EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

Con-Textos Kantianos
ISSN-e: 2386-7655

DOSSIER 1

Before (and beyond) Kant's Paralogisms: Wolff's *Psychologia Rationalis* (1734) and Mendelssohn's *Phaedon* (1767)

Guillem Sales Vilalta
Instituto de Filosofía, CSIC

https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/kant.104249 Received: 28-07-2025 • Accepted: 13-08-2025

ENG **Abstract:** This paper defends two theses concerning the relationship between Kant's critique of Rational Psychology and the contributions to this discipline made by Christian Wolff and Moses Mendelssohn, namely: (*I*) that Wolff's *Psychologia Rationalis* (1734) is not in fact vulnerable to Kant's charges, not only because it seeks to explain empirical data, but more crucially because its most basic explanatory ground is itself derived from experience; (*II*) and that Mendelssohn's *Phaedon* (1767), which Kant regarded as a prime example of Rational Psychology, likewise is not adequately captured by Kant's critique. To do so, the paper will include: (1) an introduction outlining the topic and its interest; (2) a section on Wolff's Rational Psychology; (3) an analysis of Mendelssohn's modification of Wolffian Psychology; and (4) some concluding remarks[1].
Key words: Christian Wolff, Moses Mendelssohn, Immanuel Kant, *Psychologia Rationalis*, *Phaedon.*

How to cite: Sales Vilalta, G. (2025). Before (and beyond) Kant's Paralogisms: Wolff's *Psychologia Rationalis* (1734) and Mendelssohn's *Phaedon* (1767) in *Kant. Con-Textos Kantianos. International Journal of Philosophy*, 22, 15-24.

1. Introduction. Kant's (peculiar) concept of Rational Psychology

In my previous work (Sales Vilalta, 2022) I set out to explore the extent to which Kant's critique of Rational Psychology applies to thePsychologyof Christian Wolff and Moses Mendelssohn. This question was prompted by the Paralogisms of Pure Reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant challenges the very possibility of establishing Rational Psychology as a science of the human soul grounded solely in rational concepts, without any reliance on experience. In this section, "rational doctrines of the soul" are defined and construed as follows:

> The expression *I,* as a thinking being, already signifies the object of a psychology that could be called the rational doctrine of the soul, if I do not seek to know anything about the soul beyond what, independently of all experience (which always determines me more closely and *in concreto*), can be inferred from this concept I insofar as it occurs in all thinking.
>
> *Now the rational doctrine of the soul is really an undertaking of this kind; for if the least bit of anything empirical in my thinking, any particular perception of my inner state, were mixed among the grounds of cognition of this science, then it would no longer be a rational but rather an empirical doctrine of the soul* (A 342 / B 400; Kant 1998, p.412. My emphasis).

It is well known that Kant articulates his critique of such "rational doctrines of the soul" in the Transcendental Dialectic, the second division of the Transcendental Logic, which rightly follows the Analytic devoted to clarifying the conditions of possibility of knowledge. In the brief first book of the Transcendental Dialectic,

1 References to Christian Wolff's *Gesammelte Werke* will take the form 'GW I.2, 22 | PE §35', where 'I' refers to the division, '2' to the volume, '22' to the page, and 'PE §35' to the specific paragraph within the work.

Kant identifies transcendental ideas as pure ideas of reason, "pure" in that they arise from reason's drive to seek the unconditioned that lies beyond (conditioned) empirical knowledge. He lists three different types of them: (i) the idea of soul [*Seele*] or thinking subject, which serves as the foundation of Rational Psychology; (ii) the idea of the world [*Welt*]; and (iii) the idea of God [*Gott*], (A 322-340 / B 379-398). Each of these ideas gives rise to a specific kind of dialectical inference. Among them, the so-called Paralogisms are the ones relying on the notion of soul. According to Kant's remarks, philosophers engaged in Rational Psychology seek to acquire knowledge based on the purely rational concept of a thinking subject, which lacks any empirical input (A 343-345 / B 401-403). To put it briefly: Kant critiques this enterprise by arguing that its syllogisms are merely rational inferences, therefore incapable of providing any knowledge at all.

While Kant's definition of Rational Psychology makes the object and purpose of his criticism clear and unambiguous, it seems to me that the issue lies not within the definition itself, but rather beyond of it. In other words: even though Kant forges a precise concept of Rational Psychology, his definition overlooks the historical background of both the label and the discipline it refers to. In the context of the German Enlightenment, the popularisation of the term 'Rational Psychology' to designate a specific philosophical discipline was largely due to Wolff's influential work (École 1990, p. 263–265; Dyck 2014, p. 3–4; Carboncini 2021, p. 197–198). Very interestingly, his own definition of it does not coincide with the Kantian one:

> Empirical psychology supplies principles for rational psychology. In rational psychology reason is given for what occurs in our soul (Disc. praelim. §58, 31). But empirical psychology establishes principles, whence reason is given for what occurs in the human soul (§1). Therefore, empirical psychology supplies principles for rational psychology (GW II.5, 2 | PE §4. Quoted from: Richards 1980, p. 231).

In the light of Wolff's definition of Empirical and Rational Psychology, this paper aims to revisit the questions addressed in my previous work concerning the relationship between Kant's critique of Rational Psychology and the contributions to it made by Wolff and Mendelssohn. In particular, I will focus on making two points, namely: (*1*) that Wolff's *Psychologia Rationalis* (1734) is not in fact vulnerable to Kant's charges to Rational Psychology, not only because it seeks to explain empirical data, but more crucially because its most basic explanatory ground is itself derived from experience; (*2*) and that Mendelssohn's *Phaedon* (1767), which Kant regarded as a prime example of Rational Psychology, likewise is not adequately captured by Kant's criticism.

Far from emerging in isolation, this study aims to contribute to ongoing historiographical efforts that have revitalised research on Wolffian Psychology, from Jean École's pioneering work in the twentieth century (1966, 1968, 1969, 1987, 1990) to some of the most significant studies of the last decades (Rudolph & Goubet 2004, Marcolungo 2007, Araujo, Pereira, and Sturm 2021). It also seeks to promote a more historically grounded reading of Kant's philosophy, drawing particular inspiration from the work of Corey Dyck (2014), whose meticulous *Kant and Rational Psychology* remains the most comprehensive attempt to contextualise Kant's critique of Rational Psychology. Dyck argued that the content and scope of Kant's Paralogisms must be understood in light of the Wolffian tradition of Rational Psychology, rather than through the lens of earlier figures such as Descartes or Leibniz (which prior Anglophone scholars had allegedly considered Kant's target, in Dyck's account). Accordingly, the present paper (and the previous work on which it is based) focuses more specifically on the evolution of Rational Psychology from its systematic inception in Wolff's works to its more exoteric later expression in Mendelssohn's *Phaedon*[2].

To begin with, let us now turn to Wolff's *Psychologia Rationalis*, which shall require in turn a few preliminary remarks on the Wolffian concepts of philosophy, reason, and experience to better understand the place and status granted to Rational Psychology.

2. Wolff's concept of an empirically grounded Rational Psychology

In the *Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere* (1728), the programmatic introduction to his entire series of Latin treatises, Wolff opens by distinguishing between two levels of knowledge [*cognitio*]: historical [*historica]*, which establishes what is or occurs, and philosophical [*philosophica*], which seeks to explain why it is so (GW II.1.1, 1–4 | DP §1–10). To know something philosophically, then, is not merely to describe a given thing or fact, but to provide an account of it (that is, to explain its existence after having first observed it historically). This explanatory endeavour, Wolff claims, consists specifically in seeking reasons [*Grund*, *ratio*]. The designation "rational" as applied to Wolff's philosophy must be thus understood in this precise sense. The various branches of his system (such as the *Psychologia Rationalis*, which we shall trace in due course) are "rational" not insofar as they stem from a speculative standpoint, but rather in that they aim to uncover the explanatory reasons of things that have already been established as factual through observation[3].

---

2 This research also draws more broadly on the contextualising efforts of scholars such as Manfred Kuehn (1987), who authored one of the major investigations into the historical background of Kant's critical project; Heiner Klemme (1996), whose work traced the development of Kantian conceptions of self and self-consciousness; as well as the more recent compendia that further examine the intellectual context of Kantian philosophy (de Boer & Prunea-Bretonnet, 2021; Dyck & Wunderlich, 2018). While these contributions have not shaped the present study in a direct or focused manner, they have offered valuable perspectives on the broader intellectual landscape in which Kant's thought emerged.

3 Thanks to the pioneering works of Wolffian scholars such as Jean École (1990) and Luigi Cataldi Madonna (2001), the robust integration of experience and reason that characterises Wolff's philosophy has come to be systematically referred to as the *connubium rationis et experientiae (*a phrase actually coined by Wolff himself). Beyond the general characterisation offered here, see especially Neveu (2017) for a more detailed account of Wolff's methodological integration of experience and reason, and its fundamental connection with two other key epistemological distinctions (namely, *a priori/a posteriori* and *pure/impure)*

Quite expectedly, the foundational premiss guiding this enterprise is the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason [*Satz vom zureichenden Grund, principium rationis sufficientis*] in virtue of which each and every thing must have a reason for being as it is rather than otherwise[4]. Wolff holds that the reason of a thing ultimately lies in its essence [*Wesen*, *essentia*]. As he states in his *German Metaphysics* (1720): "the essence of a thing is its possibility, and one who understands the essence is one who knows in what way and manner the thing is possible" (GW I.2, 19 | GM §35). To discover the reason of something is thus to grasp its essence and to understand how that essence renders the thing and its properties intelligible. Very interestingly, this connection of reasons to essences imparts a layered explanatory structure to Wolffian philosophy. While the essence of an object provides the first and most fundamental principle of intelligibility, not all explanations refer directly to it, since many concern highly specific features that are only distantly connected to such essential grounds. This is particularly apparent in the *Psychologia Rationalis*, where the soul's essence (its power to represent the world in accordance with the position of the body) serves as the primary and most fundamental explanatory premise. However, numerous further determinations, such as the mechanisms and functioning of each particular faculty, concern very specific aspects of our mental operations in which the soul's essence plays no direct explanatory role.

In order to explain by uncovering reasons, Wolff further states in the *Discursus* that philosophy must proceed through syllogisms[5]. To provide solid and certain knowledge, the demonstrative principles used in these syllogisms must be: (i) precise definitions, (ii) conclusions drawn from prior syllogisms, or (iii) indisputable experiences. Regarding the latter, Wolff emphasises that many philosophical disciplines require an initial "experiential stage", dedicated to compiling observations and experiments indispensable for demonstrations. The notion of experience [*experientia, Erfahrung*] that occurs here has a specific technical sense that is important to distinguish from merely historical knowledge. As defined for the first time in his 1712 *German Logic*, experience consists in acquiring knowledge through focused attention on one's sensations [*Empfindungen*] (GW I.1, 181 | GL c.5, §1). This process begins with perceiving what is represented in a sensation, and consequently involves things encountered at a particular time and place. The aforementioned empirical parts of philosophy go a step beyond this sort of sensations in that they rely on them to forge universal concepts and propositions. Based on our three fundamental kinds of particular sensations (GW I.1, 181 | GL c.5, §1-5), empirical disciplines provide propositions that describe general rules: (i) about the properties belonging to objects, (ii) about their changes, and (iii) about the effects that they exert[6].

By transforming historical observations into generalisations, empirical disciplines provide the foundational premises for the demonstrations conducted in the rational parts of philosophy. Among the various branches of Wolffian Metaphysics, Psychology is the only one in which the division between an empirical and a rational part is explicitly articulated. As stated in the foreseen preface to the 1732 *Psychologia Empirica*, Empirical Psychology is the "science that, by means of experience, establishes the principles on which reason is given for what happens in the soul" (GW II.5, 1 | PE §1). Accordingly, Empirical Psychology systematically records all soul-related phenomena that can be known through (introspective) experience, providing the fundamental concepts and propositions that serve as the basis for Rational Psychology's explanatory demonstrations (GW II.5, 1–3 | PE §2–10). A brief overview of the main contents of Empirical Psychology will help us better understand the nature of this interdependence.

Wolff offered two great expositions of his Psychology: a first, shorter one in German (in the third and the fifth chapters of his 1720 *German Metaphysics*[7]); and a second, larger Latin version (constituted by the

---

4 The intellectual relationship between Leibniz and Wolff is a complex one. The label "Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy" emerged during Wolff's own lifetime and, in fact, against his own will. It was first introduced by G. B. Bilfinger in his *Dilucidationes philosophicae de Deo, anima humana et mundo* (1725), and later gained traction through the works of Wolffians such as G. V. Hartmann *(Anleitung zur Historie der Leibnitzsch-Wolffschen Philosophie,* 1737) and C. G. Ludovici (*Neue Merckwürdigkeiten der Leibnitz-Wolffischen Philosophie,* 1738). Over time, Wolff's philosophy came to be regarded as a systematic elaboration of key theses allegedly scattered across Leibniz's writings (Carboncini 1986, p. 110–112).
The first systematic attempt to assess the relation between both thinkers was made by Walther Arnspenger, who also highlighted the issues inherent in the "Leibnizian-Wolffian" label (Arnspenger 1897). Until scholarly interest was renewed by the launch of the critical edition of Wolff's complete works, the topic was rarely treated (Campo 1939, p. 53–76; Wundt 1945, p. 122–199). From the 1960s onwards, significant contributions by major scholars have been made, including Jean École (1964, 1983, 1998), Werner Schneiders (1973), Charles Corr (1974, 1975), Ferdinando Luigi Marcolungo (1975), Hans Poser (1975), Sonia Carboncini (1988), and, more recently, Jean Leduc (2013). While also highlighting fundamental connections between the two, these works have been crucial in showing that Wolff cannot be regarded as a mere follower/systematiser of Leibniz. Arguably, the clearest reason to reject that is Wolff's most fragmentary and selective access to Leibniz's work. From this standpoint, it is evident that Wolff never had anything like a comprehensive grasp of Leibniz's philosophy, let alone the intention of offering its systematic exposition

5 Despite his later defence of syllogism, Wolff initially drew on E.W. von Tschirnhaus's *Medicina Mentis* (1687) in his logic lectures (Arndt 1965, p. 7–30). Influenced by Cartesian critiques of syllogistic reasoning and by figures such as Arnauld and Mariotte, Tschirnhaus downplayed syllogism and conceived his work as part of the *ars inveniendi* tradition (a method for discovering new truths, going beyond the mere "formalism" typically associated at the time with Scholastic Logic; Tschirnhaus, 1695, p. x–xv). Likely following Leibniz's advice (Wolff 2003, p. xx–xxx), Wolff later embraced syllogism as a core method, while retaining Tschirnhaus's emphasis on invention. On the role of *ars inveniendi* in Wolff, see Gomez Tutor (2004 p. 243–270)

6 Incidentally, Wolff's approach to explaining psychological phenomena appears to be modelled on the methods of Physics. As he states in his Psychologia Empirica, just as the movements of bodies in Experimental Physics adhere to universal laws [leges] and rules [regulae], so too must the phenomena recorded in Empirical Psychology: "We call the rules of perceptions those that the soul follows when perceiving, or alternatively, those by which we can explain one's perceptions. The laws of perceptions are the general principles underlying these rules. This terminology is drawn by analogy to the rules of motion. Our first task in Empirical Psychology, therefore, is to establish general rules governing perceptions and thoughts. (GW II.5, 49 | PE §83, 84. My translation)"

7 In the *German Metaphysics*, Wolff places the chapter on Cosmology (chapter four) between the chapters on Empirical Psychology (chapter three) and Rational Psychology (chapter five). At first glance, this might seem to contradict the structure of Wolffian philosophy, where Cosmology precedes Psychology. However, and on closer examination, this is not the case because, in German

1732 *Psychologia Empirica* and the 1734 *Psychologia Rationalis*). Whether in its German (GW I.2, 107-110 | GM §192-197) or Latin expositions (GW II.5, 1-20 | PE §1-28), consciousness is set as the first and most basic concept of Empirical Psychology [*Bewusstsein, conscientia*]. For Wolff, everyday experience shows that we are conscious of things. In his account, consciousness appears to require two fundamental elements: (i) an *object* of consciousness (something that becomes focus of attention and is consequently individuated as a separate entity); (ii) and a *subject* of consciousness (something that apprehends that object and focuses on it)[8]. The soul is precisely defined as that *substratum* of conscious acts, with thoughts [*Gedanken, cogitationes*] being the acts through which consciousness is exercised. Since the soul successively apprehends different objects, thoughts are characterised as the soul's internal changes, through which external objects as distinct from the soul itself are represented[9].

Wolff distinguishes different kinds of thought according both to their formal traits and content. Each capacity to generate a specific type of thought is referred to as a faculty [*Vermögen, facultas*], with its function governed by general rules [*regulae*] and laws [*leges*] identified through introspective experience. All thoughts and faculties are shown to depend on sensations [*Empfindung, sensatio*], the first and most basic kind of thoughts which are actual representations of external objects that transmit their movement to the sense organs. Images [*Einbildung, imago*] are reproductions of objects previously represented by the senses. Concepts [*Begriff, conceptus*] result from retaining, paying attention to and reflecting on material provided by images, i.e. the imagination's elaborations on sensorial experience. In turn, concepts are articulated into judgements [*Urtheil, iudicium*] and inferences [*Schluss, sillogismus*]. Besides knowledge of the world, the will [*Begierde, uoluntas*] inclines the soul to act whether by sensible representations or concepts (GW II.5, 33-337 | PE §55-442).

As actually seen in the previously cited passage from the *Psychologia Empirica*, Rational Psychology directly relies on the concepts and propositions derived from Empirical Psychology to further explain them. This somewhat paradoxical dynamic (both relying on and accounting for Empirical Psychology) should be understood as follows. On the one hand, Rational Psychology *relies on* it because its most fundamental objects of inquiry (consciousness, soul, faculties, and so forth), as well as the propositions that render their general functioning, are derived from introspective experience in Empirical Psychology. On the other hand, Rational Psychology further *accounts for* those propositions by uncovering the reasons behind them through syllogistic reasoning. In other words: because Rational Psychology is "rational" in the aforementioned technical sense, its specific contribution lies in making intelligible why the phenomena identified through introspection occur as they do. It is no coincidence, then, that Rational Psychology takes on the character of a commentary or gloss on Empirical Psychology. A good and concise example of this might be found in paragraph 92 of *Psychologia Rationalis*, where Wolff accounts for the resemblance between sensations and the objects they represent:

> *Sensory ideas are similar to the object they represent.* For sensory ideas are present in the soul by virtue of sensation (§95 *Psychologia Empirica*), and thus represent objects that cause changes in the sense organs as material things (§67 *Psychologia Empirica*). Since sensory ideas are images of those objects (§86), and since it is clear that an image does not represent an object unless the distinctions found in the object correspond to those that can also be discerned within the image itself — that is, unless the image resembles the object it represents (§195 *Ontologia*), it follows that sensory ideas must indeed be similar to the object they represent[10]. (GW II.6, 65-66 | PR §92. My translation).

Considering all this, there can be no doubt that Rational Psychology has an undeniably empirical foundation. Beyond this general point, I would also like to highlight another detail that further underscores the deep interdependence between both. Specifically, Wolff's mode of inferring the essence of the soul serves as the ultimate foundation for Rational Psychology's explanatory endeavour (defining the soul's very nature and enabling a general understanding of its various processes). Very interestingly, Wolff derives it from

---

Metaphysics, Cosmology still comes before Psychology in the sense that the demonstrations displayed in Rational Psychology build upon the cosmological content of the preceding chapter.
As Wolff clarifies in the 1726 *Ausführliche Nachricht*, his decision to present Empirical Psychology before Cosmology in 1720 was driven by strictly pedagogical considerations (Araujo & Pereira 2021, p.43-44). Incidentally, the *Ausführliche Nachricht* was the work in which Wolff coined the terms 'Empirical Psychology' and 'Rational Psychology' in German for the first time.

8 In the *editio princeps* of the *German Metaphysics*, Wolff speaks generically about "having consciousness". The clarifying distinction between being conscious (i) of ourselves and (ii) of things outside of us is a nuance added from the second edition of the text (1722) onwards (Corr 1983, p.35).

9 Before examining the content of thoughts, Wolff provides a description of their form. As already suggested, thoughts are defined as representations [Vorstellungen, representationes] of things, so that to have a thought is to grasp the thing that the thought stands for. If the object of representation is well-defined and different from others, then the thought is clear [klar, clarus]; if it cannot be clearly individuated, the thought is obscure [dunkel, obscurus]. If the individual parts of the thing reproduced can be clearly grasped, the thought is clear and distinct [deutlich, distinctus]; if the parts are obscure, the thought is indistinct [undeutlich, indistinctus].
These Cartesian criteria, which Wolff introduces for the first time in his 1712 German Logic, are arguably taken from Leibniz's account of them in the 1684 *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis* (Arndt 1965, p.55-74; Leduc 2013, p.295-317).

10 This passage provides a clear illustration of the distinction between experience and reason in Wolff's philosophical system, as well as of the aforementioned layered structure of his (rational) explanations. Whereas in the *Psychologia Empirica* sensory ideas are described as similar to the object for which they stand on the basis of our everyday experience, here their resemblance is demonstrated syllogistically, by appealing to principles stated both in the *Psychologia Empirica* and the *Ontologia*. Notably, the explanation offered in paragraph 92 makes no direct reference to the soul's essence: although it ultimately depends (at some remove) on the soul's essential capacity to represent the world relative to the position of the body, the fact that sensory ideas are similar to the object they represent can be established without any explicit appeal to this foundational premise.

sensations. As said before, all thoughts ultimately depend on sensations, and sensations represent external bodies that have transmitted movement to one's own body according to its position in the world. Based on this fact, Wolff concludes that the essence of the soul is that of being a force [*Kraft, uis*] by which the world is represented according to the position of one's own body (GW II.6, 39-62 | PR §58-82).

It is true that the soul's essence is said to be a force based on an ontological, non-empirical belief: as Wolff argues for the first time in his *German Metaphysics*, simple things must be assumed as non-extended, active entities that precede extended things (i.e. composite bodies) and account for their existence (GW I.2, 37-56 | GM §75-107). But, to set the ultimate ground of Rational Psychology, this ontological premise must be necessarily referred to empirical contents. In other words: the soul being essentially committed to represent the world in accordance with sensations is inferred through the introspective process by which the general rules governing the faculties were established in Empirical Psychology, tracing their dependence back to sensations as the most basic form of mental activity. Therefore, the very foundation of Wolffian Rational Psychology (i.e. the essence that serves as the most basic explanatory key to everything observed) emerges directly from experience itself.

In this light, the complementarity between Wolff's Empirical and Rational Psychology appears to be structural and two-fold. On the one hand, Rational Psychology relies on the findings of its empirical counterpart to further account for them. On the other hand, the fundamental principle deployed in doing so, the essence of the soul, is itself derived from introspective experience. Consequently, Kant's notion of a purely speculative Rational Psychology is largely at odds with this two-fold *connubium* of experience and reason that constitutes Wolff's approach to Psychology. It is in this sense that Wolff's view is not captured by Kant's critique.

After Wolff, Mendelssohn's relation to Kant's Paralogisms turns out be far more complex. Given the non-systematic character of his work, the following discussion of Mendelssohn will trace the key psychological points of his major writings from the 1755 *Philosophische Gespräche* to the 1767 *Phaedon,* to ultimately assess whether Kant's critique fairly applies to the *Phaedon*.

3. The dilution of Wolff's divide between Empirical and Rational Psychology: Mendelssohn's Psychology, from the *Philosophische Gespräche* (1755) to the *Phaedon* (1767)

Wolff was, arguably, the most influential German philosopher of his time (Tonelli 1977, Gerlach, 2001). Over nearly fifty years of university teaching in Halle (1706–1723), Marburg (1723–1740), and finally back in Halle until his death, he authored a great number of philosophical treatises which were to be widely read, whether to endorse them or to criticise them. This crucial influence notwithstanding, the mid-18th century Berlin where Mendelssohn was active differed significantly from Wolff's university environment. Whereas knowledge production in smaller German cities was centred on universities, Berlin's intellectual scene was shaped by para-academic institutions such as the Prussian Academy of Sciences, literary journals like Friedrich Nicolai's *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste* (1757–1765), and intellectual salons like the *Gelehrtes Kaffeehaus* (1755–1759). These alternative spaces encouraged a shift away from Wolff's systematic approach toward a more accessible and eclectic philosophical ethos[11]. And it seems to me that Mendelssohn's approach to Psychology from the very beginning of his trajectory exemplifies this shift very well.

The *Philosophische Gespräche,* Mendelssohn's very first work, was published in 1755, in the form of a dialogue. The first of the dialogues opens with the fictional characters Philopon and Neophil amid a debate about pre-established Harmony [*vorherbestimmte Harmonie]*, one of the most polemic themes in Wolff's Rational Psychology since his expulsion from Halle in 1723, when he was accused of Spinozism[12]. Neophil states that Leibniz did not actually discover the doctrine but adopted and incorporated it into his system instead. Before identifying Spinoza as its alleged "discoverer", pre-established Harmony is introduced as the doctrine that mental and bodily phenomena, while lacking any kind of direct causal interaction, occur in perfect parallel because of God, who had predetermined *ab initio* that each mental representation must always correspond to a specific bodily movement (JubA 1, 3-9). Like Wolff, then, Mendelssohn appears to maintain that each soul possesses an essential (representative) force and that thoughts can be explained both in relation to their parallel physical processes and to the soul's inherent activity. Despite these parallels, what is particularly relevant for our present purposes is to note that, unlike Wolff, Mendelssohn assumes these propositions without any prior investigation into our introspective experience of mental processes.

Some months after the *Gespräche*, the *Briefe über die Empfindungen* (1755) take the form of an epistolary exchange between the fictional characters Palemon (called Theocles from the 1761 edition onwards) and Euphranor. Through their conversation, Mendelssohn offers an independent exploration of the nature of

11 By Mendelssohn's time, the idea that Wolff had systematized Leibniz had clearly become a commonplace (Wilson 1995, p.442-476). Even so, the influx of numerous foreign influences in Berlin (particularly from Britain and France) broadened this tradition to which Mendelssohn explicitly adhered, leading him to draw simultaneously from other thinkers as diverse as Locke, Shaftesbury, and Bayle, while distancing himself from the neo-scholastic environment that dominated universities. Regarding the rich and diverse intellectual influences that shaped the young Mendelssohn in Berlin, see specially Altmann (1973, p.31-50) and Feiner (2010, p.17-55).

12 For the controversial reception of Spinoza in early modern Germany and Mendelssohn's uniquely distinct position within this process, see especially Dyck (2018).
Incidentally, and as Alexander Altmann suggested, the extensive discussions that Mendelssohn and Lessing had while reading Spinoza in 1754 make it plausible that the dialogues in the Gespräche reflect, at least to some extent, their own real-life conversations (Altmann 1973, p.37-38)

pleasant sentiments, another highly specific area within Wolffian Psychology and mostly unrelated to the discussion of pre-stablished Harmony traceable in the *Gespräche*. Expanding upon Wolff, Mendelssohn classifies pleasure into three distinct types: (i) pleasures derived from purely physiological processes, (ii) those arising from the contemplation of beauty, and (iii) the intellectual pleasure resulting from acquiring knowledge. Drawing on Wolff's adaptation of Leibnizian epistemological concepts, each form of pleasure is distinguished by its mental representation and the object it represents. Sensory pleasure stems from an indistinct yet vivid representation [*undeutliche aber lebhafte Vorstellung*] of a perfection within one's own body (specifically, a gratifying state originating in a limb and spreading throughout the body). Aesthetic pleasure, by contrast, is based on an extensively clear representation [*ausgebreitete klare Vorstellung*] of a perfection related to the appearance of physical objects, occurring when an external object is perceived as a harmonious and pleasing whole. Finally, intellectual pleasure arises from a distinct representation [*deutliche Vorstellung*] of the "highest perfection," understood as the harmonious interaction of multiple elements that constitute both every individual being and the universe as a whole[13] (JubA 1, 43-111).

In stark contrast to Wolffian systematicity, Mendelssohn's two works from 1755 address highly specific and largely disconnected topics within Rational Psychology, thus departing from the *connubium* of Empirical and Rational Psychology as originally formulated by Wolff. In the *Gespräche*, the doctrine of pre-established harmony is examined, with particular emphasis on Spinoza's alleged anticipation of it. Mendelssohn's discussion here is purely speculative and makes no reference to elements drawn from Wolffian Empirical Psychology. The *Briefe über die Empfindungen*, by contrast, focus on feelings of pleasure. In this case, each type of feeling is treated through an initial empirical moment, which brings out the subject's particular experience of pleasure, followed by a rational stage aimed at explaining it. Yet this two-step sequence remains highly circumscribed and falls significantly short of Wolff's sustained and systematic engagement with Empirical Psychology as a necessary antecedent to its rational counterpart.

In the aesthetic works written between 1757 and 1761, Mendelssohn departs even more explicitly from Wolff's handling of the distinction between Empirical and Rational Psychology. In the *Betrachtungen über die Quellen und die Verbindungen der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* (1757), this divide is reworked into an interesting interplay between Experience [*Erfahrung*] and Theory [*Theorie*]:

> The human soul is as inexhaustible as nature; mere reflection cannot possibly establish everything about it, and everyday experience is rarely decisive. The happy moments in which we, as it were, catch nature in the act never escape us as easily as when we want to observe ourselves. At such moments the soul is much too preoccupied with other concerns to be able to perceive what transpires in it. Hence, one will have to analyze carefully the phenomena in which the impulses of our soul are most moved and compare them with the theory in order to shed a new light on this theory and extend its borders through new discoveries. Yet, are there any phenomena that move every impulse of the human soul more than the effects of the fine arts do?[14] (JubA 1, 167-8; quoted from: Mendelssohn 1997, p.169)

In contrast to the *Philosophische Gespräche* and the *Briefe*, the 1757 *Betrachtungen* contain an explicit emphasis on inquiring into the nature of the human soul and on the method required to do so. As Mendelssohn explains, this task demands the combined efforts of both Experience and Theory, echoing the Wolffian view that an empirical and a rational-explanatory stages are equally necessary. However, the way in which the two of them interact marks a significant departure from Wolff. As was already evident in the *Briefe*, Mendelssohn moves away from Wolff's sequential separation of empirical observation and theoretical explanation. What Mendelssohn labels as Experience and Theory no longer function as neatly distinct phases of a systematic Psychology. Instead, the two of them engage in a continuous and dynamic interplay, so that, throughout the *Betrachtungen*, introspective analysis of aesthetic pleasure is repeatedly interspersed with rational principles. The text provides several examples of this, such as the assertion that there can only be a single cause for why beautiful objects please us (based on the ontological premise that the soul is a simple substance) or the definition of beauty as the sensory representation of perfection [*sinnliche Vorstellung der Vollkommenheit*] based on the soul's alleged tendency to seek what perfects it[15] (JubA 1, 168-172).

---

13 As a side note, the *Briefe* contain one of the most vivid and telling passages illustrating how, in Mendelssohn's time, exogenous influences (such as the British legacy of Locke in this case) were regarded on a par with the major German authorities of the period: "Like hellish furies, cruel doubts about providence tortured me; indeed, I can confess, without skittishness, that they were doubts about the existence of God and the blessedness of virtue. At that point I was prepared to give rein to all vile desires, I was in danger, like someone drunk, of reeling into the wretched abyss into which the slaves of vice slide ever more deeply with every passing hour. [...] Thanks be to those true guides who have guided me back to true knowledge and to virtue. Thanks to you, Locke and Wolff! To you, immortal Leibniz! [...] Without your help I would have been lost forever... [...] Your immortal writings [...] steered me on the sure path to genuine philosophy, to knowledge of my very self and my origin" (JubA 1, 256. Quoted from: Mendelssohn 1997, p.27).
This alignment with British sources is also evident in Mendelssohn's stylistic concerns: according to Mendelssohn's son Joseph, it was the delight that his father experienced when reading Shaftesbury's *The Moralists* (1709) that decisively shaped the literary form of the Briefe (*Altmann* 1973, p.39). Regarding the crucial influence that Shaftesbury exerted on the German Enlightenment, see Dehrmann (2008).

14 For the sake of brevity, I will not delve into the details of Mendelssohn's aesthetics, which have been extensively analysed in recent years. A "rationalist" reading (according to which beauty is a form of sensible perfection, i.e., a dimmed version of the genuine, intellectual perfection inherent to knowledge) has been proposed by Beiser (2009, p.196–243) and supported by Blincoe (2012). Anne Pollok (2018), however, has rightly pointed out that this view neglects a key aspect of Mendelssohn's account: its subjective dimension. As she shows, texts like the 1771 *Rhapsodie* make clear that aesthetic pleasure arises not only from the object's perfection but also from the subjective perfection it awakens in the observer through contemplation.

15 In the *Rhapsodie* (both in the 1761 original version and in the 1771 expanded version), Mendelssohn, again underscoring his direct

In the 1767 *Phaedon*, Theory clearly takes precedence over Experience. As its full title suggests (*Phaedon, oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*), the work aims to demonstrate the soul's immortality, as well as its correlative attributes (simplicity, incorruptibility, indestructibility...), thus advancing precisely the kind of paralogistic inferences later addressed by Kant. Yet even at this apex of speculative reasoning, and rather unexpectedly, theoretical argument remains interwoven with empirical considerations. Interestingly, the empirical elements in the *Phaedon* are not drawn from Empirical Psychology, but rather from Natural philosophy. In particular, the initial reference to physical processes of change [*natürliche Veränderung*] serves as the cornerstone of the argument for the soul's incorruptibility and persistence [*Beharrlichkeit*] presented at the end of the work's first dialogue[16] (JubA 3.1, 59–61). And this is far from incidental, as this very argument is the one Kant later identifies as a paradigmatic (and fallacious) instance of Rational Psychology in the second version of the *Paralogisms*.

Kant appears to reconstruct Mendelssohn's argument as follows: (i) the soul has no parts; (ii) because it has no parts, it cannot gradually cease to exist through decomposition; (iii) since it does not undergo successive decomposition, its destruction would imply something impossible (namely, no temporal gap between its existence and non-existence); (iv) therefore, the soul must exist forever and be immortal (B 413-415). Kant's critique centres on the claim that Mendelssohn failed to recognise that the soul's faculties possess an intensive magnitude [*intensive Grosse*], that is, varying degrees of activity that could gradually diminish until disappearing entirely. However, this interpretation is strikingly at odds with Mendelssohn's own argument (Falkenstein 1998). Mendelssohn *does* acknowledge that all processes occurring in time have an intensive magnitude, and precisely because of this he argues that the soul, unlike corporeal entities in ever-lasting transformation, cannot undergo a gradual diminishing of activity without implying a form of annihilation (i.e. a transition from being to non-being, which is conceptually inadmissible in Mendelssohn's view).

The misinterpretation evident in the B version of the Paralogisms brings us to the first and most fundamental aspect of Mendelssohn's *Phaedon* that sets it apart, in a subtle yet unexpected sense, to Kant's criticism. At first glance, it is true that the *Phaedon* is a largely speculative work on Psychology, in which Mendelssohn analyses the attributes inherent in the mere concept of the soul, thus following a method closely aligned with Kant's previous definition of Rational Psychology. This clearly distinguishes him from Wolff and, in a very relevant sense, places him within the scope of Kant's criticism. However, Mendelssohn also draws on knowledge from Natural Philosophy to construct his argument for the incorruptibility of the soul. By doing so, he introduces an empirical component (resulting from the observation of corporeal changes) which plays a crucial role in his reasoning, ultimately leading him to conclude that the soul cannot be subject to the sort of gradual changes experienced by macroscopic bodies. The key point here is that Kant's critique of this argument in KrV B relies on overlooking the empirical considerations that ground Mendelssohn's conclusion. In other words: Mendelssohn's argument for the incorruptibility of the soul falls outside the scope of Kant's criticism in the specific sense that Kant misrepresents its meaning precisely by overlooking the empirical considerations on which it is grounded.

In order to add some curious, final nuances to Mendelssohn's relation to Kant's account of Rational Psychology, I would like to conclude this section by focusing briefly in a second departure from Wolffian Psychology. Beyond his blurring of the empirical/rational divide as instituted by Wolff, Mendelssohn also modulates the relation between Psychology and Moral Philosophy, as the former is no longer limited to providing premises for the demonstrations of the latter, like in Wolffian philosophy[17]. For Mendelssohn, by contrast, knowledge of the human soul holds a fundamental moral significance, which ultimately becomes the primary motivation for Psychology. This is especially evident in the third dialogue of his *Phaedon*[18].

---

engagement with the British tradition, contrasts his own methodologcial combination of experience and theory with what he sees as the one-sided empiricism of authors like Edmund Burke. In Mendelssohn's view, Burke is "a keen observer of nature. He heaps observation on top of observation, each of which is as basic as it is discerning. Yet, whenever it comes down to explaining these observations on the basis of the nature of the soul, his shortcomings become apparent. One sees that he was unacquainted with the psychology developed by German philosophers. Mere experience was not sufficient for him to be able see these profound doctrines in connection with one another" (JubA 1, 400; quoted from: Mendelssohn 1997, p.147).
For a historical overview of this sort of philosophical and cultural rivalry between national Enlightenments, see Tonelli (1971, p. 217–28).

16 Mendelssohn begins his argument by outlining the following key features of natural change: it involves transitions [Uebergang] between opposites [entgegengesetzen], occurs in time as a continuous process, and entails intermediate stages [Mittelzustand]. He then asks whether the soul, like the body, might be subject to gradual transformation. While this seems initially plausible, he ultimately rejects it: unlike bodies, which undergo continual change as their particles disperse and recompose to further form new bodies, the soul cannot gradually dissolve without its faculties ceasing to function, which would amount to their annihilation [Zernichtung]. Since such annihilation is conceptually inadmissible, Mendelssohn concludes that the soul and its powers are indestructible (JubA 3, 61-71).

17 The criterion employed by Wolff to determine the systematic ordering of the parts of philosophy is grounded in the syllogistic nature of philosophical reasoning: a part A must precede a part B if the latter requires premises established in the former (GW II.1.1, 39 | DP §87). According to this principle, Psychology occupies a foundational position with respect to other disciplines, such as Moral Philosophy, which depends on psychological content like the accounts of volition and action, or, more fundamentally, Wolff's demonstration of the soul's freedom.

18 This moral emphasis is particularly evident in the Phaedon, but its roots can also be traced throughout Mendelssohn's earlier works. By the end of the *Briefe* (1755), moral concerns are suddenly taken onto the scene. Midway through the text, the character Euphranor expresses unease about certain critiques of Providence [Vorsehung], particularly those used to justify suicide [Selbstmord] on the grounds that a providential plan does not exist. At this point, Mendelssohn shifts from analysing sentiments of pleasure to systematically presenting and refuting these arguments. In essence, his main argument against suicide can be summarised as follows: since human beings are endowed with faculties that can be continuously improved, fulfilling God's maximally benevolent intentions requires dedicating one's existence to self-improvement, an imperative fundamentally at odds with ceasing to exist through suicide. (JubA 1, 96-109).

Having already established the soul's incorruptibility and substantiality, Mendelssohn further explores the connection between immortality and morality. In his view, humanity's predestined journey toward perfection [*Vollkomenheit*] begins with the cultivation of personal virtues [*Tugend*], which can only be fully realised through engagement in the social sphere (i.e. in our relation to other individuals). This process ultimately leads to the recognition of God's existence, an all-caring being who grants immortality to his creatures, ensuring that their path toward perfection never comes to an end (JubA 3.1, 104-125).

Kant engages with this argument in a particularly interesting way, when reflecting on the consequences of moral action in *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1792). Once autonomous moral laws and duties are established, he argues, reason may legitimately ask: "What, then, is the outcome of our moral conduct?" (AK 6:5). It is in response to this question that the psychological argument for immortality comes back again onto the scene. The belief in a God who ensures moral justice beyond this life does not constitute knowledge in the Kantian sense. However, it provides a crucial subjective certainty that the moral efforts of human beings are never vain. In this respect, Rational Psychology has no cognitive validity but retains an essential pragmatical role: it sustains the subject's motivation for moral action by offering a regulative belief in God's commitment to make moral ends possible. This approach to the argument relevantly distances Kant from Mendelssohn in epistemological terms, while nonetheless preserving the essential link between Psychology and Morals that Mendelssohn had emphasised in modifying his Wolffian sources. Even if the sort of Rational Psychology conducted in the *Phaedon* cannot offer knowledge, its speculative ideas remain indispensable for moral life. In a way, then, Kant not only fails to offer an exhaustive refutation of the *Phaedon*'s speculative approach to Psychology but ultimately, albeit critically, repositions Mendelssohn's arguments within his own philosophy.

4. Conclusions

This study has examined Kant's critique of Rational Psychology in light of the works of Wolff and Mendelssohn, with the aim of demonstrating two central theses: (I) that Wolff's *Psychologia Rationalis* (1734) is not in fact vulnerable to Kant's charges to Rational Psychology, not only because it seeks to explain empirical data, but more crucially because its explanatory starting point (i.e. the essence of the soul) is itself derived from introspective experience; and (II) that Mendelssohn's *Phaedon*, despite being explicitly targeted as a prime example of Rational Psychology in KrV B, is not accurately characterised by Kant.

Regarding the first thesis, it has been shown that Wolff's *Psychologia Rationalis* is structurally inseparable from the *Psychologia Empirica*, and that its rational account is grounded at two distinct levels in experience. On the one hand, Rational Psychology relies on the findings established by Empirical Psychology to further uncover their reason. On the other, the fundamental explanatory principle that it deploys (the essence of the soul) is itself inferred through introspective observation. This two-fold integration of experience and reason marks a clear departure from the sort of Rational Psychology targeted by Kant in the *Paralogisms of Pure Reason*. Since Wolff does not attempt to deduce the nature of the soul solely by speculative reasoning but rather integrates empirical observation into his explanatory enterprise, Kant's critique fails to directly address the epistemological framework in which Wolff's Rational Psychology operates.

As for the second thesis, the case of Mendelssohn presents a more nuanced challenge to Kant. While Kant explicitly criticises the *Phaedon* as a paradigmatic instance of Rational Psychology in KrV B, his engagement with Mendelssohn's text is far from straightforward. As argued, the Paralogisms of the B edition misrepresent Mendelssohn's argument for the incorruptibility of the soul, particularly in accusing him of failing to consider the possibility that the soul's activity has an intensive magnitude that could gradually diminish. Contrary to Kant's claim, Mendelssohn does actually recognise the intensive magnitude of all temporal processes and, based on that, explicitly rejects that the soul could progressively cease in the manner of natural bodies. This misinterpretation weakens the force of Kant's refutation, since it suggests that this particular argument of Mendelssohn's, grounded in empirical considerations about natural change, is not actually targeted by the criticism of the Paralogisms in KrV B.

This discrepancy is further nuanced by a second departure from Wolffian Psychology. As discussed, Mendelssohn distances himself from the Wolffian model not only by blurring the empirical/rational divide, but also by redefining the very purpose of Psychology in highlighting its intrinsic moral orientation. This reconfiguration becomes explicit in the third dialogue of the *Phaedon*, where the immortality of the soul is presented as a necessary condition for human moral striving. Very interestingly, Kant revisits this line of thought in his *Religionsschrift*. While he clearly sets himself apart from Mendelssohn by abstaining from any

---

Moral concerns are still present in the aesthetic texts like the 1761 *Rhapsodie* (which was originally conceived as an appendix to the 1755 Briefe). In the *Rhapsodie*, the discussion of mixed sentiments [vermischte Empfindung] leads to shifting the notion of perfection trom an aesthetic to a moral framework. Since every individual has the capacity to act freely in accordance with reason, the duty of self-perfection extends to a broader moral obligation: to assist others in their own path of self-improvement (JubA 1, 393-424).

A few years later, *Orakel, die Bestimmung des Menschen betreffend* (1764) specifically focuses on the themes of Providence and human destiny. Here, Mendelssohn develops a nuanced version of Joachim Spalding's thesis in Die Bestimmung des Menschen (1748), arguing that because human beings must pursue perfection without limits, and because death would constitute such a limit, their process of self-improvement must necessarily continue without end. (JubA 6.1, 19-24).

Regarding the debate on human destiny in which Mendelssohn took part, and its broader significance within the German Enlightenment, see in particular Anne Pollok's commendable reconstruction of Mendelssohn's anthropology (2010), as well as Laura Macor's comprehensive study of the theme of human destiny in the German Enlightenment (2013).

epistemic claims about the soul, he nevertheless follows him in recognising the essential role of Rational Psychology in actually motivating moral praxis.

Taken together, this study calls for a reassessment of enlightened Rational Psychology not as a relic of pre-critical metaphysics but as a complex and evolving field of inquiry: one that, in ways still deserving of further exploration, apparently continued to shape Kant's critical project.

5. References

Sources:

Kant, I. (1911a). *Kants Gesammelte Schriften. Akademieausgabe. Band. 3.* De Gruyter, Germany.
Kant, I. (1911b). *Kants Gesammelte Schriften. Akademieausgabe. Band. 4.* De Gruyter, Germany.
Kant, I. (1911c) *Gessammelte Werke. Akademie Textausgabe. Band 6. D*e Gruyter, Germany.
Kant, I. (1998). *Critique of pure reason* (P. Guyer & A. W. Wood, Trans.). Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
Mendelssohn, M. (1971) *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumausgabe. Band 1.* Frommann-Holzboog, Germany.
Mendelssohn, M. (1972) *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumausgabe. Band 3.1.* Frommann-Holzboog, Germany.
Mendelssohn, M. (1981) *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumausgabe. Band 6.1.* Frommann-Holzboog, Germany.
Mendelssohn, M. (1997) *Philosophical Writings* (translated by Daniel O. Dahlstrom). Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
Tschirnhaus, E.W. (1695). *Medicina mentis et corporis*. T. Fritsch, Germany.
Wolff, C. (1965). *Gesammelte Werke. I Abteilung, Band 1. Vernünftige Gedanken von den Kräften des menschlichen vertsandes und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in Erketniss der Wahrheit.* Olms, Germany.
Wolff, C. (1968). *Gesammelte Werke. II Abteilung, Band 5. Psychologia Empirica.* Olms, Germany.
Wolff, C. (1972). *Gesammelte Werke. II Abteilung, Band 6. Psychologia Rationalis.* Olms, Germany.
Wolff, C. (1983). *Gesammelte Werke. I Abteilung, Band 2. Vernünftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen.* Olms, Germany.
Wolff, C. (1987). *Gesammelte Werke.. II Abteilung, Band 1.1. Philosophia rationalis sive logica, pars 1.* Olms, Germany.
Wolff, C. (2003). *Gesammelte Werke. III Abteilung, Band 77. Logic, or rational thoughts*, Olms, Germany.

Secondary literature:

Altmann, A. (1973), *Moses Mendelssohn. A biographical study*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, USA.
Araujo, S. F.; Pereira, T. C. R.; Sturm, T. (eds.) (2021), *The Force of an Idea: New Essays on Christian Wolff's Psychology*, Springer, Germany.
Arndt, H. W. (1965), "Einführung", en C. Wolff, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 1-102.
Arnsperger, W. (1897), *Christian Wolffs Verhältnis zu Leibniz*, Felber, Germany.
Beiser, F. (2009), *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom.
Blincoe, A. (2012), "The Priority of Reason: Mendelssohn's Rationalist Aesthetics", *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, 4, pp. 105-120.
Boer, K. de; Prunea-Bretonnet, T. (eds.) (2021), *The Experiential Turn in Eighteenth-Century German Philosophy*, Routledge.
Campo, M. (1939), *Christian Wolff e il razionalismo precritico*, Vita e Pensiero, Italy.
Carboncini, S. (1986), "Christian August Crusius und der Leibniz-Wolffischen Philosophie", en A. Heinekamp (ed.), *Beiträge zur Wirkungsgeschichte von G. W. Leibniz*, *Studia Leibnitiana*, Supplementa XXVI, Steiner, Germany, pp. 110-125.
Carboncini, S. (1988), "Der Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Christian Wolff", en I. Marchlewitz (ed.), *Leibniz. Tradition und Aktualität. Vorträge des V. Int. Leibniz-Kongresses (Hannover, 14-19 November 1988)*, Steiner, Germany, pp. 139-146.
Carboncini, S. (2021), "Development and Diffusion of Wolff's Psychology Through His Disciples and Followers", en S. F. Araujo; T. C. R. Pereira; T. Sturm (eds.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 197-225.
Cataldi Madonna, L. (2001), *Christian Wolff und das System des klassischen Rationalismus: die philosophia experimentalis universalis*, Olms, Germany.
Corr, C. A. (1974), "Did Wolff Follow Leibniz?", en G. Funke (ed.), *Akten des 4. Internationalen Kant Kongresses, Mainz, 6.–10. April 1974, Teil II. 1. Sektionen*, De Gruyter, Germany, pp. 11-21.
Corr, C. A. (1975), "Christian Wolff and Leibniz", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (2), pp. 241-262.
Corr, C. A. (1983), "Introduction", en C. Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke. I Abteilung, Band 2. Vernünftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen*, Olms, Germany, pp. 1-47.
Dehrmann, M. K. (2008), *Das Orakel der Deisten: Shaftesbury und die deutsche Aufklärung*, Wallstein, Germany.
Dyck, C. W. (2014), *Kant and Rational Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
Dyck, C. W. (2018), "Between Wolffianism and Pietism: Baumgarten's Rational Psychology", en C. D. Fugate; J. Hymers (eds.), *Baumgarten and Kant on Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, pp. 78-93.
Dyck, C. W.; Wunderlich, F. (eds.) (2018), *Kant and his German Contemporaries*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.

École, J. (1966), "Des rapports de l'expérience et de la raison dans l'analyse de l'âme ou la 'Psychologia empirica' de Christian Wolff", *Giornale di Metafisica*, 21 (4–5), pp. 589-617.
École, J. (1968), "Editoris introductio", en C. Wolff, *Op. Cit.*, pp. V-XXXVII.
École, J. (1969), "De la nature de l'âme, de la déduction de ses facultés, de ses rapports avec le corps, ou la 'Psychologia rationalis' de Christian Wolff", *Giornale di Metafisica*, 24 (4-6), pp. 499-531.
École, J. (1983), "Des rapports de Wolff avec Leibniz dans le domaine de la métaphysique", en *Leibniz. Werk und Wirkung. IV. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress*, Gottfried-Wilhelm-Leibniz-Gesellschaft, Germany, pp. 153-163.
École, J. (1987), "La critique wolffienne des systèmes d'explication des rapports de l'âme et du corps", *Il cannocchiale. Rivista di studi filosofici*, 1–2, pp. 3-21.
École, J. (1990), *La Métaphysique de Christian Wolff*, Olms, Germany.
École, J. (1998), "War Christian Wolff ein Leibnitianer?", *Aufklärung*, 10 (1), pp. 29-46.
Falkenstein, L. (1998), "A Double Edged Sword? Kant's Refutation of Mendelssohn's Proof of the Immortality of the Soul and Its Implications for His Theory of Matter", *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, 29A (4), pp. 561-588.
Feiner, S. (2010), *Moses Mendelssohn. Sage of Modernity*, Yale University Press, USA.
Gerlach, H. M. (ed.) (2001), *Christian Wolff – seine Schule und seine Gegner*, Meiner, Germany.
Gómez Tutor, J. I. (2004), *Die wissenschaftliche Methode bei Christian Wolff*, Olms, Germany.
Goubet, J. F.; Rudolph, O. P. (eds.) (2004), *Die Psychologie Christian Wolffs. Systematische und historische Untersuchungen*, Max Niemeyer Verlag, Germany.
Klemme, H. (1996), *Kants Philosophie des Subjekts: systematische und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Selbstbewusstsein und Selbsterkenntnis*, Meiner, Germany.
Kuehn, M. (1987), *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800: A Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Canada.
Leduc, C. (2013), "Les 'Meditationes' de Leibniz dans la tradition wolffienne", *Archives de Philosophie*, 76 (2), pp. 295-317.
Leduc, C. (2018), "Sources of Wolff's Philosophy: Scholastics/Leibniz", en R. Theis; A. Aichele (eds.), *Handbuch Christian Wolff*, Springer, Germany, pp. 35-53.
Macor, L. A. (2013), *Die Bestimmung des Menschen (1748-1800): Eine Begriffsgeschichte*, Frommann-Holzboog (Forschungen und Materialien zur deutschen Aufklärung II, 25).
Marcolungo, F. L. (1975), "Principi e sistema. Saggio sui rapporti Wolff – Leibniz", en C. Giacon (ed.), *Storiografia e Filosofia del linguaggio*, Antenore, Italy, pp. 85-121.
Marcolungo, F. L. (2007), *Christian Wolff tra Psicologia Empirica e Psicologia Rationale*, Olms, Germany.
Neveu, S. (2017), *L'a priori, l'a posteriori, le pur, le non pur chez Christian Wolff et ses maîtres* (*Christian Wolff: Gesammelte Werke, III. Abteilung, Bd. 148. Wolffiana, 5*), Olms, Germany.
Pollok, A. (2010), *Facetten des Menschen. Zu Moses Mendelssohns Anthropologie*, Meiner, Germany.
Pollok, A. (2018), "Beautiful Perception and its Object. Mendelssohn's Theory of Mixed Sentiments Reconsidered", *Kant-Studien*, 109 (2), pp. 270-285.
Poser, H. (1975), "Zum Begriff der Monade bei Leibniz und Wolff", en *Akten des II. Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses Hannover 17.–22. Juli 1972*, Bd. 3 (*Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa*, 14), Steiner, Germany, pp. 383-395.
Richards, R. J. (1980), "Christian Wolff's Prolegomena to Empirical and Rational Psychology: Translation and Commentary", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 124 (4), pp. 227-239.
Sales Vilalta, G. (2022), *L'estudi de l'ànima humana a l'Alemanya del segle XVIII. Christian Wolff, Moses Mendelssohn i Immanuel Kant* [Tesi doctoral, Universitat de Barcelona].
Schneiders, W. (1973), "Leibniz – Thomasius – Wolff. Die Anfänge der Aufklärung in Deutschland", en *Akten des II. Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses Hannover 17.–22. Juli 1972*, Bd. I (*Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa*, 12), Steiner, Germany, pp. 105-121.
Tonelli, G. (1971), "The 'Weakness' of Reason in the Age of Enlightenment", *Diderot Studies*, 14, pp. 217-244.
Tonelli, G. (1977), "La filosofía alemana de Leibniz hasta Kant", en Y. Belaval (ed.), *La filosofía alemana de Leibniz a Hegel*, Siglo Veintiuno, Spain, pp. 98-165.
Wilson, C. (1995), "The Reception of Leibniz in the Eighteenth Century", en N. Jolley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, pp. 442-476.
Wundt, M. (1945), *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, Olms, Germany.