

Robert Audi:
The Architecture of Reason
 (3)

Chapter 4

The Sources of Practical Reasons

To Claim:

___ There *are* substantive criteria for the rationality of intrinsic desires.
 Therefore, instrumentalism is false.

[Intrinsic desires]:

___ Wanting something for its own sake.

___ There is some such characteristic or some intrinsic quality for which we want it.

___ We not only have a conception of the thing wanted, but also a sense of some apparently intrinsic characteristic of the activity or state of affairs in question.

e.g. wanting to have a cool swim on a hot day

(1) Pleasure as an object of intrinsic desire \Rightarrow Hedonism

Wanting something for pleasure is wanting it for (presumed) intrinsic qualities of it that make it attractive to one *as* pleasure; it is not wanting it as a causal or other contingent producer of pleasure.

(2) The cessation of pain as the object of intrinsic desire

The cessation of pain is not wanted as a *means* to elimination of the unpleasant qualities. Its cessation itself is the object of our want.

§ Ill-grounded Intrinsic Desires

Q: Are there ill-grounded intrinsic desires versus well-grounded ones?

Audi:

___ It can be foolish to think that certain things are enjoyable.

Unjustified beliefs or presuppositions are among the major factors that render intrinsic desires ill-grounded.

Q: What sort of things would you consider to be ill-grounded/irrational intrinsic desires?

§ Objects of Rational Desires

There is a sense in which the apparently rational desires so far examined are self-interested. This is not to say that they are selfish. That would be a matter of how they are related to other people. But they are intuitively of the kind which it is in one's own interest to satisfy.

* To see the difference between the merely self-interested and the egoistic, take a self-interested desire that is more likely to seem egoistic, in the sense of being directed toward one's *own* well-being, not just toward something one *cares* about.

* three kinds of desires:

- (1) objectual wanting – directed to a thing, including an action or experience or property, that one is aware of.
- (2) Behavioral wanting – directed to one's own action, as in the case of wanting to swim.
- (3) Propositional wanting – directed to a state of affairs expressed subjunctively, as where one wants that there be no more war...

* Certain features of intrinsic desires:

1. The grounds of a desire do not enter into its content and need not enter into the content of any other, such as a desire for a further end, just as the basis of a belief does not enter into its content and need not enter into that of any other belief, such as one expressing a premise for the first.
2. It is not clear that simply wanting the pain to stop for its felt unpleasantness requires conceptualizing it at all.
3. A self-concept need not enter into desire regarding oneself. If some indexical notion is part of the content of my want, we should construe that content referentially, not conceptually.
4. Desires can be self-interested without being egoistic.

§ Hedonism and Rational Desire

To say that something is pleasurable (or, for that matter, intrinsically good) is not equivalent to saying that it is always rational, on balance, to want it for its own sake.

The notion of intrinsic goodness is highly practical.

I am inclined to agree with hedonism that pleasure is intrinsically good and pain intrinsically bad; but I do not hold that these are the only intrinsic values.

I want to develop a theory of value, and of reasons for action, that is more pluralistic.

e.g.

- (1) self-improvement (the perceptible sense of improvement in the quality of something we are doing.)
- (2) intrinsic intellectual challenge that may be unenjoyable or even unpleasant
- (3) activities that employ some of our more complex faculties in an engaging way and hence are “rewarding”

Conclusion:

- ___ Hedonism is too narrow as an account of the grounds of rational desire. Pleasure need not be the only intrinsic good.
- ___ I reject the two-dimensional model of motivation so natural for hedonism: the idea that all motivation resides either directly in hedonic desire or in desire instrumentally based on it.
- ___ Pleasure is perhaps the most primitive and enduring kind of reward in human life, but this does not entail that we seek all other goods for the pleasure of their realization, nor does pleasure in contemplating the realization of a good entail that one seeks it *for* pleasure.

§ Axiological Experientialism

- ___ The view that only experiences have intrinsic value.

Audi:

- ___ My theory of rationality allows, but does not require, that there be things of intrinsic value other than experiences and their qualities. If there are, however, surely the awareness of their value is acquired at least in part *through* experience.

If there are non-experiential intrinsic goods, they provide us with non-instrumental reasons for action. But we still need experience of them or something relevantly similar if they are to provide us with basic reasons for action.

I encounter these qualities in my own experience, but the rationality of wanting things *for* those qualities is grounded in the qualities themselves, not on these qualities *conceived* as experienced by *me*.

It is true that the experiential grounds of practical rationality are internal; but they are not egocentric. They are communicable to others and repeatable in their experience.

Q: Has Audi successfully separated his experientialism from egoism?

§ Practical Skepticism

___ The rationality conferred upon intrinsic desires is subjective and entirely relative. Nothing is beyond intrinsic desire if one is attracted to it; and what is rational for one of us, may be irrational for another.

Audi:

___ The experiential status and internal accessibility of these grounds should not be taken to imply either that there are no objective standards of rationality or that the only intrinsic goods are experiences or their properties.

___ Even if everything intrinsically good can be an object of experience, it does not follow that it is simply an element *in* experience or a property thereof. Assuming it is such an element, however, there can be kinds of experiences, such as those that are enjoyable, which are good from an *impersonal* point of view.

___ These experiences' realization will depend on the subjects who have them; but their status as intrinsically good, and as providing impersonal grounds for rational intrinsic desires, is not subjective. It is intersubjectively ascertainable, apparently universal, and objective.

___ There are general standards of rationality, including the widely held standard of pleasure and pain as generating good *prima facie* reasons both for action and for desire.

Q: Do you agree with Audi that there are “intersubjectively ascertainable, universal and objective” grounds for the rationality of intrinsic desires?

Chapter 5

Desires, Intentions, and Reasons for Action

Main Thesis:

___ Desire without belief has no direction. If desire can express well-grounded reasons for action, it does not play its motivationally basic role entirely alone. Beliefs are also essential in this role. Without them, even if there could be rational desires as foundations for practical reason, there would be no adequate means of building a superstructure.

§ Desire and Intention

1. Desire is not the fundamental practical attitude – many desires may be “directionless” and a desire need not even be to *do* something.
2. Intention, on the other hand, has the executive character. There is a kind of *motivational commitment* to what we intend.
3. There may be incompatible objects of desire; there can't be incompatible objects of intention.

In a very wide sense, our beliefs indicate the content of our intellect; our map of the world – at least of our world. In a similar way, our intentions indicate the content of our wills: our overall plans to change the world.

§ Rational Desire and Reasons for Action

It appears that the possibility of one's forming a belief about how to realize a desire is a condition for that desire's providing one with a reason for action, that is, providing what we might call a *normative direction* for desire, roughly a direction in which it ought to take place.

§ The Authority of the Theoretical over the Practical

Whereas the rationality of intrinsic desire is defeasible by beliefs, that of beliefs is not defeasible by desire.

Whereas desires *cannot* render beliefs rational, beliefs *can* render desires rational.

* the indispensability of belief in instrumentally rational action:

— Belief plays a crucial role wherever the pattern is instrumental: so long as what I want is something other than to perform a basic action, there is no action that, in the light of that want, is rational for me apart from what I believe, since I must find a means to satisfying this want.

⇒ rational *connecting belief*

There are cases in which a good reason we have for doing something is not in fact the reason *for which* we actually do it. But just as a belief is rational in the light of a reason for holding it only if held on the basis of that reason, an action is rational in the light of a reason for performing it, *only if performed on the basis of that reason*.

Beliefs can supply reasons with normative power (render intrinsic wants rational) only if they themselves are well grounded, and the needed grounds will be experiential.

§ Reasons for Action

- (1) *normative reasons* – reasons (in the sense of objective grounds) there are to take a cool swim on a blistering day [e.g. On a hot day it is always good to go for a cool swim.]
- (2) *person-relative normative reasons* – reasons for me to take a cool swim [e.g. On a hot day it is good for me to take a cool swim.]
- (3) *possessed reasons* – reasons I have to take a cool swim [e.g. I want to relax on a hot day; therefore, I take a cool swim.]
- (4) *explanatory reasons* – reasons *why* I take a cool swim
- (5) *motivating reasons* – reasons *for which* I take a cool swim

Normative reasons are objective: when a normative reason is propositional, it is true; when it is not propositional, it in some way correspond to a truth. These reasons are too abstract to be causal factors in practical reason.

With possessed reasons, it is the psychological states, such as desire and hope, that express these reasons. The psychological states may or may not exercise causal power.

Explanatory reasons are always sustaining explainers. Such reasons need not be *prima facie* justifiers, since an action can be produced or causally sustained by factors that have no justificatory value.

Motivational reasons are explanatory, possessed, and have whatever minimal *prima facie* justificatory power (if any) a reason must have to be a basis of *action*.

Wants themselves provide reasons for action only in combination with beliefs or dispositions to believe, a reason for action can always be expressed by an appropriate ascription of a belief to the agent.

Whether we cite a belief or a desire or both or neither in explaining or justifying an action is largely a matter of what can be presupposed in the context.

Q: What are the five basic kinds of reasons for action according to Audi? How are they different? Use a different example to explain these five kinds of reasons.

Q: Davidson would identify explanatory reasons with motivational reasons. What is Audi's view? Could Audi's distinctions help dissolve the paradoxes of irrationality as discussed by Davidson?

§ The Internal Grounds of Rational Action

We have intrinsic wants as a foundation of our motivational structure, and, contrary to instrumentalism, if we have any rational desire, it is in virtue of our having one or more rational intrinsic desires.

Our instrumental desires often have a quite integrated grounding, since so many of them are built upon important intrinsic desires.

Rational intrinsic desires

↓ rationality

Action

The crucial element that links the rationality of action to that of a desire it subserves is the connecting belief, the belief to the effect that doing the deed will contribute to realizing that desire.

Well-groundedness of the action requires that at least one crucial connecting belief be rational.

*defeasibility

___ There is defeat of the rationality of the foundational element, as where the rationality of the intrinsic want is undermined or overridden.

___ There is also defeat of the rationality of the connecting belief, as where one discovers that one was foolish to think an action would be sufficient for one's end.

Defeat of the foundational desire can come from beliefs, say, a belief that satisfying the want will not be worthwhile, or from beliefs together with wants, as where I discover that realizing the want will prevent satisfying one that is more important to me.

If one has a reason that is undefeated, then if it has sufficient strength relative to what it is a reason for, it makes it rational to do something one justified believes will fill the bill. This transmission principle captures part of the important idea that an action supported by a sufficient reason is rational.

This principle does not imply that an action supported by a sufficient reason must be what one has *best* reason to do. For one thing, we often have equally good reasons for different options, any of which it is quite reasonable to take.

Audi's definition of rational action:

___ Rational action is action that is at least minimally well-grounded: it must be based on some rational ground by some rational cognitive connection.

Not all rational actions are intentional. Still, whenever any non-intentional action is rational, it is apparently by virtue of some intentional action that is. We might call such non-intentional rational actions *indirectly well-grounded*: being wanted neither as ends nor as means. They are not motivationally grounded directly in any desire; and being rational on neither of those counts, their rationality is also indirect.

Rationality is like justification in being transmissible to items other than its primary bearers.

* "internalism"

___ The notion of rational action is *internal* in the sense that it requires that the agent can, by reflecting with sufficient care, arrive at the relevant ground that a connection between it and the action it supports, even if not under description of these abstract kinds.

___ Even if there are external reasons to act, unless I have appropriate access to these reasons, they are not reasons *for me*, nor can they render an action I perform rational unless they become so.

Q: Do you agree with Audi's internalism with respect to rational action?

[Conclusion]: the autonomy of practical reason

Theoretical reason takes us from rational grounds for action to the rationality of actions supported by those grounds. Such actions constitute a practical analogue of rational inferential belief, and there are also analogous transmission principles linking the rational in intrinsic desires to that of desires or actions based on them.

But theoretical reason does not by itself supply all of the basic grounds of action.

The beliefs about action that provide reasons for it can do so only if they are themselves well-grounded; and the kinds of grounds they require for this task include experiences that are themselves more basic sources of practical reasons than beliefs themselves.

In fundamental cases of practical reason, the formation of intrinsic desires, like the formation of non-inferential beliefs, is a discriminative response to experience, whether sensory or introspective or reflective or some other kind. There are features of experience that play basic normative roles in both the practical and theoretical spheres.

Action is discriminative response to desires and belief that arise in our experience – and is thereby also a response to reasons for it. These conative and cognitive elements are rational when they are well-grounded.

Well-groundedness is experiential for intrinsic desire, as it is for our normal non-inferential beliefs; it is inferential in the case of instrumental desires and inferential beliefs, and it is also inferential – in the practical sense – in the case of actions.

Q: What is Audi's experientialism? What does he place such an importance on the role of experiences in both non-inferential beliefs and intrinsic desires? Does this mean that we cannot have any intrinsic desire without experiences?

