

## KANT ON SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND SELF-FORMATION

As the pre-eminent Enlightenment philosopher, Kant famously calls on all humans to make up their own minds, independently from the constraints imposed on them by others. Kant's focus, however, is on universal human reason, and he tells us little about what makes us individual persons. In this book, Katharina T. Kraus explores Kant's distinctive account of psychological personhood by unfolding how, according to Kant, we come to know ourselves as such persons. Drawing on Kant's Critical works and on his Lectures and Reflections, Kraus develops the first textually comprehensive and systematically coherent account of our capacity for what Kant calls 'inner experience'. The novel view of self-knowledge and self-formation in Kant that she offers addresses present-day issues in philosophy of mind and will be relevant for contemporary philosophical debates. It will be of interest to scholars of the history of philosophy, as well as of philosophy of mind and psychology.

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KANT ON  
SELF-KNOWLEDGE  
AND SELF-FORMATION

The Nature of Inner Experience

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*Für meine Mutter und dem Andenken meines Vaters (1948–2000)*

To my mother and in memory of my father (1948–2000)

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,  
die sich über die Dinge ziehn.  
Ich werde den letzten vielleicht nicht vollbringen,  
aber versuchen will ich ihn.

*Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Ich lebe mein Leben  
in wachsenden Ringen'*

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## PREFACE

Modern life is full of change and transition. We constantly undergo new experiences or even actively seek them, and with those new experiences we ourselves change. All these changes become manifest in some way or other in our conscious mental life, which consists, most basically, of a constant stream of passing thoughts, perceptions, desires, joys, hopes, and fears, as well as various other mental states. Reflecting upon this seemingly endless flow of experiences, we may notice – once in a while and perhaps often to our own surprise – that many of these changes are profound, even if slow. They concern long-held beliefs, core commitments, and even character traits. And yet we have a sense of *still being me*, unmistakably and distinctively. We almost unavoidably think of ourselves as being the same unique individual persons throughout all these changes. We are rarely willing to accept that our lives may just consist in single experiential episodes strung loosely together. Rather, we even may find ourselves trying to make sense of our lives as a whole, perhaps hoping that all our experiences may add up to an overall character, aim, or purpose towards which we unswervingly strive.

This book aims to enhance our understanding of the intricate relationship between becoming a unique individual person and knowing oneself as such by exploring Immanuel Kant's distinctive account of psychological personhood. For this purpose, it expounds, in accordance with the tenets of his transcendental philosophy, Kant's account of empirical self-knowledge as the knowledge that one has of oneself as a unique psychological person. The resulting account of personhood, I shall argue, is able to explain both the experience of psychological change and the sense of personal identity.

By focusing on the structural conditions of human mental life and retrieving Kant's conception of inner experience, this book will tackle two puzzling questions that lie at the heart, not only of Kant's philosophy, but of any philosophical account of self-knowing subjects. Firstly, how, if at all, can we become the objects of our own experience and, if so, what kind of objects are we for ourselves? Secondly, how, if at all, can we know ourselves objectively? That is, how can the subjective contents of our minds become items of knowledge meeting the standards of objective validity? Kant's philosophy, I argue, provides an exceptionally productive framework to resolve the baffling tension

that arises between the self-consciousness that one has of oneself qua *thinking subject* and the self-knowledge that one has of oneself as *object of knowledge*.

Kant's solution, I shall argue, draws centrally on his conception of *the soul as an idea of reason*, which he takes to serve as the "guiding thread of inner experience" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A672/B700). While Kant denies that there is (at least that we can know of from experience) any Cartesian mental substance that underlies all inner change, he nonetheless assigns a crucial role to the idea of the soul. As a regulative idea of reason, it shapes how we conceive of ourselves as enduring psychological persons, providing the unity that enables us to experience our own mental states and more general psychological properties as varying across time. The individual person will be understood as evolving through self-formation in the course of realizing mental capacities under the normative guidance of the idea of the soul. In consequence, Kant's notion of the soul will turn out – perhaps surprisingly to many readers – to be much closer to an *Aristotelian soul-form* than to a *Cartesian mind-substance*. To be a person, for Kant, just means to live one's life according to the form of an integrated mental whole.

This book is, if anything, only the *sketch of a whole*. In the years working on this project, I have been fortunate to have invaluable teachers, colleagues, and friends. I am especially grateful to all my colleagues at the University of Notre Dame for offering me an extraordinarily productive as well as cooperative atmosphere. Above all, I thank Karl Ameriks for his philosophical guidance and encouragement, and just for seemingly knowing the answers to all my questions. Moreover, I thank in particular Robert Audi, David Cory, Therese Cory, Sam Newlands, Fred Rush, Jeff Speaks, and Meghan Sullivan for supporting me in numerous ways.

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