

Adrian M. S. Piper,
Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume I: The Humean Conception

Cambridge University Press Reader B

Rationality and the Structure of the Self is an ambitious project to examine and evaluate various positions advanced in late twentieth century moral philosophy in the Anglo-American analytic tradition around the contrast between what the author characterizes as the Humean and Kantian models of the self. The first volume represents the negative part of the project—a critical assessment of the major contributions to the tradition in so far as they assume and defend in different ways and to various degrees a commitment to the Humean model—whereas volume two (which I have not seen) promises to develop what the author proposes as a superior approach based on a Kantian-inspired alternative. The writing is of a very high quality—executed clearly, engagingly and at times with a great deal of passion for the subject—and the author organizes and treats a wide sweep of work with great skill and an impressive scholarly command of the material. As far as I know, there is no work in the extant literature that compares with the proposed book or one that treats the tradition in terms of the thesis that the author advances and defends. In that respect, it is certainly an original piece of work and, given the persistent interest in moral philosophy, a timely contribution to the literature.

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There are no doubt interpretive claims she makes that are controversial, especially as she confronts them all through her claim that they adhere to and ultimately fail by adopting the Humean model. Her criticisms, however, are informed and wellargued, and disagreements can be aired where they should be, in the arena of scholarly debate.

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The manuscript is of a prodigious length, even more so given that this is only the first volume. On the whole, however, I found very few places where the author did not use the space efficiently and economically. The majority of the chapters represent a deep engagement with the works under discussion, and the critical appraisal of each does require that the author present and assess them in a detailed and extended fashion.