

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

Cambridge University Press Reader C

This is an extraordinary typescript, and well worth CUP's support. What Piper has done is to offer a critique of a significant portion of 20th century work in meta-ethics. It is crosscutting in the sense that the vantage point from which she conducts her study—rationality and the structure of the self—offers the reader an original and distinctive way to compare and critique major 20th Century work in this area. The territory covered is amazing. It includes the work of Brandt, Kim, Goldman, David Lewis, Anscombe, Nagel, Frankfurt, Watson, Williams, Slote, Gewirth, Anderson, Rawls, Gibbard, and Hume, as well as a very extensive discussion of major versions of Utility Maximization theory. Moreover, while she discusses each of these in terms of the respect in which they each are indebted to what she characterizes as the "Humean" conception of rationality and the structure of the self, there is, in the case of many of the persons mentioned above, original and often insightful discussion of other aspects of their work.

To be sure, you have only made the 1st of two volumes available to me, and thus I have to make some extrapolations from the closing passages of this 1st Volume, plus many comments along the way about what is to be found in the 2nd Volume. But given that extrapolation, I would suggest that not only should you publish Vol. 1, but make a commitment to also publish Vol. 2. Indeed, given the nature of the project, it makes no sense to just publish volume 1. I realize that this would be a major commitment for CUP, but I really do think it is merited.

I found the analysis she offers of the various major figures that she discusses to be very clear and insightful. In many cases I came away with a very much deeper sense of what was really at issue in a given theorist's work. This was especially true of the Chapters on Nagel and Rawls. The analysis is not only clear and insightful, but proceeds at a level of detail that is extraordinary—with many, many cross-references to other parts of the typescript (as well as the second volume). This is obviously one of the reasons why it is so long: she has a huge amount of ground to cover.

There is one Chapter in which I thought she did an especially fine analysis. This is Chapter X on Rawls's instrumentalism. It is obvious enough that the behind the veil of ignorance argument presupposes an instrumental view of rationality, while the reflective equilibrium argument does not. Piper shows, quite convincingly, I think, that the behind the veil of ignorance argument is undermined by what she describes as the continuity thesis. I came away from her discussion with a much clearer sense of one problem that besets the instrumentalism to which (at least *A Theory of Justice*) Rawls was committed. Again, I found her discussion of Nagel and of the free rider problem (Chapter XII) very illuminating.

...

Chapter IV is the longest Chapter in the typescript, and testifies to her understanding of the more technical literature in decision theory that really does reflect the Humean conception of the self. What she has to say here is very interesting.