Kant's Politics in Context by Reidar Maliks, and: *Kant and Rational Psychology* by Corey W. Dyck (review)

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German Studies Review, Volume 40, Number 1, February 2017, pp. 172-175 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/gsr.2017.0012

Kant's Politics in Context. By Reidar Maliks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. v + 195. Cloth $74.00. ISBN 978-0199645152.

Kant and Rational Psychology. By Corey W. Dyck. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. vii + 257. Cloth $74.00. ISBN 978-0199688296.

Reidar Maliks and Corey W. Dyck do the important work of situating Kant's political philosophy and metaphysics, respectively, in their contemporary context. Other recent texts in this vein are Pauline Kleingeld's *Kant and Cosmopolitanism* (2011), James DiCenso's *Kant, Religion and Politics* (2013) and Patrick Frierson's *Kant's Empirical Psychology* (2014). In their attention to the historical Kant, these books contribute to a growing body of literature on the eighteenth-century sociocultural and intellectual environment within which Kant was working.

Maliks canvasses nearly all of Kant's political writings against the backdrop of the debates of the day. Between the conservative position of Justus Möser, which grounded state legitimacy in cultural tradition and modeled political institutions after the ancient estates of the German Reich, and the natural law theory of Wolff, which combined politics and ethics in positing the goal of the state to be the happiness of its constituency, Maliks identifies Kant as a progressive of a particular stripe. Across his political writings, Kant argued for freedom rather than eudaimonistic well-being—a political/moral divide codified in the two distinct parts of *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797): "The Doctrine of Right" and "The Doctrine of Virtue." Maliks reads the right/virtue distinction in Kant as both a critical response to Wolff's perfectionism and as an implicit rejection of Frederick II's statist paternalism (23).

There is a speculative tone to Maliks's historical reconstruction of Kant's politics. On the issue of citizenship rights, Maliks claims that it is "*reasonable* to assume" that Kant followed the debates of the day because of his familiarity at first- or secondhand with its main participants (101, emphasis added). The tentativeness of Maliks's language fits his subject. As Kant writes Schiller in 1795, the "discussion of political . . . topics is currently subject to certain restrictions"; exercising prudence, Kant continues, "one must conform . . . to the times" (Akademieausgabe, 12:11–12). Throughout the 1780s and '90s Frederick II's public ministers closely checked political and religious publications; Kant himself was officially censored in 1794 for *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (Maliks, 5). Equally, while his correspondents regularly asked for his opinion, Kant tends in his letters to avoid their queries. In a 1793 letter to the publisher Johann Carl Philipp Spener, Kant explains his hesitancy to discuss politics. Humbly, Kant declines his invitation to reprint "Idea for a Universal History" (1784) in a forthcoming issue of the *Berliner Monatsschrift*. Invoking Hecuba's comment in the *Aeneid* to an aged Priam preparing for battle, Kant explains that aged philosophers are "not the defenders this hour needs" (Akademieausgabe,

11:417). Wary as Kant was of Frederick II's censors and deferential to the political opinions of younger men, the explicit record on Kant's politics is scant. If he is to be made party to eighteenth-century Prussian public discourse, the best approach is Maliks's: a historical reading of Kant's political philosophy that discerns points of possible contact with the events of the day.

No event loomed larger for Kant and his contemporaries than the French Revolution. Fittingly, Maliks's study revolves around the Revolution while still acknowledging that Kant's political philosophy was largely settled in the 1770s and '80s (3). To balance the obvious historical significance of the French Revolution for Kant against the pre-1789 date of his political lectures and notes, Maliks incorporates references to the Revolution into his discussion of Kant's theories of citizenship, suffrage, revolution, and international relations. In this reading, the Revolution was an occasion for Kant to reconsider his position on political franchise and republicanism, among other things, rather than the single prompt for his political ideas. On revolution, Kant first formulated his prohibition on a people's right to rebel in his early political works. In Hobbesian fashion, Kant refused the right of rebellion so as to protect the sovereign authority of rulers of state (121). Kant's personal enthusiasm for the Revolution did little to change his theoretical position. In *The Metaphysics of Morals* Kant wanted it both ways: he maintained his philosophical prohibition against the right to rebel while absolving the French of political wrongdoing. By convoking the Estates General in 1789, Louis XVI effectively transferred sovereign authority to the new body. Thus, the ensuing events did not threaten the sanctity of legal-political sovereignty.

In Maliks's telling, Frederick II's reign and the French Revolution impacted Kant at one remove. It is comments on these events by conservative critics and progressive advocates to which Kant responded in writing. The "context" in Maliks's title, then, is first the magazine-forged space of the public sphere; second, it is the legal and political constitution of Prussia prior to and after the French Revolution. A third and somewhat extended meaning of "context" in Maliks's title is what he calls "canonical" political philosophy (40). Working in reverse order from practice to theory, Maliks uses Prussian politics to qualify the theoretical influence of the likes of Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau on Kant. For example, though Part II of Kant's *Theory and Practice* essay is subtitled "Against Hobbes," Maliks reads the text as part of a larger project by Kant to "addres[s] . . . his critics" and to think through "the practical consequences of implementing his theory of right in the Prussian context" (40).

The case for Kant as *le philosophe engagé* is here overstated. Marginal notes in his copy of *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) show Kant to have been encouraged by his reading Rousseau to reformulate his political and moral philosophy, which, once composed, changed only in detail over the next thirty years. Rather, and echoing Maliks's fittingly tentative tone, we can conclude that Kant was as practically minded as the systematic strictures of his critical project

and the theoretical influence of Rousseau allowed. The rest he left to younger, abler "defenders [of the] hour" (Akademieausgabe, 11:417).

Dyck also contextualizes Kant in his historical context but in a more traditional way than Maliks in prioritizing his canonical philosophical influences. With an eye on the "Paralogisms" chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87), Dyck explores eighteenth-century rational psychology: a special branch of metaphysics rooted in Descartes's idea of the *cogito* (I think) and developed by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Christian Wolff and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. Kant is critical of the illusory errors of past metaphysicians. Dyck claims that Kant was mostly concerned with Wolff. There are aspects of the text that recommend this interpretation. For one, Kant presented the soul as a thinking being. While Descartes variously presents the *sum* (I am) as an immediate intuition of, or mediate inference from, the *cogito*, Wolff was unequivocal: the *I am* follows syllogistically from the *I think* (Dyck, 175–176). In turn, Kant presents the *cogito* in the Paralogisms as a term in the premise of a syllogism (A349–350; A354–355): a mediated, inferential construal of the Cartesian *cogito* that bespeaks Wolff's influence.

For Wolff, the rational investigation of the soul "sets out from experience" and "confirms . . . its claims in experience" (Dyck, 32). Rational psychology is thus a particular instance of philosophy in general, a "marriage of reason and experience" (Dyck 27). Wolff's correction of the Cartesian essentialization of the soul as consciousness exemplifies his empiricorationalism. Consciousness is not an immediate given. Rather, it is the result of "an act of differentiation" (Dyck, 33). From this premise, one can hypothesize about unconscious states of the soul—hypotheses, according to Wolff, that can be confirmed by experience. The interplay between reason and experience works in two directions: "rational psychology . . . infer[s] to the ground of a given experience . . . [and] expand[s] the scope of our observation[s]" from experience (Dyck, 34). Reason logically grounds experiential claims; in turn, it speculates on experience to draw further logical inferences.

Dyck's focus on Wolff seems to conflict with Kant's exclusion of experience from science. In his presentation, Kant insists on the purity of rational psychology: "The term 'I,' as a thinking being . . . [is] the object of psychology, which may be called the rational science of the soul, assuming . . . *independen*[*ce*] [*from*] *all experience*" (A342/B400, my emphasis). The illusory conclusions of this branch of metaphysics, such as its claims to know the soul's simplicity or the persistence of its personality after death, seem to be drawn without recourse to experience.

That said, there is indeed an empirical aspect to rational psychology as Kant suggests, and it is to Dyck's credit for highlighting this aspect of the text. The syllogisms in which Kant presents the paralogisms are faulty in equivocating between a transcendental and empirical meaning of their middle terms. In technical Kantian language, the mistake of the rational psychologist is not simply faulty logic. More ineluctably,

the rational psychologist mistakenly treats the conditions of discursive cognition as determinative of rational thought. From one mistake, the rational psychologist makes another: thinking the conditions of discursive determinacy apply to ideas of reason, s/he posits the soul as an empirical object and predicates of it attributes like "permanence" and "substantiality." The first of these mistakes is purely rational; the second is a mistaken empiricorational extrapolation upon the first. Wolffian rational psychology, which constitutively involves reference to the empirical, seems to be an instance of the second mistake. Thus, even if Wolffian rational psychology is the object of Kant's critique, it seems to come in only once the fundamental error of science is redressed.

The tradition in Kant scholarship has been to find reference to experience in rational psychology at the conclusion of a pure inference drawn from the *I think*. Scholars have taken this tack because an empiricism derived from reason alone is of more immediate concern to Kant in the first *Critique* than is an empiricorationalism à la Wolff—regardless if the latter, as Dyck notes (237), may anticipate Kant's "grand synthesis" of empiricism and rationalism. Were it possible to arrive at determinate cognition from the purely rational resources, Kant's restriction of such determination to the understanding would be unjustified: the ideas of reason could be tabulated among the categories; the claims made on their bases would have a determinate and not merely regulative status.

Accordingly, there is an urgency to Kant's response to pure rational psychology—one that necessitated the revision, in tandem, of the "Paralogisms" and "Transcendental Deduction" between 1781 and 1787. Kant had to get right his critique of a rational science of the soul if the *I think* as principle of apperception was to ground the understanding's transcendentally ideal empiricism. Dyck's interpretive choice to treat "context" historically rather than intratextually—that is, to read the "Paralogisms" against the Wolffian metaphysical tradition rather than relative to the A- and B-edition "Transcendental Deduction"—shifts the attention of Kant's argument from the first logical mistake of rational psychology to the second speculative excesses of the same. In this way, *Kant and Rational Psychology* complements earlier studies of the "Paralogisms" by detailing the eighteenth-century empiricorational development of Descartes's pure metaphysics.

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