

Robert Audi:
The Architecture of Reason
 (4)

Chapter 6

Others As Ends

The central question:

___ Is rationality grounded in the way egoism claims?

Three Arguments for Altruism:

[A] The Argument from Empathy

1. Empathy radiates beyond us, even if its origin is in us.
2. If others are fundamentally like us, we might expect that their experiences can be enjoyable or painful, in much the way ours are and can provide grounds of practical reasons for them.
3. If I truly find some experiences intrinsically enjoyable or intrinsically painful, then I would want the same satisfaction or aversion for others – not for my sake but for others' sake.
4. Therefore, altruism can be a natural extension of psychological egoism.
5. Therefore, altruistic wants are rational in a sense that they are fully consonant with reason.

* Empathy can motivate, with or without the help of duty, and sometimes better.

[B-1] The Argument from the Intrinsic Qualities of Experiences

1. Rational beliefs arise on the basis of one's experience if it has qualitative content appropriate to ground those beliefs.
2. If it is the qualities themselves that make the experience attractive to me, then they are not attractive to me merely as features of *my* experiences.
3. Therefore, I could rationally find these qualities of experiences in others attractive.
4. If I find those qualities attractive, then I would naturally desire it.
5. Therefore, it is natural for me to have altruistic desires (for others to have the experiences whose qualities I find attractive).

* The tendency to form desires of the kind in question is not limited to close relationships: it is characteristic of those who want the good of others for its own sake. It is also in part constitutive of empathy, as a common underpinning of altruism, that one tends to form desires of the kind in question.

Q: What is the origin of empathy? Is it part of our nature or is it brought upon us by our training?

* If the primitive cases of rational desire are not egoistic, then in the situations I have described there is as much reason to believe others' experience to be good as to believe mine to be good; and the same holds for their experience's being valuable, rewarding, worthwhile, or the like.

[B-2] The Argument from the Demand of Reason

1. Rationality demands that our beliefs and desires be integrated in the way that if I believe *x* to be good, then I would desire *x*.
2. If I believe that others' experience is as good as mine because of the common intrinsic qualities in these experiences themselves, then I *would* desire for others' realizing these goods.
3. Therefore, rationality demands that I have altruistic desire for others' getting enjoyable experiences for their sake.

* We do vividly and concretely call the well-being of others to mind, and for those of us with a sufficiently clear grasp of how others can experience the qualities in virtue of which our own intrinsic desires are rational, and particular for those of us with a measure of empathy, rationality demands some degree of altruistic desire.

* (Granted,) it is easy to see how altruistic desire can be commonly outweighed by a rational self-interested one. Nonetheless, an altruistic one, even when thus outweighed, can be not only consonant with reason but a demand of reason. Wanting something can be, in this way, required by rationality even where overall rationality licenses a stronger desire for some competing end.

Q: Do you think that our egoistic desire always outweighs our altruistic desire? In what cases do you see the reverse? Would we be *irrational* when the reverse takes place?

[C] The Argument from 'Reasonableness'

1. The notion of 'reasonableness' goes beyond minimally consonant with reason; it is the sort of thing one would expect of a rational person who is at least moderately thoughtful and balanced.
2. Being a reasonable person requires a measure of good judgment and is incompatible with pervasively bad judgments.
3. An aspect of the required level of good judgment is, roughly, a tendency to treat like cases alike and to be prepared to give a reason for doing otherwise.
4. A reasonable person cannot be unwilling even to consider cooperative relations with other people; and when reasonable people live in human societies of the kind that concern us, they actually maintain such relations.
5. Thus, reasonable people must, in a suitable proportion of their relations with others, be willing to give reasons to them and to consider reasons given by them.
6. To consider others in ways similar to our self-concern is to extend our egoistic desires to others.
7. Therefore, being reasonable demands that one be altruistic.

* We can say that a reasonable person is (minimally) *governed by reason*, whereas a merely rational person (one who is rational but not reasonable) is only capable of such governance and often fails to achieve it.

* There is much that is uncontroversial about pleasure, pain, and other good and bad things in human life; and in the light of an appreciation of such everyday facts, a rational person who lacks a good measure of altruistic desire is not reasonable.

Q: How do you evaluate Audi's three arguments for the rationality of altruistic desire? Which argument carries the most weight – if any?

Q: Do you believe that we humans are generally altruistic (by the general definition of 'altruism')? If you do, then what do you take to be the cause, the foundation, or the motivation for our altruism?

* More generally, one can derive both the justification of moral principles and the rationality of moral desires from a theory of practical reason without denying that ethics has a kind of *epistemic autonomy*: that moral principles can, in their own terms, be seen to be true on the basis of adequate reflection on the concepts that figure in

them – concepts such as that of a person, a promise, a duty of fidelity – and on the kinds of human situations to which the principles apply.

* [Audi's conclusion]:

My conclusion in this chapter is that, in various ways, others can and should be among our ends, and indeed among our reasonable ends. Our self-realization is largely a matter of the satisfaction of certain of our rational desires, which in turn is largely a matter of what we experience. But the experiences, states, and activities of others can be our ends, just as our own can be. If others are as much like me as it seems reasonable to believe they are, then I can easily take them as ends. I can intrinsically want them to have experiences they will find rewarding. I assume that they will find such experiences rewarding in much the way I do. When our lives are structured by normal human relations, it is natural to make such assumptions, to feel a good measure of empathy, and to have a significant degree of altruistic desire. It is clear that such desire is consonant with reason.

Empathy and perceived likeness may ease the way toward altruism, but when they do, it is because I transcend my absorption with myself.

The most general grounds of altruism lies in some apparently universal characteristics of persons. It is to regarding features of our experiences that rational desires are a natural and discriminative response, as rational experiential beliefs are natural and discriminative responses to the sensory array that pervades our lives.

When action is suitably grounded, through rational belief, in rational desires, it is rational. When it is both rational and, in a certain way, other-regarding, it is moral.

Morality at its best carries a commitment to impartially caring about others in the way we naturally care about ourselves.

Q: Do you agree with Audi that morality commands us to be altruistic?