



The Sciences of the Soul: The Early Modern Origins of Psychology

Fernando Vidal

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The Sciences of the Soul is the first attempt to explain the development of the disciplinary conception of psychology from its appearance in the late sixteenth century to its redefinition at the end of the seventeenth and its emergence as an institutionalized field in the eighteenth. Fernando Vidal traces this development through university courses and textbooks, encyclopedias, and nonacademic books, as well as through various histories of psychology.

Vidal reveals that psychology existed before the eighteenth century essentially as a “physics of the soul,” and it belonged as much to natural philosophy as to Christian anthropology. It remained so until the eighteenth century, when the “science of the soul” became the “science of the mind.” Vidal demonstrates that this Enlightenment refashioning took place within a Christian framework, and he explores how the preservation of the Christian idea of the soul was essential to the development of the science. Not only were most psychologists convinced that an empirical science of the soul was compatible with Christian faith; their perception that psychology preserved the soul also helped to elevate its rank as an empirical science. Broad-ranging and impeccably researched, this book will be of wide importance in the history and philosophy of psychology, the history of the human sciences more generally, and in the social and intellectual history of eighteenth-century Europe.

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