresses that Kant’s accounts of concept formation, judgment, and reasoning are normative rather than descriptive, because they stress how one ought to think if one is to avoid error.

Chapters four and five focus on Kant’s empirical account of moral motivation, which is primarily concerned with the feelings a moral agent ought to display. This discussion might seem out of place in chapter four, since it is situated after, rather than between, the chapters on cognition and action; yet any confusion this might cause is short-lived. Frierson does much in these chapters to demonstrate that there is, in fact, an empirical correlate of Kant’s moral philosophy in his empirical psychology. Focusing on the feeling of respect, Frierson argues that this feeling really does constitute an empirical source of moral motivation, against those who maintain that moral action cannot be motivated by anything empirical. He also argues that the empirical source of moral motivation is the immediate cause of moral action, contrary to those who maintain that the feeling of respect is an effect of our consciousness of the moral law. While he is sympathetic to alternative views, which he calls anti-empiricist and intellectualist, Frierson maintains that the same schema Kant uses to explain action in his empirical psychology also holds for moral motivation. Moral motivation begins with the cognition of the moral law, leads to feelings of respect, and produces a desire to act in accordance with the law (123). Frierson proceeds through each of these stages, showing that Kant thinks cognition of the moral law arises from a natural predisposition of personality (127-36); that this cognition generates feelings of respect because of the way our cognitive faculties are constituted (136-38); and that these feelings can be regarded as moral motivators, because they cause the desire to engage in moral action, following the cognition → feeling → desire → action schema. Frierson is careful to point out that feelings of respect are only the causes of the desire to act morally from an empirical psychological perspective and not from the practical perspective that Kant describes in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. From the practical perspective, one’s desires and actions must be determined by reason rather than feeling if they are to be moral, because it is only through reason that they can be morally justified. Yet this does not preclude the possibility of explaining moral desires and actions through psychological causes (146-50). These explanations do not contribute to the moral justification of desires and actions, but they can help us understand the psychological processes that accompany them.

Chapters six and seven address defects of cognition and volition. Many of Kant’s discussions of empirical psychology present an idealized version of human mental life, in which all of our faculties function precisely as they are supposed to. But he also treats cases in which our cognition and volition do not function normally or nominally, which helps to complete his account of empirical

psychology. Frierson focuses, first, on prejudice, noting that Kant distinguishes between prejudices and false judgments. Prejudices arise when provisional judgments are accepted as principles (191). And while it is important to note that accepting a provisional judgment as a principle may lead to false beliefs, Kant is just as interested in the psychological causes of prejudice as he is in their effects. By tracing the origin of prejudice back to the lower cognitive faculty, and the influence of sensibility on the understanding, Kant thinks he can show how it is that prejudices ‘deaden’ the higher faculties and prevent them from functioning as they ought to. He proposes similar accounts of other mental disorders, whether they are to be regarded as mental derangements, mental deficiencies, or mental illnesses (197-200). Each can be traced back to one of the cognitive faculties—the senses, imagination, wit, judgment, understanding, or reason – and shown to arise from heredity, environmental factors, or behavioral causes (205-10). These kinds of explanations might seem out of place in Kant’s moral philosophy, which emphasizes our rational autonomy; yet Kant understood that affects, passions, and human frailty can, in some cases, influence our willing. He characterizes affects and passions as ‘illnesses of the mind’ (216) because they can compromise our ability to will what reason commands. Human frailty gives rise to weakness of the will, which is perhaps best understood as a kind of irresoluteness, caused by a lack of stable maxims or general policies governing one’s will. To the extent that affects, passions, and human frailty interfere with our rational autonomy, they are subject to moral evaluation and we are morally responsible for the influence they exert on our will (248-56). Frierson shows that this constitutes an important point where Kant’s empirical psychology and his moral philosophy intersect.

Although Frierson’s book is excellent in most respects, there are a few ways in which it might have been improved. First, it would have been helpful if Frierson had paid more attention to the eighteenth century sources of Kant’s empirical psychology, since many of the positions he attributes to Kant have their origins in Wolffian textbooks and other works by his German contemporaries. It might also have been helpful if Frierson were more cautious about the material he draws from Kant’s lectures, since it is often based on the texts from which Kant lectured and may not always reflect his own views. Finally, it might have been helpful if Frierson had organized the chapters on Kant’s empirical account of cognition, feeling, desire, and action in the order indicated by the schema he proposes, since that would have provided a more direct route through Kant’s empirical psychology than the one he actually charts. While I think these alternatives might have been worth considering, Frierson’s book remains a thorough and compelling guide to Kant’s empirical psychology. A quick glance at the conclusion in chapter 8 will show that Frierson’s book is required reading for anyone interested in the subject.

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