

# **Rethinking the Relationship between Empirical Psychology and Transcendental Philosophy in Kant**

**Katharina T. Kraus (Notre Dame)**

forthcoming in *International Yearbook of German Idealism*

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the transcendental sources that Kant's philosophy is able to offer to empirical psychology as the study of the empirical aspects of the human mind. I argue that Kant's transcendental philosophy defines a set of distinctive conditions in terms of an idea of reason – the idea of the soul – which gives systematic unity to psychological knowledge. The idea of the soul primarily serves as the most general genus-concept of the domain of inner nature, i.e., the idea defines what counts as a psychological phenomenon to be investigated in empirical psychology. In addition, the idea of the soul serves as a placeholder for the complete species-concept of an individual person.

Dieser Artikel untersucht die transzendentalen Grundlagen der empirischen Psychologie als der empirischen Lehre vom menschlichen Gemüt nach Kant. Darin wird gezeigt, dass nach Kants Transzendentalphilosophie von der Vernunftidee der Seele spezifische Bedingungen abgeleitet werden können, die allem psychologischen Wissen eine systematische Einheit verleihen. Die Idee der Seele dient dabei hauptsächlich als allgemeinsten Gattungsbegriff der inneren Natur, i.e., die Idee bestimmt, was überhaupt als ein in der empirischen Psychologie zu untersuchendes Phänomen gilt. Zudem dient die Idee der Seele als Platzhalter für den vollständigen Artbegriff einer individuellen Person.

## **Introduction**

The relationship between transcendental philosophy and empirical psychology is a notoriously difficult and controversial issue in Kant. There seems to be some consensus with regard to their distinct subject matters. Transcendental philosophy

aims to uncover the necessary conditions of human cognition and morality that apply universally for every human thinker and agent. By contrast, empirical psychology – broadly speaking – seeks to explain the empirical-psychological features of human individuals, such as the actual operations of mental faculties, the temporal occurrence and causal relations of mental states, as well as the development and display of character traits.<sup>1</sup> Yet commentators differ greatly over the question of how exactly the two disciplines are related.

Kant himself is at pains to keep the two disciplines apart and occasionally warns us not to confuse his transcendental philosophy with matters of psychology and not to fall back on psychological accounts, if concerned with transcendental matters.<sup>2</sup> In other places, Kant points out how transcendental philosophy may illuminate or resolve certain puzzles and misconceptions held by empirical psychologists.<sup>3</sup> In yet other places, Kant seems to suggest that empirical psychology may even promote the aims of transcendental philosophy in that it provides empirical examples and hence some corroboration for his transcendental claims about the human mind.<sup>4</sup>

Kant's diverse comments on matters of psychology have led commentators to propose a variety of accounts of the relationship between transcendental philosophy and empirical psychology. Some argue that they are largely distinct enterprises, even to the extent that empirical psychology may not fall under the transcendental conditions of cognition, as explicated in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* [henceforth, *Critique*].<sup>5</sup> Some conclude that empirical psychology does not contain full-fledged objective knowledge (i.e., empirical cognition of objects) since it cannot be subject to the transcendental conditions of experience examined in transcendental philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Others see close interrelations between the two disciplines.<sup>7</sup> Some even concede that transcendental philosophy depends to some extent on some sort of empirical-

---

<sup>1</sup> Interpreters who subscribe to this or a similar characterization include Hatfield (2006), Schmidt (2008), Sturm (2009), Kitcher (2011), and Frierson (2014).

<sup>2</sup> E.g., CpR A53/B77-A55/B79, A152, A801/B829. Anth 7:135n, 141.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., CpR A120n, B153, A380, A848/B876, Anth 7:142.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., in the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories, Kant uses examples from perception to illustrate his arguments, e.g., the example of drawing a line, s. A102, B154-155.

<sup>5</sup> Mischel 1967; Nayak/Sotnak 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Washburn 1975; Schoenrich 1991; Westphal 2004.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., O'Neill (1984) and Schmidt (2008) propose a clear division of labour between transcendental philosophy and empirical psychology, recognizing the autonomy of each as well as their necessary interrelation. Schmidt (2008) interprets transcendental philosophy as "the study of universal and necessary principles of empirical cognition" and, correspondingly, "empirical cognitive psychology" as "the study of the success of any given human subject in any particular activity of judgment" (Schmidt 2008:463). In a similar vein, s. Hatfield (2006). Emundts (2007:205) construes empirical psychology as an "art of description" regarding the relations of mental states.

psychological knowledge.<sup>8</sup> What has been largely ignored in the debate is whether transcendental philosophy is able to discern a more specific set of conditions for empirical psychology in addition to (or perhaps partly in replacement of) the necessary conditions of empirical cognition. Are there distinctive conditions that follow from a transcendental investigation of empirical psychology, such as conditions on what it means to be a psychological person, to have mental states in time, and to develop an empirical character?

In what follows, I shall take seriously the view that transcendental philosophy is an investigation of the necessary conditions of *all* human knowledge, including psychological knowledge, and argue that transcendental philosophy specifies some distinctive conditions for empirical psychology. More specifically, I shall explore the transcendental sources that Kant's philosophy is able to offer for the conceptualization and cognition of psychological phenomena. For current purposes, I do not enter into a detailed discussion of the different conceptions of empirical psychology in the eighteenth century, nor do I assess the extent to which, for Kant, empirical psychology as an academic discipline could ever rise to the rank of a science.<sup>9</sup> Rather, I confine myself to an analysis of the type of knowledge that is produced by studying the empirical aspects of the human mind, namely *psychological knowledge*, and examine the conditions of this type of knowledge, according to Kant's Critical philosophy.

To this effect, I first introduce Kant's distinction between transcendental and empirical faculties in Section 1. In Section 2, I examine the way in which psychological knowledge is related to, but also distinct from, a specific type of experience, namely inner experience, i.e., the experience of one's inner appearances

---

<sup>8</sup> For Frierson, the material of empirical psychology "like all experience, is governed by the general transcendental categories", while "empirical psychology also serves transcendental philosophy by laying out the empirical influences on the development and exercise of proper reasoning, moral virtue, and the pursuit of happiness" (Frierson 2014:49-59). In a similar vein, Kitcher suggests that psychological knowledge is governed by the transcendental conditions of experience, but at the same time she demands that Kant should have acknowledged that transcendental philosophy is crucially informed by empirical psychology (Kitcher 2011:159). In her earlier account, Kitcher (1990) still proposes a transcendental psychology to bridge the gap between transcendental philosophy and empirical psychology.

<sup>9</sup> It is notoriously difficult to discern the exact notion of empirical psychology that Kant in fact had in mind or would have endorsed on the basis of his transcendental philosophy. It is not always clear in his Critical writings whether he uses the term to present his own views regarding matters of empirical psychology or to criticize the views of his contemporaries, such as Wolff and Baumgarten. For a survey of the different uses, s. Kraus/Sturm (2018:212-215), also Hatfield (2006). For a discussion of the scientific status of empirical psychology, s. Sturm (2009), Kraus (2018), and McNulty (forthcoming).

as given to inner sense. In Section 3, I argue that empirical psychology is conditioned, not only by the transcendental conditions of experience defined by the understanding, but in addition relies on more specific transcendental sources provided by reason. In particular, I show that the rational idea of the soul gives an indispensable guidance for the formation of psychological predicates and hence for the acquisition of psychological knowledge. This argument finally allows me, in Section 4, to identify the specific set of conditions that Kant's transcendental philosophy offers to make empirical psychology possible.

### **1. Transcendental Faculties and Empirical Faculties**

A centrepiece of Kant's Critical philosophy is the division of mental faculties. While Kant's view is broadly in line with the prevailing faculty psychology that was held by many of his rationalist and empiricist predecessors, Kant crucially departs from their views in developing a *hylomorphic* account of experience.<sup>10</sup> This account distinguishes between transcendental (or formal) and empirical (or in a broad sense "material") aspects of mental faculties contributing to experience. So Kant frequently introduces both a transcendental and an empirical variant of the major faculties, e.g., "*a priori* sensibility" (A21/B35) and the "empirical sense(s)" (A29/B35, see Anth 7:153ff.), the "transcendental faculty of imagination" (A102) (or "productive imagination", B152) and the "reproductive imagination" (which "belongs to psychology", B152), "transcendental apperception" and "empirical apperception" (A107). According to this hylomorphic account, a faculty is still seen as carrying out a mental operation and thereby generating representations. Yet these mental operations work not only upon *given* representational content, but importantly each faculty additionally contributes a characteristic *form* through which such representational content first becomes available to the mind. The faculty of sensibility, for instance, contributes the forms of space and time; the understanding contributes the categories (e.g., substance and causality), which are derived from the pure forms of judgment (e.g., categorical and hypothetical judgment).

---

<sup>10</sup> Many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers endorsed some version of faculty psychology, both the empiricist-minded, such as Locke and Hume, and the rationalist-minded, such as Wolff (1732) and Baumgarten (1739). For the historical context, s. Heßbrüggen-Walter (2004) and Falduto (2014).

Kant identifies three basic mental faculties and several derivative ones. The basic faculties are the faculty of *cognition*, *desire*, and *feeling*. The derivative faculties include: the senses, memory, understanding, reason, all of which belong to the power of cognition; the higher desires (e.g. rational motives) and lower desires (e.g. instincts, basic inclinations); the feeling of respect and the feelings of pleasure and pain, and so on. This tripartite division features prominently in Kant's lectures on rational and empirical psychology, which were closely modeled on the textbook written by Alexander Baumgarten, a resolute proponent of rational psychology.<sup>11</sup> In his Critical philosophy, Kant offers a transcendental justification for this tripartite structure in terms of three basic dependence relations that a faculty can have to its objects. Firstly, the faculty of cognition is directed at given, existentially independent objects in the world. Secondly, the faculty of desire aims for the realization of an object or state of affairs in the world and seeks to bring about the existence of the object that is represented by a desire. Thirdly, feelings of pleasure and displeasure are not directed at objects: they are subjective states in that they do not represent an object, though they may themselves be the effect of a subject's having a cognitive or conative relation to an object.<sup>12</sup>

According to Kant's Critical hylomorphic account of our possible experience of nature, a mental faculty can be described either transcendently qua its *form* or empirically qua the *representation* (or *representational content*) that it produces in or at a certain time. The former gives us "transcendental definitions" (*CJ* 5:177f. n.; cf. *CpracR* 5:9n.; *CJ (First Intro)* 20:205 f., 230n.).<sup>13</sup> Such transcendental definitions primarily give functional accounts: each mental faculty exerts a characteristic mental activity (or function) and thereby produces a characteristic type of representation in accordance with its form. For instance, sensibility's function is to receive sensory content in the form of space and time, the understanding's function is to generate (pure or empirical) judgments in accordance with the logical forms of judgment, and so on.

---

<sup>11</sup> Baumgarten (1739). I will not discuss Kant's pre-critical account of rational psychology, nor his later critique and reject thereof. For discussion, s. Hatfield (2006), Kitcher (20011), and Dyck (2014).

<sup>12</sup> S. *CJ* 5:189 and *CpracR* 5:9n.

<sup>13</sup> In the *CpracR* (5:9n), Kant argues that in ethical disputes one should presuppose definitions of the basic faculties of desire and feeling that are neutral with regard to the ethical theory that one defends. This is precisely what his "transcendental definitions" of desire and feeling are supposed to be. Although these definitions originally borrowed the very concepts of desire and feeling from psychology, psychology cannot provide such transcendental definitions. For an opposite view, s. Frierson (2014:2); for further discussion, s. Kraus/Sturm (2018).

The transcendental definition of a faculty applies universally to all human beings, i.e., all beings that are assumed to have the same mental faculties.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, a transcendental faculty can be understood as a *type* of faculty that, characteristically, gives rise to a particular *type* of representation (i.e. a representation in the faculty's characteristic form) and that is (or can be) realized by all human minds. Such transcendental definitions, though not derived from experience, can be corroborated through empirical observation of individuals.<sup>15</sup>

Transcendental philosophy enquires into the necessary conditions that must be in place in order for a faculty to fulfil its characteristic function. It examines each faculty and its interrelation with other faculties with respect to form. In the *Critique*, which focuses on the faculties of cognition, Kant agrees with others in arguing that the characteristic forms of each cognitive faculty, viz. space, time, and the categories, determine the transcendental conditions of experience: these conditions *must* be fulfilled in order for the resulting cognition to be *able* to truthfully represent an object of experience.

In turn, an empirical faculty can now be understood as the concrete realization or implementation of the corresponding transcendental faculty, or function, in a human individual. That is, the empirical faculty is the particular *token* of a transcendental faculty that operates within an individual mind and that produces the representations occurring in the individual's empirical consciousness.<sup>16</sup> More precisely, these representations "as modifications of the mind [...] belong to inner sense" (A99) and hence give rise to so-called inner appearances (*innere Erscheinungen*), or what in contemporary philosophy is commonly called *mental states*. This means that the operations of empirical faculties can be observed primarily in terms of the states in empirical consciousness they produce. By actively attending to these states we can then become conscious of them in inner perception (*innere Wahrnehmung*).

---

<sup>14</sup> I leave aside any speculations about the existence of non-human beings with the same or similar mental faculties, such as angels, God, or non-rational animals.

<sup>15</sup> Note that, while the transcendental definitions of these three basic faculties are presupposed *a priori* in Kant's system, their real existence in each individual case is not secured *a priori*, but has to be confirmed *a posteriori*. In this sense, the three basic faculties give rise to psychological predicates (e.g., "cognitive", "conative", and "emotional"), rather than to transcendental concepts that express transcendental conditions of experience.

<sup>16</sup> Schmidt (2008) cashes out the relationship between transcendental and empirical faculties in terms of "configuration" or "structure": a transcendental faculty provides the configuration or structure of an empirical faculty, whereas the empirical faculty carries out mental operations defined by this configuration. I take her account to be broadly in line with mine.

Empirical psychology inquires into the nature of these empirical faculties and aims to describe how such faculties actually operate. In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* [henceforth, *Anthropology*], Kant states that the goal of psychological investigations is to examine the level of “appropriateness” of our empirical faculties, that is the extent to which we appropriately exercise “[c]orrect understanding, *practiced* judgment and *thorough* reason” (Anth 7:198).<sup>17</sup> Empirical psychology derives such descriptions primarily from the self-observation of individuals and thereby pays particular attention to the *specific variations* that mental operations show both across different individuals and across different times within one and the same individual.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, empirical psychology pursues public knowledge and aims at generating sufficiently *general* descriptions of the workings of empirical faculties in general. In the best case, it discovers *psychological laws of experience* that capture lawful, efficient-causal relations between inner appearances, which apply to everyone or at least in all sufficiently similar cases.<sup>19</sup>

This first gloss of empirical psychology already reveals an intrinsic tension. On the one hand, the acquisition of psychological knowledge relies on the self-observation of individual minds with regard to their subjective states of consciousness. On the other hand, for such self-observations to give rise to objectively valid psychological knowledge, they must already rely on the availability of general psychological concepts that apply objectively across different individuals. Yet such general psychological concepts are first acquired through general psychological studies comparing different individuals. *Prima facie*, there is thus a tension between the subjective validity and specificity of self-observation, on the one hand, and the objective validity and generality of psychological concepts and descriptions, on the other hand. I explore this tension further in a closer analysis of psychological knowledge in the next section, before I then show, in Section 3, how this tension can be resolved by means of a transcendental investigation. I shall argue that this tension can be overcome if one acknowledges that both specific self-observations and general psychological descriptions presuppose a common guiding principle, namely the idea of the soul.

---

<sup>17</sup> On psychology as a study of mental disorders, s. Schmidt (2008:470); Frierson (2014:189-258).

<sup>18</sup> S. “In anthropology, experiences are appearances united according to laws of understanding, and in taking into consideration our way of representing things” (Anth 1:142).

<sup>19</sup> S. “psychology (a sum of all inner perceptions under laws of nature)” (Anth 1:141).

## 2. Psychological Knowledge and Inner Experience

What for Kant counts as psychological knowledge? In order to answer this question it is necessary to understand the relation of psychological knowledge to a particular type of experience, namely *inner experience*. In his Critical writings, Kant offers only scattered remarks on inner experience, covering a variety of phenomena, ranging from consciousness of one's passing perceptions, thoughts, desires, and feelings, to the temporal determination of one's own mental states, as well as the empirical cognition of oneself qua more general psychological properties, including one's character traits.<sup>20</sup>

What makes all these phenomena distinctively psychological is the fact that they all involve mental states, i.e., inner appearances, though they may not be fully reducible to such mental states and may in addition have accompanying behavioural components and actions. All psychological phenomena, therefore, rely on *inner sense*, i.e., the part of sensibility “by means of which the mind intuits itself, or its inner state” (CpR A22/B37). On Kant's view, mental activities produce mental states, which then occur as inner appearances under the form of inner sense, i.e., time, in empirical consciousness. These mental states are the primary objects of our *inner perception* (*innere Wahrnehmung*) or *self-observation* (*Selbstbeobachtung*).<sup>21</sup> Through inner perception we thus become aware of our own mental activities only in terms of their inner appearances, such as a particular perception, thought, desire, or feeling. Based on inner perception, inner experience then is experience of such inner appearances.<sup>22</sup> Yet inner experience requires something more if it is to be empirical

---

<sup>20</sup> In the *Critique*, Kant also uses locutions such as “determining my own existence in time” (CpR Bx1; B157n; B430-431), “cognizing myself as I appear to myself” (CpR B68; B158), and “self-cognition”. Kant uses the term “self-cognition” (*Selbsterkenntnis*) rarely in the sense of empirical cognition of oneself (e.g., Religion 6:75, CpR B421), but more often in the sense of transcendental (or philosophical) cognition of the nature and limits of human reason (e.g., CpR B509, B763, B877, Prol 4:328; CpracR 5:86). As to more general psychological properties, s. for instance “his *inner experiences* (of grace, of temptations)” (Anth 7:134).

<sup>21</sup> I take “inner perception” and “self-observation” to be by and large co-extensive. E.g. Anth 7:134; 7:141ff., CpR A342/B401. Kant mainly conceives of inner experience in the *narrow sense* as experience of oneself “from within” without drawing on self-directed external sources of information, such as behavioural observation or testimony of others. It should be distinguished from experience about oneself *in the broad sense*, which may additionally draw on external sources, such as the observation of one's bodily state or of one's behaviour, and the testimony of one's character traits by others. Sturm (2017) sees this broader notion mainly at play in the *Anthropology*.

<sup>22</sup> S. “inner sense, which contains a manifold of determination that make an inner *experience* possible” (Anth 7:134n).

cognition of oneself, that is – according to Kant’s general theory of experience – if it is to yield objectively valid empirical judgments about one’s psychological features.<sup>23</sup>

In the *Anthropology* and related notes, which contain the most detailed account of inner experience, Kant suggests that inner experience is made possible as empirical cognition by some kind of “reflection” on inner appearances. He is ambiguous as to what exactly this “reflection” consists in, as some passages suggest that it requires (a) reflection according to the concepts of the understanding or (b) reflection under general (psychological) laws of nature; other passages suggest that it requires (c) reflection yielding a concept of oneself. Each of these options is supported by one of the following passages:

(a) an empirical intuition [becomes...] through reflection and the concept of understanding arising from it, [...] inner experience (Anth 7:142)

(b) [inner sense] belongs to psychology (a sum of all inner perceptions under laws of nature) and establishes inner experience (Anth 7:141)

(c) The inner sense is not yet cognition of myself, but we must first have appearances through it, then we first make a concept of ourselves through reflexion on [these appearances], which eventually results in empirical cognition, i.e., inner experience. (LB- Reicke, p. 1)<sup>24</sup>

This ambiguity in Kant’s account of inner experience, I submit, is due to the same tension that I have diagnosed above with respect to empirical psychology. On the one hand, inner experience is had by an individual person and based on the person’s subjective consciousness of her own mental states. On the other hand, inner experience, if it is to be empirical cognition of an object, makes a claim to an objectively valid judgment, i.e., a judgment that is valid for everyone and that is about some empirical reality.

In reply to this tension, Kant suggests that inner experience can be empirical cognition of object, i.e., “knowledge of the human being through experience” in the passage below, only if it involves “the assertion of certain propositions that concern human nature” in general:

[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

---

<sup>23</sup> I here use the notion of *psychological features* to refer both to relatively short-lived, frequently fluctuating *mental states*, such as passing representations in empirical consciousness, and relatively stable, long-term *psychological properties* that characterize the whole person, such as character traits.

<sup>24</sup> S. also “All my inner experience is a judgment in which the predicate is empirical and the subject is *I*.” (Refl 5453 18:186, my translation).

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*. (*Anth* 7:143)

In this passage, Kant acknowledges that observing one's own inner appearances is the indispensable starting point of any acquisition of *inner experience as empirical cognition*, but it remains insufficient if it is not at the same time assisted by general propositions concerning human nature. In self-observation, it is difficult to clearly separate one's different states and to observe them "by will" (*Metaphysical Foundations* 4:471). Moreover, self-observation easily distorts and "displaces the state of the observed object" (*Metaphysical Foundations* 4:471), is prone to error, illusions, "enthusiasm and madness" (*Anth* 7:132) and may involve "the tendency to accept the play of ideas of inner sense as experiential cognition, although it is only a fiction" (*Anth* 7:161). Due to the danger of distortions and self-manipulation, Kant advises us in the passage above to interpret our own inner appearances only within a more comprehensive theory of human nature in general. Only if we assert "certain propositions concerning human nature" in general, can we finally accomplish adequate empirical cognition of oneself. Yet having such general propositions regarding human nature already presupposes a general classification of mental states and psychological properties. That is, it presupposes general psychological knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

The tension can now be understood as follows: while psychological knowledge concerning human nature in general relies on inner experience of individuals as its "material" source, inner experience can be understood as objectively valid cognition of one's psychological features only if some general psychological propositions are already accepted as a background theory within which one can reliably assess the truth of one's specific inner experiences. Note, furthermore, that psychological propositions cannot be gained by simply comparing the self-observations of different individuals because for one thing self-observation concerns the private items of an individual's consciousness, which need to be communicated in order to be accessible

---

<sup>25</sup> There is some controversy as to the primacy of inner experience over general (psychological) knowledge in this passage. While Frierson (2014:37, fn.43) endorses that "observation of inner appearances is still the ultimate and primary basis" and is optimistic that undistorted inner experience is possible, Sturm (2009) doubts whether inner experience can ever be a reliable source of knowledge and, therefore, argues that knowledge can be produced only on the basis of "a general, anthropological theory of human nature" (s. Kraus/Sturm 2017:219-220).

for others. Yet such communication and subsequent comparison already presuppose a generally accepted conceptual framework by means of which mental states can be expressed.<sup>26</sup> Hence, accomplishing inner experience as empirical cognition already presupposes generally applicable psychological concepts, which in turn, however, can be acquired only on the basis of general psychological descriptions. Does this mutual dependence of general psychological knowledge and specific inner experience pose a vicious circle, or can we resolve this tension? I suggest that a transcendental investigation of the way in which we acquire psychological concepts, which are needed both for psychological knowledge and for inner experience, will help to dispense worries regarding any vicious circularity in Kant's account.

### **3. The Conceptualisation of Psychological Phenomena**

The mutual dependence between general psychological knowledge and inner experience resembles the problem of empirical concept formation in general. In order to first acquire an empirical concept, we need to rely on some prior experience of particular objects that instantiate the concept. In turn, in order to take one's experience to be a true representation of an object (regarding outer or inner matters), we need to have available empirical concepts that serve as the constituents of empirical judgments.<sup>27</sup> Kant tackles the problem of concept formation within his theory of reason, and in particular with respect to reason's regulative principles of systematicity, as introduced in the Appendix to the Dialectic (*Critique*). In what follows, I sketch Kant's approach to empirical concept formation in general, then apply it to the case of the acquisition of psychological predicates, and finally show that this approach is capable of resolving the apparent circularity between general psychological knowledge and inner experience.

#### **3.1. Three General Principles of Concept-Formation**

---

<sup>26</sup> Here I assume that while behavioural states may express mental states to some extent, for Kant mental states are not fully reducible to externally observable states (see Kraus 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Recall that for Kant experience is empirical cognition, i.e., a judgment about a sensible object. Note that it may be possible to have experience on the basis of the categories alone, e.g., experience of spatial or temporal quantities. Yet, as soon as experience is about, or distinguishes between, specific kinds of realities (or qualities), it requires empirical concepts. In order for empirical cognition to give rise to knowledge, i.e., to taking a judgment to be true on objectively sufficient grounds, it requires conditions of adequacy (or truth conditions) of these empirical concepts (s. A821/B849). On the distinction between empirical cognition and knowledge in Kant, s. Watkins/Willaschek (2017).

Kant famously argues that the content of our empirical concepts can never be rich enough to ensure the full determination of individual objects.<sup>28</sup> Rather, concepts always remain to some extent *general* representations, which relate to objects only by means of intuitions that contain common marks. In conceptualising our intuitions, we attempt to track these common marks by forming adequate empirical concepts.<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, we aim for concepts with increasingly broad empirical content so as to grasp more and more similarities between objects. On the other hand, we look for concepts with increasingly rich empirical content so as to grasp more and more details of a particular object.

The theory of concept formation that Kant depicts in his *Lectures on Logic* and in the Appendix to the *Transcendental Dialectic (Critique)* suggests that such specification of conceptual content can be meaningful only within a *system of concepts*: the empirical content of a concept should be understood in relation to “higher”, more general concepts, to “lower”, more specific concepts, and to “neighbouring” concepts that denote similar kinds.<sup>30</sup> The acquisition of concepts is thus more properly understood as an ongoing complex activity that is implemented in light of ongoing experience by three complementary activities: taken together the activities of generalisation, specification, and interconnection lead to an increasingly comprehensive, increasingly specific, and increasingly dense *system* of empirical concepts.<sup>31</sup>

To further fill in the details of his account, Kant argues, in the Appendix, that one aim of reason – the highest faculty of cognition – is to seek “a certain systematic unity of all possible empirical concepts” (A654/B680). Kant introduces three principles of reason that enable us to seek such a systematic unity of concepts. These are the principles of *homogeneity* (or “of the *sameness of kind* in the manifold under higher genera”), *specification* (or “of the *variety* of what is same in kind under lower

---

<sup>28</sup> A655/B683, L-Log/Wiener 24:911, L-Log/Jäsche 9:97. For an excellent discussion of Kant’s argument for this claim, s. Watkins (2013). Kant rejects Leibniz’s thesis of complete conceptual determination, according to which a complete concept fully determines individual, but is only fully knowable by an infinite mind, viz. God.

<sup>29</sup> I remain neutral as to whether the relevant marks are *given* in intuition or whether the marks are first *found* through synthetic activity of the mind. For insightful discussions, see Longuenesse (1998), Ginsborg (2006) and Anderson (2014).

<sup>30</sup> Kant’s idea of a systematic unity of concepts follows the “scholastic” tradition that assumes a hierarchical order in terms of higher genus and lower species concepts (s. A652/B680).

<sup>31</sup> For excellent discussions of empirical concept-formation in Kant, s. Ginsborg (2006, 2017) and Anderson (2014).

species”), and *continuity* (or “of the *affinity* of all concepts”) (A657/B685).<sup>32</sup> The principle of homogeneity guides us in seeking, for every pair of concepts, a genus-concept defining a higher kind under which both these concepts can be subsumed. This principle serves “the interest in [enlarging] the *domain* (the universality)” of genus concepts (A654/B682). The principle of specification guides us in finding for every given concept further sub-concepts (or species concepts). This principle serves “an interest in *content* (the determinacy [of concepts])” by finding ever-richer species-concepts that contain ever-more fine-grained determinations of an individual object (A654/B682).<sup>33</sup> By assuming continuity between different concepts, we finally arrive at an interconnected hierarchical system that proceeds, not only vertically from elementary genus concepts to fine-grained species concepts, but also horizontally between “neighbouring” concepts.<sup>34</sup>

Consider, for instance, the concept <tree>. If taken together with the concept <shrub>, we may subsume the two concepts under the common genus-concept <plant>; if taken together with <animal>, we may subsume the two concepts under the common genus-concept <living being>. Looking for further varieties of <tree>, we may consider lower, more specific concepts that can be subsumed under <tree>, such as <oak>, <birch>, and <linden>. Finally, searching for continuity among concepts, we may consider further more general concepts such as <trunk>, <root>, <branches>, and <leaves>. These concepts are, as it were, horizontally, rather than vertically, connected, and each of them is contained *in* both <tree> and <shrub> (which is just to say that both <tree> and <shrub> can be subsumed *under* them).

Primarily, these principles of homogeneity, specification, and continuity are introduced as *logical* principles of systematicity that concern only the logical relations among concepts and that abstract from the concepts’ relation to objects. By means of them, reason pursues its subjective interest of acquiring a system of concepts.<sup>35</sup> In addition, reason – as one of the cognitive faculties – aims at a truthful description of nature, which seemingly can be accomplished by seeking a systematic unity of empirical cognitions. So Kant argues that each of the logical principles is applicable to nature only if “a transcendental principle is presupposed, through which such a

---

<sup>32</sup> S. A652/B680-A668/B696; CJ 5:185-186.

<sup>33</sup> L-Log/Jäsche 9:96-97; also L-Log/Blomberg 24:240-260; L-Log/Vienna 24:905-913; L-Log/Dohna-Wundlacken 24:755.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed discussion in connection to Kant’s Logic lectures, s. Watkins (2013).

<sup>35</sup> They are also called “principle[s] of parsimony” or “principle[s] of economy for reason” (A650/B678).

systematic unity, as pertaining to the object itself, is assumed *a priori* as necessary” (A650-1/B679-80). Accordingly, Kant defines three corresponding transcendental principles of homogeneity, specification, and continuity, which do *not* abstract from the concepts’ relations to empirical objects. Hence, reason demands not only the systematic unity of concepts, but also the systematic unity of all cognition concerning nature itself.

Kant justifies the assumption of transcendental principles by arguing that reason’s principles of systematicity are “objective but in an indeterminate way” (A680/B708). He explains this indeterminate objective validity in the following way:

[such a principle functions] not as a constitutive principle for determining something in regard to its direct object, but rather as a merely regulative principle and maxim for furthering and strengthening the empirical use of reason by opening up new paths into the infinite (the undetermined) with which the understanding is not acquainted, yet without ever being the least bit contrary to the laws of its empirical use. (A680/B708)

According to this passage, reason’s principles of systematicity are only regulative, rather than constitutive insofar as they complement the constitutive principles of the understanding by providing guidelines for the discovery of new pieces of cognition, without determining objects of experience as such. Regulative principles, unlike constitutive principles of the understanding, do not define conditions of the very possibility of experience and hence do not determine generic features of objects of experience. Nonetheless, they define necessary conditions on experience, namely in terms of guiding rules for the understanding, if experience is to amount to empirical knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

So Kant continues his line of argument by making the stronger claim that reason’s principles of systematicity play an epistemic role for the justification of empirical knowledge claims. They lead reason to serve as an arbiter of empirical truth. More precisely, Kant argues that “we simply have to presuppose the systematic unity of nature as objectively valid and necessary”, since otherwise we would have “no coherent use of the understanding” with regard to empirical cognition and hence

---

<sup>36</sup> There is an ongoing debate regarding the regulative status of these principles. Some commentators take them to be merely optional guides for experience, e.g., Guyer (1990), Grier (2001); others take them to be necessary for the very possibility of experience, e.g., Buchdahl (1967), Abela (2006). Based on the textual evidence I provide above, it seems safe to assume that they are at least necessary conditions for those experiences that are supposed to give rise to empirical knowledge, i.e., empirical cognition that is taken to be true on subjectively and objectively sufficient grounds (see fn. 38 below; also, e.g., Zuckert 2017).

“no sufficient mark of empirical truth” (A651/B679).<sup>37</sup> This suggests that reason’s epistemic role lies in providing principles of systematicity according to which we can test the coherence of our empirical judgments and then develop coherence criteria of empirical truth.<sup>38</sup>

While a further discussion and evaluation of Kant’s line of argument regarding the assumption of these transcendental principles goes beyond the scope of this paper, the upshot for current purposes is as follows: For Kant, empirical concept formation and the acquisition of systematic empirical cognition can be understood as ongoing complex activities, one complementing the other. The formation of empirical concepts is viewed as an ongoing activity of systematization according to the principles of generalisation, specification, and continuity. The formation of concepts is informed by the ongoing activity of acquiring a system of empirical cognition. In light of ongoing experience, our system of empirical concepts is continuously assessed and refined as to its adequacy by adding (or revising) increasingly comprehensive genus-concepts, increasingly determinate species-concepts, and further intermediary concepts. In turn, newly acquired empirical cognition can be assessed as to its truth in light of a system of already accepted empirical cognitions, which builds on the system of empirical concepts. Based on the outcome of this assessment, the new cognition can then be asserted and added to the system, or rejected as untrue, or in rare cases may lead to the revision of already accepted cognitions.<sup>39</sup>

Despite making the greatest effort of completing our system of concepts, our conceptual abilities are severely limited insofar as we can never fully conceptually grasp a unique individual. Although Kant denies that we can ever be in the possession of a lowest species-concept, he affirms the existence of a highest genus-concept, the

---

<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere, Kant explicates the coherent use of the understanding in terms of goals set by reason: reason has an “indispensably necessary regulative use, namely that of directing the understanding to a certain goal” – a goal, which, “although it is only an idea”, is needed to find the greatest unity among cognitions (A644/B672).

<sup>38</sup> S. Kant’s definition of knowledge in the Canon: “when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called knowing” (A822/B850), whereby a reason is objectively sufficient if it is “valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true”, because it “rests on the common ground, namely the object” (A821/B849). On the distinction between knowledge and cognition, s. Watkins/Willaschek (2017).

<sup>39</sup> The fact that these two activities complement one another does not necessarily imply that the resulting systems – the system of concepts and the system of cognitions (within a particular domain) – fully correspond to one another. Rather, the discussion of the conceptualization of psychological phenomena below will show that there can be concepts that do not have a correspondent in the system of cognitions, e.g., the idea of the soul (s. §3.3).

*conceptus summus* (V-Lo/Jäsche 9:97), which forms the highest point of the system.<sup>40</sup> The highest genus-concept of a system of *empirical* concepts is the most general concept of a thing that falls in the domain of nature described by that system. For nature in general, this highest genus-concept is the concept <object of experience in general>.<sup>41</sup> The predicates contained in this highest genus-concept can be derived from the *a priori* forms of the mind, which determine the transcendental conditions of experience, viz. the forms of space and time and the categories of the understanding (e.g., <quantity>, <quality>, <substantiality> and <(seat of) causal powers>). What counts as an object of experience is precisely that which instantiates the highest genus-concept.

### 3.2. The Idea of the Soul as Concept of Reflection

Returning to psychological knowledge and inner experience, conceptualization concerns only a particular domain of nature, namely the domain of psychological phenomena, i.e., humans qua their psychological features. This domain includes all inner appearances that can occur in human empirical consciousness and be constituents of human mental life. Let us call this domain *inner nature*, or as Kant sometimes puts it, “thinking nature” (A682/B710, MFNS 4:467). The corresponding system of concepts is a system of psychological predicates – those predicates that describe (aspects of) inner appearances. Here it is important to note the distinction between inner nature and an individual’s mental life. Inner nature comprises all possible inner appearances that can appear in any human’s mental life, that is, the *sum total of all possible inner appearances*. It is the subject matter of general psychological knowledge.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, an individual’s mental life concerns only those inner appearances that in fact belong to a particular individual and of which only that individual can have *inner* experience. It is the *sum total of someone’s actual inner appearances*, i.e., those appearances that belong to one and the same person and which make her the psychological person she is.

---

<sup>40</sup> In his *Lectures*, he identifies this highest concept as the concept of “something” (L-Log/Wiener 24:911), as that of “a thing” (L-Log/Dohna 24:755), or as that of “a possible thing” (L-Log/Blomberg 24:259).

<sup>41</sup> S. Anderson (2014:368) on the concept of <object in general> (or what he calls “Ur-concept”).

<sup>42</sup> Here I draw on Kant’s definition of “nature as the sum total of all appearances (*natura materialiter spectata*)” (B163); i.e., “by ‘nature’ taken substantively (*materialiter*) is understood the sum total of appearances insofar as these are in thoroughgoing connection through an inner principle of causality” (A419/B446). S. also Kant’s definition of the “world of sense” as “the sum total of appearances, so far as it is intuited” (A257/B312; also A419/B447).

In what follows, I argue that both the conceptualization of inner nature and the acquisition of inner experience rely on a system of psychological predicates and that such a system requires a unifying idea of reason, namely the *idea of the soul*. While this idea is crucial for both activities, it serves a different purpose in each case. In the case of inner nature, the idea of the soul serves – according to the principle of homogeneity – as the highest genus-concept that first defines the domain of inner nature, or what counts as a psychological phenomenon. In the case of an individual’s mental life, the idea of the soul serves – according to the principle of specification – as a placeholder for the lowest species-concept, that is, for the empirical concept that, if it were available, would completely describe the individual person.

In the Appendix, Kant introduces the *idea of the soul* as a transcendental idea of reason that gives us a “guiding thread” for pursuing the systematic unity of inner experience and hence the “systematic unity of all appearances of inner sense” (A682/B710). More precisely, the idea of the soul is needed to

connect all appearances, actions, and receptivity of our mind (*Gemüth*) to the guiding thread of inner experience *as if* the mind (*Gemüth*) were a simple substance that (at least in life) persists in existence with personal identity, while its states [...] are continuously changing. (A672/B700)<sup>43</sup>

This and related passages in the Appendix are central to understanding how we can make sense of our inner experiences as cognitions of our mental states or of our more general psychological properties, without asserting the existence of a permanent mental substance.<sup>44</sup> Here it is important to note that inner experience is a special case of experience: strictly speaking, it is not experience of a substance since nothing permanent, “no standing and abiding self”, is given to inner sense that could instantiate the category of substance (A107).<sup>45</sup> So *not* all categories are straightforwardly applicable to that which is given in inner sense. Therefore, inner appearances – strictly speaking – do not fall under the genus-concept <object of

---

<sup>43</sup> S. also A682/B710-A684/B712.

<sup>44</sup> The idea of the soul is often ignored in interpretations of Kant’s psychology. Its role remains unnoted by Frierson (2014) and is marginalized by Sturm (2009, pp.254-255, fn.87). There are exceptions, such as Klemme (1996), who however claims that the “as-if” model of the soul has been replaced in the B-Edition (Klemme, pp.229-234). Serck-Hanssen (2011) makes the suggestions that the idea should serve to define a “mark of the mental”, but thinks that this is not the interpretation that Kant in fact develops in this passage (Serck-Hanssen, 2011, p. 69). Dyck (2014) reads the idea as the basis of an “impure rational psychology”, without explaining how this differs from empirical psychology (Dyck, 2014, pp.199-225). None of them takes the idea of the soul to be foundational for the acquisition of either inner experience or general psychological knowledge.

<sup>45</sup> S. A22-23/B37; A350; B412-413.

experience in general>, but instead require a regulative idea that substitutes for those categories that are not applicable.<sup>46</sup>

Recall that Kant has difficulties in the *Anthropology* in discerning which kind of “reflection” on inner appearances gives rise to inner experience: (a) reflection under concept of the understanding, or (b) reflection under general (psychological) laws of nature, or (b) reflection yielding the concept of oneself. The passages in the Appendix now suggests that all these reflective activities can be traced back to the *reflection under the idea of the soul*. But what would this mean?

Firstly, for Kant, an idea of reason gives completeness to an empirical synthesis that cannot be completed in intuition “through its progress towards the unconditioned” (A409/B436). With respect to inner experience, the synthesis in accordance with the category of substance cannot be completed. Therefore, Kant introduces the idea of the soul as the concept of the “*unconditioned of the categorical synthesis in one subject*” (A323/B379).<sup>47</sup> The idea represents the unconditioned unity that is taken to be the ultimate condition *with respect to* all one’s conditioned representations, viz. inner appearances. Since the categorical syllogism corresponds to the conditioning relation of subsistence, Kant explicates this idea as the concept of a “simple [thinking] substance” (A672/B700, also A682/B710). The idea of the soul thus primarily denotes that which is assumed as the subsistent ground in which all one’s representations inhere. Moreover, the idea contains the predicates of <personal identity> and <(seat of a) fundamental mental power> (see A672/B700, also A682/B710). These predicates of the soul are broadly in line with what has traditionally been associated with the soul.<sup>48</sup>

Yet Kant departs from the rationalist tradition in arguing, secondly, that this use of the idea is only *regulative*, not constitutive. In general, transcendental ideas serve

---

<sup>46</sup> In Kraus (2016), I argue that the categories of quantity and quality, which concerns single intuitions, can be constitutively applied to distinctively inner intuitions. By contrast, the categories of relation, which concern the relation between intuitions, including the category of substantiality, cannot be used constitutively, but must be substituted by regulative principles based on the idea of the soul (see Kraus 2019).

<sup>47</sup> The idea of the soul is also identified as “the concept of the absolute (unconditioned) unity of the thinking subject” (A334/B391, also B348, A353, A406/B432).

<sup>48</sup> Concerning the predicates, s. in particular A682/B710. Yet Kant does not endorse all traditional predicates of the soul: he explicitly rejects predicates that define features beyond this life, as those of “generation, destruction or palingenesis” (A683/B684). Further phrases Kant uses to characterize the idea of the soul include the concepts of an “absolute subject” (A348), the “absolute unity of a thinking being” (A353), and the “unconditioned unity of the subjective conditions of all representation in general (of the subject or soul)” (A406/B432). Further predicates contained in the idea can be discerned in accordance with the categories, as is discussed in the Paralogisms, s. A404; B419.

as “*regulative* principle[s] of the systematic unity of the manifold of empirical cognition” (A671/B699). So for Kant the predicates contained in the idea are not asserted as properties that are instantiated by a real soul-substance. Such an assertion would presuppose a constitutive use of them. Rather, they are only problematically assumed in order to guide the derivation of systematic connections between inner experiences and hence guide the determination of inner appearances.<sup>49</sup>

It is not from a simple thinking substance that we derive the inner appearances of our soul, but from one another [i.e., inner appearances] in accordance with the idea of a simple being. (A673/B701)

In sum, this suggests that for Kant we acquire inner experience by reflecting on inner appearances under the idea of the soul in the following way: by considering inner appearances *as if* those appearances inhered in a mental substance, we can gain cognition of them and of their relations, even though such a substance can *never* be cognized on the basis of sensation, but is only problematically assumed on the basis of a transcendental idea.<sup>50</sup> In the following section, I explain how such a reflection under the idea of the soul plays out for the conceptualization of inner nature in general and for the acquisition of inner experience by individuals. I then explain, in Section 4, to the observed tension between general knowledge of inner nature and individual inner experience.

### **3.3. The Idea of the Soul as Genus and as Species Concept**

Reflection under the idea of the soul can take different forms: (1) regarding the conceptualization of inner nature in general, the idea of the soul serves as the highest genus-concept of inner nature; (2) regarding the acquisition of inner experience, the idea of the soul serves as a placeholder for the lowest species-concept of an individual person. I discuss each case in turn.

---

<sup>49</sup> S.: “With [the concept of a simple self-sufficient intelligence] reason has nothing before its eyes except principles of the systematic unity in explaining the appearances of the soul, namely by considering all determinations as in one subject, all powers, as far as possible, as derived from one unique fundamental power, all change as belonging to the states of one and the same persisting being, and by representing all *appearances* in space as entirely distinct from the actions of *thinking*. (A682/B710, my emphasis)

<sup>50</sup> My use of “reflection” is broadly in line with the notion of reflective judgment, that is judgment that does not determine a sensibly given object, but relates given contents in accordance with a regulative principle or idea, e.g., the idea of purposiveness for judgments about living beings (s. CJ\_FI 20:213; 236; CJ 5:185, 375, 385, 389, 397-401, 405). For further discussion with regard to the experience of living beings, see Nassar (2016).

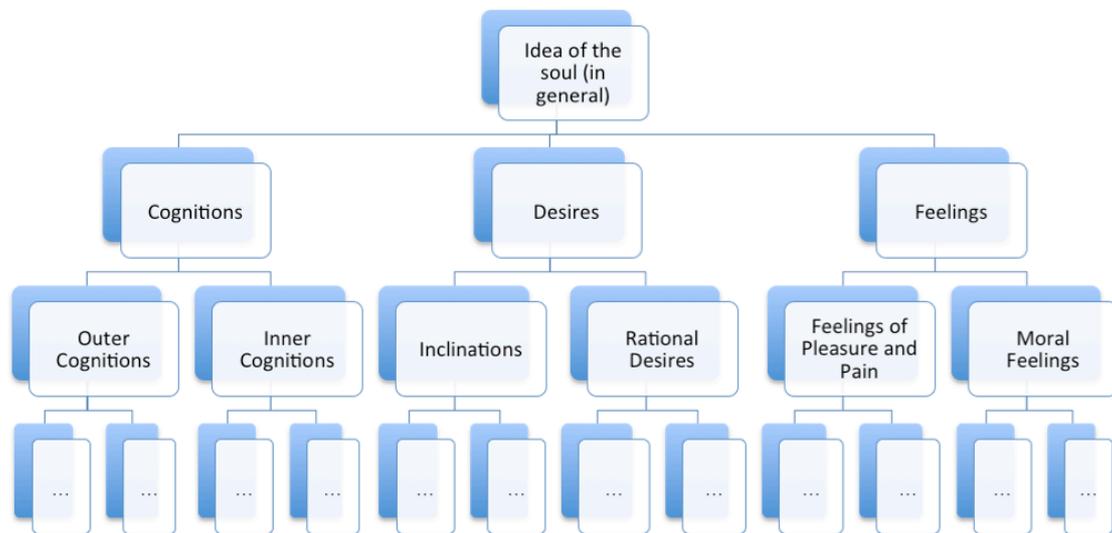
(1) *The idea of the soul functions as the highest genus-concept of inner nature.* Despite its regulative character, I argue, the idea of the soul serves as the highest genus-concept of inner nature in that it defines what counts as a psychological person in general. The idea defines the domain of inner nature as that which can be reflected upon under the regulative concept or idea, <soul>, that is, it defines the class of beings to whom psychological features can be ascribed. Due to the regulative character of the idea, the predicates it contains, such as <(mental) substance>, <personal identity> and <(seat of a) fundamental power>, are not straightforwardly instantiated by inner appearances. But inner appearances can be reflected on under them. That is, even though there is no sensibly given substance that instantiates the idea, we can cognize *given* inner appearances and their relations in accordance with these predicates.

Each predicate thereby explicates a particular kind of unity that is approximated in inner experience. For instance, in accordance with the predicate <(mental) substance>, inner appearances are trans-temporally unified *as if* they were the states of one and the same persistent mental substance, even though such a substance can never be cognized. In accordance with the predicate <(seat of a) fundamental power>, all inner appearances are causally unified *as if* they were mental states originating from one and the same mental power and thus subject to a general kind of mental causation. In this way, causal relations between mental states within one and the same mind can be derived, even though such a fundamental power can never be cognized. These states may in fact even be produced by entirely distinct faculties, such as the faculties of cognition, desire, and feeling, according to the tripartite division of the mind, as discussed in Section 1.

Hence, without the regulative idea of the soul, we would not be able to recognize inner appearances as instances of mental states that can be ascribed to the mental life of a psychological person (as opposed to other *kinds* of natural states, e.g., physical-material, physiological, or behavioural states). The idea of the soul serves as the highest genus-concept under which each more specific psychological predicate must be subsumed. The idea defines a whole from which a systematic unity of psychological predicates can be derived. The resulting system is applicable to all human individuals in general and reflects the interrelations between different kinds of mental states (or more general psychological properties). These interrelations

correspond to the *conceptual containment relations* between psychological predicates defined within the system.

In accordance with the tripartite division of transcendental faculties, as outlined in Section 1, Figure 1 schematically illustrates the function of the idea of the soul as highest genus concept, from which the system of psychological predicates originates.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 1:** The idea of the soul as the highest genus concept of the system of psychological predicates in accordance with the tripartite structure of basic mental faculties.

(2) *The idea of the soul serves as the placeholder for the lowest species-concept of an individual person.* The idea of the soul also plays a crucial role in the acquisition of inner experience. As demanded by the principle of specification, the idea helps one to acquire a more and more determinate concept of oneself as an individual person. According to Kant’s denial of the availability of lowest species-concepts, one can never obtain the complete psychological concept of oneself as a unique individual, nor of the corresponding concept for any other individual. Nonetheless, the general principle of specification guides one in searching for a more determinate empirical concept. By determining further psychological predicates that are applicable to a particular individual and adding those predicates to the existing psychological concept

<sup>51</sup> My reading of the idea as a necessary condition for the defining the domain of inner nature is stronger than a merely heuristic reading, such as Dyck’s, according to which the idea of the soul is a useful, but to some degree contingent, device for “organizing our knowledge and directing the understanding to the discovery of new cognition” (Dyck 2014:210). Similar to my reading, Serck-Hanssen (2011:69) argues that the soul should be understood as defining the “mark of the mental”, but she eventually denies that this is what Kant has in mind in the Appendix.

one has of oneself (or of another individual), one approximates a complete (self-)concept.

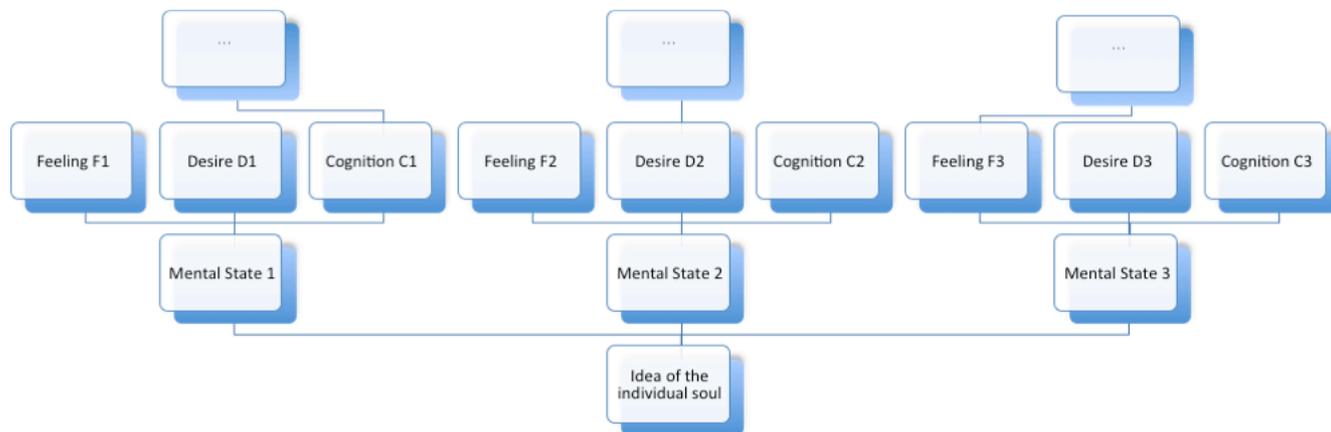
In this connection, the idea of the soul serves as a “template” of a lowest species-concept in the case of psychological beings. As such a template, the idea of the soul offers a sketch of the psychological species-concept of a unique individual, which is then to be progressively “filled in” with applicable psychological predicates such that the sketch approximates the complete concept of this individual. The most general predicates contained in the idea, such as <(mental/thinking) substantiality>, <simplicity>, <personal identity>, and <(seat of a) fundamental mental power>, define the most general outline of this sketch. Since they are assumed only problematically, they do not strictly speaking determine generic properties of psychological beings, but give guidance for finding further applicable psychological predicates. In this sense, they serve the idea’s purpose of advancing one’s empirical cognition of oneself. These psychological predicates range from rather specific descriptions of individual mental states, e.g., emotions, thoughts, and desires, to more general notions identifying character traits or other more global psychological properties, e.g., gratitude, honesty, and wit.

Corresponding to the conceptual containment relations within the general system of psychological predicates, the specific predicates applicable to a particular individual can be arranged within a system, as well. Taken together, these predicates give rise to a unified system, ascending from more determinate concepts specifying mental states occurring in particular moments, e.g., particular feelings, thoughts, and desires, to more general concepts defining long-term psychological properties, such as character traits, e.g., shyness, kindness, and confidence. Here the idea of the soul substitutes for the lack of a complete self-concept; it is the placeholder of a complete species-concept, the most determinate concept of the individual, “at the bottom” of the hierarchy. From there, potentially infinitely many, less determinate psychological predicates (of different levels of determinacy and generality) branch out.

Although a complete concept of an individual can never be fully grasped (and arguably cannot even exist) from an empirical perspective according to Kant, our conceptualizing capacities are such that we seek to approximate this concept. In light of ongoing inner experience, we approximate such a concept by determining more and more applicable psychological predicates within a systematic unity, which becomes increasingly fine-grained, dense, and general at the same time. The empirical

concept towards which we thereby converge would potentially contain infinitely many psychological predicates *in it*, but only one individual falls *under it*: the unique individual person.

In sum, with respect to inner experience, the idea of the soul serves as the placeholder for the unavailable complete psychological concept of a person. It serves as a template for “filling in” this species-concept with applicable psychological predicates and hence for approximating the unity of, as well as the systematic relations among, all inner appearances that belong to one and the same person. Figure 2 schematically illustrates the function of the idea of the soul as the placeholder for the lowest species-concept of an individual person in which *all* psychological predicates ever applicable to this person are contained.



**Figure 2:** The idea of the soul as the placeholder for the lowest species concept, i.e., the unavailable complete concept of the individual person in which all psychological predicates applicable to this person are contained.

#### 4. The Transcendental Sources of Psychological Knowledge

Let us now return to the mutual dependence we observed earlier between general psychological knowledge and individuals’ inner experience. Given the above considerations regarding the relation between concept-formation and the acquisition of systematic cognition above, I suggest that the acquisition of general psychological knowledge and the acquisition of inner experience should be understood as two ongoing complex activities, one complementing the other. In line with my considerations regarding the conceptualization of psychological phenomena, we can now see that psychological knowledge and inner experience can be understood as

complementary constituents of one and the same system of empirical cognitions regarding matters of psychology, i.e. regarding humans qua their psychological features.

The worry about an apparent vicious circularity or of a possible primacy of one of these two types of cognition can be resolved if one recognizes that the two corresponding activities through which they are acquired are mutually necessary complements of another. Both activities – the acquisition of general psychological knowledge and the acquisition of inner experience as empirical cognition of myself – can operate alongside one another and complement one another, as long as both are guided by reason's overarching demand for systematic unity. Here, for the domain of inner nature, this demand is explicated by the most general predicates contained in the idea of the soul. Both activities are thus conditioned by the same transcendental idea of reason. The complementary nature of the two activities does not explain the historical genealogy of how we – as a community of human cognizers – come to adopt certain psychological predicates or how we – as human individuals – come to acquire certain inner experiences in the first place. Rather, it addresses the issue of justification. We can start out with psychological predicates and inner experiences that we assume only hypothetically, for instance, on the basis of tradition or upbringing. The two complementary activities determine a procedure of justification by which we acquire new concepts or cognitions and revise (or even reject) already adopted concepts or cognitions. As a consequence, my inner experience of my subjective inner states can be empirical cognition of myself and hence can give rise to knowledge – self-knowledge as well as general psychological knowledge – only if I subject my inner experience to a general system of psychological predicates. In turn, this system reflects insights from empirical psychology and is increasingly refined through the acquisition of further psychological knowledge.

With this proposal, we can finally return to my initial question regarding the specific set of necessary conditions that Kant's transcendental philosophy offers for empirical psychology, which I have identified for the current purpose as the study of the empirical aspects of the human mind: psychological knowledge is not only made possible by the transcendental conditions defined by the categories of the understanding, but in addition it necessarily conditioned by a transcendental idea that gives systematic unity to psychological knowledge and to the corresponding system of psychological predicates. The predicates of the idea of the soul, such as

<(mental/thinking) substantiality>, <simplicity>, <personal identity>, and <(seat of a) fundamental mental power>, can be understood as assumptions of the most general propositions regarding the human nature. Yet, these propositions should not be understood as truths that are assertable on the basis of experience; that is, the predicates above are not constitutive with respect to inner experience. Rather, they give an outline of the inner structure of the domain of inner nature. They first span the domain of inner nature into which given empirical cognition can be integrated and classified. It is in this sense, I suggest, that the idea of the soul defines the specific transcendental sources of empirical psychology.

Kant himself explicitly draws on these transcendental sources in his *Anthropology*, which includes a study of human psychological features. There Kant presupposes a fine-grained taxonomy of mental faculties and mental capacities more generally. A taxonomy, for Kant, while showing signs of the possibility of constructing a system, is nonetheless not yet fully systematic. In general, it still lacks an *a priori* schema (or outline) of the system by means of which the position of each part within the whole can be derived *a priori* in accordance with a guiding idea.<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, Kant himself emphasizes the need for systematicity with respect to matters of psychology in his *Anthropology*. There, he explicitly acknowledges that the observation of particular human beings “can yield nothing more than fragmentary groping” without a general classificatory scheme in the background (Anth 7:120). Particular observations must “be ordered and directed through philosophy” (Anth 7:120). The aim of anthropology, then, is to “gradually unite [this taxonomy] into a whole through the unity of the plan” (Anth 7:122). What this plan of anthropology exactly consists in is not entirely clear from Kant’s account.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, anthropology requires “appropriate categories” and “the completeness of headings under which this or that observed human quality [...] can be subsumed”, and opens the possibility for more detailed studies (Anth 7:121-122).<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> “For its execution the idea needs a *schema*, i.e., an essential manifoldness and order of the parts determined *a priori* from the principle of the end.” (A832-3/B861-2). The schema of an idea “contains the outline (*monogramma*) and the division of the whole into members in conformity with the idea, i.e., *a priori*” (A834/B862).

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of Anthropology as a science and its guiding idea, s. Brandt (1999, 2003). On the exact relationship between empirical psychology and anthropology, s. Kraus (2018)

<sup>54</sup> While Kant would certainly reject the claim that empirical psychology (as well as pragmatic anthropology) can be a proper natural science (s. MFNS 4:471), there is controversy as to whether (or the extent to which) empirical psychology can fulfil the requirement of systematicity according to Kant’s demanding concept of science (s. MFNS 4:469 and A832-3/B861-2). For discussion, s. Pollok

From our earlier considerations, we can conclude that at least the part of anthropology that is concerned with psychological matters is guided by the idea of the soul as a highest genus-concept. Thus, Kant's *Anthropology* itself is structured in accordance with the tripartite structure of the mind and taxonomically investigates empirical psychological observations. The first part is divided into three books, each investigating one of the three basic faculties. Book I, which is concerned with the cognitive faculty, investigates the senses (and their physiological modalities) and the power of imagination (and its modalities). In it, Kant eventually offers a taxonomy of mental disorders and illnesses in accordance with the internal structure of the cognitive faculty (Anth 7:214, 2:256-260).<sup>55</sup> In a similar manner, Book II, concerned with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, presents a detailed study of lower pleasures, such as the feeling of agreeableness, and higher pleasures, such as the feeling of aesthetic beauty and taste. Book III, concerned with the faculty of desire, lays out accounts of lower desires, viz. affects, and higher desires, viz. passions, and finally offers a complete division of the passions.

The empirical study of anthropology thus enriches the basic system of psychological predicates that is based on the transcendental definitions of the mental faculties, as sketched in Figure 1. It adds a variety of psychological capacities, which in the broader anthropological context are then viewed as aspects of behavioural and social dispositions. The transcendental definition of each basic mental faculty, as well as the empirical account of each more specific psychological capacity, can be understood only through relating them to one another within a system of faculties and capacities. This system corresponds to the taxonomy of psychological predicates that captures these interrelations in terms of conceptual containment relations. While the transcendentially defined predicates corresponding to indispensable mental faculties, such as cognition, desire (or will), and feeling, must be realized in *all* human minds, the more specific predicates describing particular psychological capacities may be realized only in *some* persons. Both kinds of predicates should be able to be corroborated by empirical observations in a science of empirical psychology, as well as in everyday life.

---

(2001), Sturm (2009), and Kraus/Sturm (2017). Note that the requirement of systematicity may be – at least approximately – implemented by empirical sciences that do not have an *a priori* part and that therefore do not count as “proper” natural sciences, though perhaps as “improper” sciences, e.g., chemistry (McNulty 2015) or even empirical psychology (Kraus 2018).

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed reconstruction and discussion of Kant's taxonomy of mental deficiencies and illnesses, s. Frierson 2009a and 2009b.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the transcendental sources that Kant's philosophy is able to offer to empirical psychology as the study of the empirical aspects of the human mind. I have argued that Kant's transcendental philosophy defines a set of distinctive conditions in terms of an idea of reason – the idea of the soul – which makes psychological knowledge possible.

With respect to empirical psychology, the idea of the soul primarily defines what counts as a psychological being whose psychological features are to be investigated in empirical psychology. The idea thus defines as the highest genus-concept the domain of inner nature. The predicates that are contained in the idea, such as <(mental/thinking) substantiality>, <simplicity>, <personal identity>, and <(seat of a) fundamental mental power>, can then be understood as the most general, though only problematically assumed propositions regarding human nature. As regulative principles, they give guidance for establishing a system of psychological predicates and, correspondingly, a system of psychological knowledge.

With respect to inner experience, the idea of the soul additionally serves as a placeholder for the lowest species-concept of an individual person, that is, for the empirical concept that, if it were available, would completely describe a particular individual. The mutual dependence between general psychological knowledge and particular inner experiences can then be understood as resulting from two mutually complementary complex activities that are both guided by the same regulative idea. Both the activity of acquiring psychological knowledge, and the activity of acquiring inner experience giving rise to empirical self-knowledge, rely on a system of psychological predicates and, therefore, both necessarily depend on the idea of the soul as the unifying idea of such a system.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> I am grateful to all those who have given me valuable feedback on earlier versions of this paper. I thank in particular Aaron Wells, Clinton Tolley, and Eric Watkins, as well as the editors, Dina Emundts and Sally Sedgwick.

## References

- Abela, Paul (2006): "The Demands of Systematicity: Rational Judgment and the Structure of Nature". In Bird; Graham (ed.): *A Companion to Kant*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 408-422.
- Anderson, R. Lanier (2014): *The Poverty of Conceptual Truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baumgarten, Alexander G. (1739/1982): *Metaphysica*. Halle/Magdeburg (7<sup>th</sup> edition): Hildesheim: Olms.
- Brandt, Reinhardt (1999): *Kritischer Kommentar zu Kants 'Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht'*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Brandt, Reinhardt (2003): "The Guiding Idea of Kant's Anthropology and the Vocation of the Human Being". In: Jacobs, Brian and Kain, Patrick (eds.): *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 85-104.
- Buchdahl, Gerd (1967): "The Relation between 'Understanding' and 'Reason'". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 67: 209-226.
- Dyck, Corey (2014): *Kant and Rational Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Emundts, Diana (2007). "Kant über innere Erfahrung". In: U. Kern (ed.): *Was ist und was soll sein. Natur und Freiheit bei Immanuel Kant*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 191-205.
- Falduto, Antonino (2014): *The Faculties of the Human Mind and the Case of Moral Feeling in Kant's Philosophy*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Frierson, Patrick (2014): *Kant's Empirical Psychology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Frierson, Patrick (2009a): "Kant on Mental Disorder 1: An Overview". In: *History of Psychiatry* 20, pp. 267-289.
- Frierson, Patrick (2009b): "Kant on Mental Disorder 2: Philosophical Implications". In: *History of Psychiatry* 20, pp. 290-310.
- Ginsborg, Hannah (2006): "Empirical concepts and the content of experience". In: *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, pp. 349-372.
- Ginsborg, Hannah (2017): "Why Must We Presuppose the Systematicity of Nature?". In: Massimi, Michela and Breitenbach, Angela (eds.): *Kant and the Laws of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 71-88.
- Grier, Michelle (2001): *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guyer, Paul (1990) "Reason and Reflective Judgment: Kant on the Significance of Systematicity". In: *Noûs* 24, pp. 17-43.
- Hatfield, Gar (2006): "Empirical, Rational, and Transcendental Psychology: Psychology as Science and as Philosophy". In: P. Guyer (Ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 200-227.
- Heßbrüggen-Walter, Stefan (2004): *Die Seele und ihre Vermögen. Kant's Metaphysik des Mentalen in der 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft'*. Paderborn: mentis.

- Kant, Immanuel (1900ff.): *Gesammelte Schriften*. Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.): Berlin: Reimer/DeGruyter.
- Kant, Immanuel (1992ff.): *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Guyer, Paul, and Wood, Allen (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kitcher, Patricia (1990): *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kitcher, Patricia (2011): *Kant's Thinker*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klemme, Heiner (1996): *Kants Philosophie des Subjekts*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Kraus, Katharina and Sturm, Thomas (2017) “‘An Attractive Alternative to Empirical Psychologies Both in His Day and Our Own’? A Critique of Frierson’s *Kant’s Empirical Psychology*”. In: *Studi Kantiani* 30, pp. 203-223.
- Kraus, Katharina (2018) “The soul as the ‘guiding idea’ of psychology: Kant on scientific psychology, systematicity, and the idea of the soul”. In: *Studies of History and Philosophy of Science* 71, pp. 77-88.
- Kraus, Katharina (manuscript): “The Parity and Disparity between Inner and Outer Experience”.
- Longuenesse, Béatrice (1998): *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- McNulty, Bennett (forthcoming) “Kant on Empirical Psychology and Experimentation”. In: Waibel, Violetta and Ruffing, Margit (eds.): *Natur und Freiheit: Akten des XII. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- McNulty, Bennett (2015) “Rehabilitating the Regulative Use of Reason: Kant on Empirical and Chemical Laws”. In: *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 54, pp. 1–10.
- Mischel, Theodore (1967): “Kant and the Possibility of a Science of Psychology”. In: *Monist* 51, pp. 599-622.
- Nassar, Dalia (2016): “Analogical reflection as a source for the science of life: Kant and the possibility of the biological sciences”. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 58, pp. 57-66.
- Nayak, Abhaya, & Sotnak, Eric (1995): “Kant on the Impossibility of the ‘Soft Sciences’”. In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55, pp. 133-151.
- O’Neill, Onora (1984): “Transcendental Synthesis and Developmental Psychology”. In: *Kant-Studien* 75 (2), pp. 149-167.
- Schmidt, Claudia (2008): “Kant's transcendental and empirical psychology of cognition”. In: *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 39 (4), pp. 462-472.
- Schönrich, Gerhard (1991): “Kant und die vermeintliche Unmöglichkeit einer wissenschaftlichen Psychologie”. In: *Psychologie und Geschichte* 2, pp. 130-137.
- Serck-Hanssen, Camilla (2011): “Der Nutzen von Illusionen. Ist die Idee der Seele unentbehrlich?”. In: B. Dörflinger (ed.): *Über den Nutzen von Illusionen. Die regulative Ideen in Kants theoretische Philosophie*. Hildesheim: Olms, pp. 59-71.

- Sturm, Thomas (2009): *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*. Paderborn: Mentis.
- Washburn, Michael C. (1976): “Did Kant have a theory of Self-Knowledge?”. In: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 58, pp. 40-56.
- Watkins, Eric (2013): “Kant on *Infima Species*”. In: Ferrarin, Alfredo, La Rocca, Claudio, and Ruffing, Margit (eds.): *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht. Akten des XI. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 283-296.
- Watkins, Eric, and Willaschek, Marcus (2017): “Kant’s Account of Cognition”. In: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55 (1), pp. 83-112.
- Westphal, K. (2004): *Kant’s Transcendental Proof of Realism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolff, Christian (1732): *Psychologia empirica*. In: *Gesammelte Werke* II 5. Hildesheim (Olms):1968.
- Zuckert, Rachel (2017): “Empirical Scientific Investigation and the Ideas of Reason”. In: Massimi, Michela, and Breitenbach, Angela: *Kant and the Laws of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 89-107.

In citing Kant’s text the following abbreviations are used.

Anth	<i>Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View</i> (1798) (Ak., vol. 7)
A/B	<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (1781/1787) (Ak., vol. 3-4)
CJ	<i>Critique of Judgment</i> (1790) (Ak., vol. 5)
CpracR	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i> (1788) (Ak., vol. 5)
MFNS	<i>Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science</i> (1786) (Ak., vol. 4)
L-Log	<i>Lectures on Logic</i>
L-Log/Blomberg	<i>Logic Blomberg</i> (early 1770s) (Ak., vol. 24)
L-Log/Dohna-Wundlacken	<i>Logic Dohna-Wundlacken</i> (1792) (Ak., vol. 24)
L-Log/Jäsche	<i>Jäsche Logic</i> (1800) (Ak., vol. 9)
L-Log/Vienna	<i>Logic Vienna</i> (1780s) (Ak., vol. 24)
LB-Reicke	<i>Loses Blatt Reicke Xb 6, p. 1, No. 6354</i> (1780-1790?) (not included in the Ak.)
Prol	<i>Prolegomena to any future metaphysics that will be able to come forward as a science</i> (1783) (Ak., vol. 4)

Refl

*Reflections* (Ak., vols. 14-19)

*Religion*

*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793)  
(Ak., vol. 6)