

***The Architecture of Reason: The Structure and Substance of Rationality***, by Robert Audi. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001, 286 pp., £13.50.

***Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology***, by Earl Conee and Richard Feldman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 319 pp., £17.99.

There are many interesting structural parallels between the theoretical and the practical domain. There is theoretical reasoning from beliefs to beliefs, and practical reasoning from intentions to actions. Both cognitive states (beliefs) and motivational states (desires, intentions) have a ‘direction of fit,’ mind to world in the case of beliefs, world to mind for desires. There are reasons to believe and there are reasons to act. In both cases, there is a distinction between causal or explanatory reasons on the one hand, and justificatory or normative reasons on the other. In so far as the distinction between external reasons — reasons there are to  $\phi$  — and internal reasons — reasons that I have to  $\phi$  — makes sense, it can be applied to both domains. There is a parallel between failures of rationality in the case of actions (*akrasia*) and failures of rationality in the case of belief (self deception, ‘epistemic *akrasia*’). And as there is scepticism about knowledge, there is scepticism about practical reason: some philosophers doubt that reason can be practical in the sense that it could motivate our actions.

There are, however, important asymmetries. It is not clear that practical reasoning has the same structure as theoretical reasoning. Beliefs and desires have reverse directions of fit: beliefs ‘aim at’ truth whereas desires ‘aim at’ satisfaction. It seems essential for beliefs that they have justification, in a sense in which it is not so for action. Wishful thinking is proper in practical reasoning in a way in which it is not proper in theoretical reasoning. The fact that I prefer to go to Porto rather than to Coimbra gives me a reason to go to Porto rather than to Coimbra, but my preference for Porto does not give me a theoretical reason to believe that I am on the road to Porto. Similarly, it can be appropriate to decide arbitrarily to go to Coimbra rather than to Porto when one is indifferent between both, but it is not appropriate to believe that this is the road to Coimbra rather than the road to Porto when one has no reason to believe either: in such a case, one must rather suspend judgement. Finally, failures of rationality in the theoretical domain are not the same as failures of rationality in the practical domain: for instance, it is not clear that there can be

epistemic *akrasia* in the sense in which there can be practical *akrasia*. It is not clear either that rationality in one domain has the same shape as rationality in the other domain. For instance, I may be rationally required to do A and rationally required to do not A but I cannot be rationally required to believe A and rationally required to believe not A: the requirements of coherence seem to be more stringent in the epistemic domain than they are in the ethical domain, at least if one is not a strict Kantian. The word ‘ethics’ applies obviously to action but it is not so clear that there is an ethics of belief. Because of these differences, one may doubt that the phrase ‘reason’ in the philosophical term of art ‘to have a reason to  $\phi$ ’ has the same meaning whatever is substituted for ‘ $\phi$ ’.

What is the overall structure of reasons? There seem to be four possible options:

- (1) There are only theoretical reasons;
- (2) There are only practical reasons;
- (3) There are theoretical and practical reasons, which have a distinct structure;
- (4) There are theoretical and practical reasons, which have a common structure.

Hume, when he says that reason deals only with beliefs, and that it is the slave of passions, defends a version of (1). Pragmatism is ordinarily understood as defending (2). Many philosophers defend (3). The most attractive view seems to be (4): although theoretical and practical reasons are different, they have a common core. Thus Kant, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) says:

If pure reason of itself can be practical and is actually so, as the consciousness of the moral law proves, then it is still only one and the same reason which, whether in a theoretical or a practical point of view, judges according to a priori principles. (p. 5:121)

The difficulty is to say what is the ‘same reason.’ This depends in a large part upon the conception of explanation, of justification, and of rationality in general that one holds. No small business!

(4) is also Robert Audi’s view. One of the merits of his book is that he attempts lucidly to describe the overall structure of symmetries between the two domains, while proposing his own account of this structure. I shall comment here only a few points of this rich, but

sometimes elusive, book. The account is, broadly speaking, foundationalist. Audi holds that to be rational in one's beliefs is to be justified in having them, and that beliefs get justified by having a basis or ground. Ultimately, our beliefs are based on primary experiences. But although these are proper bases for our beliefs, they are defeasible. It is essential to such a view that the founding experiences are not beliefs, and that the beliefs in the superstructure are not inferred from these primitive experiences, which are more like an arch that sustains a vault than like the building blocks out of which the edifice is built. Thus, Audi is able to avoid the familiar difficulties of foundationalism when the basing relation rests upon beliefs. He also claims that his view does not fall into the 'myth of the Given.' I am not sure, but let us suppose that it does. Still it does not avoid the other familiar difficulty: in what sense are experiences, if they are not conceptual, reasons or justifications for beliefs? A number of philosophers have recently preferred to talk in terms of 'entitlement' rather than in terms of justification. This view has clear advantages (in particular for resisting the sceptical challenge), but it is not clear that it can be called foundationalist. Actually, Audi does not use the notion of entitlement and keeps to the vocabulary of justification. Another important feature of Audi's account of justification is that it is internalist: it implies that a subject has access to the justificatory basis of her beliefs. But, curiously, he holds that the same view is available for the externalist. In particular, he holds that one can be externalist about knowledge while being internalist about justification. For instance, there can be things which I know because they are stored in my memory, but which are not justified for I do not see why I hold them, or forgot how I acquired them. But it is hard to see how the two can be reconciled: for either the notion of internalist justification or reason is integral to the notion of knowledge, and my stored but not justified beliefs are not knowledge, or the notion of internalist justification does not belong to the notion of knowledge, and only an externalist conception of knowledge remains.

Audi holds a similar foundationalist view for desires. There are some desires, like wanting to swim in fresh water on a hot day, which are justified by the experiences — enjoyment of swimming — on which they are based and which do not need further justification. These are wanted for their own sake. Thus, Audi rejects any instrumentalist conception of the rationality of desires. But it seems that foundationalism about desires encounters the same difficulty as foun-

dationalism about belief: if primitive desires do not have a propositional content, it is not clear how they can motivate propositional desires. It is not clear either in what sense more complex desires, like the desire to become a novelist or a pianist, are ultimately based in primitive experiential desires. Maybe my wanting to become a writer started from my experience of desiring to write a novella and of writing one. But my more complex desire to earn my living as a novelist is less clearly so based.

Both belief and desire foundationalism invite the familiar objections from a coherentist account: many of my beliefs and desires seem to depend on others. Audi's answer is that this fact, which belongs to the 'superstructure' of beliefs and desires, is compatible with their being based on primitive experiences. But in so far as the many interlocking beliefs that we have are often unconscious or at least not present to our minds, whereas basic experiences necessarily are, it is not clear how the former are related to the latter.

Audi has an interesting argument from his foundationalism about desire to the rejection of egoism: the experience which grounds my desires does not include the experience being mine, hence they ground the desires of others. Altruism is thus vindicated. In the same way, the grounds of our beliefs are not egocentric: we are not part of our basic experiences, which are not self-referential. The last part of the book contains a refutation of relativism, both about theoretical and about practical reason. One may expect that Audi's strong objectivism about rationality implies the falsity of relativism in both domains.

Practical reason, on Audi's view, is not reducible to theoretical reason because practical rationality is not just a matter of having rational beliefs. Nor is theoretical reason reducible to practical reason. The kinds of basic experiences on which they are based are distinct. But they have a common foundational structure. This is an interesting version of thesis (4), but apart from the specific difficulties that I have hinted at, it is not clear that actions are in need of reasons (or justifications) in the same (here: foundational) sense as beliefs. If a belief is not justified for the person who holds it, it hardly qualifies as a belief (one may doubt that someone who says 'I believe that P, but I have no reason to believe it' is really self-ascribing to herself a *belief*), whereas if an action is done for no reason, it does not cease to be an action ('Why did you do that? For no particular reason').

There are many attractive features in Audi's approach, but there is also something disappointing in it. It promised to illuminate the very

notion of reason, and thus to explain how this concept can be central in accounting for the normative features of belief and actions, but it does little to analyse this very concept. Audi's style is more illustrative than argumentative. This can be a virtue, but I found often that the broad, suggestive, picture painted here lacked details.

One may suggest that the reason relation, both for beliefs and for actions, consists in a certain kind of support by a certain kind of fact: one has reasons to  $\phi$  (where ' $\phi$ ' can be to believe that  $p$  or to do action A) because there are certain facts that support, to a certain degree, our  $\phi$ -ing in this case. The proposal can be understood either in an externalist sense, or in an internalist sense: the facts can be taken to be independent of the agent or relative to her. Audi's proposal is clearly internalist about justification for beliefs, although he holds that his foundationalism can have also an externalist reading, because the reasons for believing are objective.

Conee and Feldman's (C&F) answer is internalist too, and their views in epistemology also have a foundationalist ring. But their distinctive contribution to the issue of the nature of reasons in epistemology is a precise articulation of the thesis of evidentialism, which they have done over the years either individually or jointly in a series of papers collected here. The papers are authored either by Conee or by Feldman, or by both.

Evidentialism is not a newcomer in the theory of knowledge. Locke formulated it thus: 'Not to receive a proposition with more assurance than the grounds upon which they are based allow it' (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690, IV, xix). William Clifford formulated it in his characteristic moralistic tone: 'It is wrong, always and everywhere to believe anything on the basis of insufficient evidence' ('The Ethics of Belief,' 1877). Locke as well as Clifford seem to say two things: (a) that one is not justified, or does not have any good reason to believe P unless one has evidence for P; (b) that one ought to attend to evidential reasons and one can be blamed for not doing so. But in what sense of 'ought'? Locke and Clifford seem to say that it is a kind of moral 'ought.' James too, in his well-known critique of Clifford in 'The Will to Believe' (1897), speaks of epistemic duties. C&F's have a more sober version in their classic piece 'Evidentialism' (Chapter 4):

- (E) Doxastic attitude D toward proposition  $p$  is epistemically justified for S at  $t$  if and only if having D towards  $p$  fits the evidence S has at  $t$ .

In itself (E) is free from any ought, and does not say anything about obligations or duties to believe.

E&C tell us that (E) is best expressed as

(ES) The epistemic justification of anyone's doxastic attitude toward any proposition at any time strongly supervenes on the evidence that the person has at the time.

(ES) commits E&C to a form of internalism about justification, which is defended in particular in Chapter 3 ('Internalism Defended'). Internalism consists in two theses: (i) justification depends upon internal mental states, not external factors (mentalism); (ii) all justifiers are accessible to the subject who has them. Externalists about justification balk at (ii) because they claim that not all of our beliefs are present to our minds and that (ii) commits us to the claim that for knowing one must know that one knows (the KK thesis). E&C claim in response that they are neither committed to (ii) nor to KK and higher-order beliefs requirements on knowledge (p. 104): all that is needed is that the evidence is supervenient upon internal states. (pp. 75–76). Only a disposition to retrieve evidence is sufficient, and not all evidence need be conscious. But to my mind this still looks like a form of the accessibility thesis. Moreover, in other passages, E&C commit themselves to a much more stringent thesis: a proposition is justified to someone when it is evident to the person that the proposition is true (p. 252). In Chapter 8 ('The Justification of Introspective Beliefs') they say that evidence justifies temporarily and at the time when the subject is conscious of it, or remembers it. It does not justify through cohering beliefs or from beliefs of which the subject is not aware. This seems to impose a very strong requirement on justification, much closer to (ii) than it is stated in Chapter 3. Thesis (i), mentalism, seems open to the familiar externalist charge that mental contents are neither internal nor supervenient on internal states. E&C note (p. 81) that mentalism seems to be defensible by an externalist: Williamson in particular has argued that knowledge is a mental state; but his view is hardly compatible with C&F's, for he holds that knowledge is a mental state precisely because it is *not* an internal state. From a radical externalist perspective, E&C are certainly wrong when they say that knowledge is partly an external state, partly an internal one.

In Chapter 2 ('The Basic Nature of Epistemic Justification'), Conee claims that (E) allows a reconciliation between externalism and internalism:

- (IE) 'What can be external to the mind of a person whose belief is justified, i.e. inaccessible to the person whose belief is justified, i.e. inaccessible to the person by reflection, are epistemological facts about what evidence provides the person's justification and about the nature of the epistemic link of the belief to the justifying evidence. What must be internal, i.e. accessible to the person by reflection, is evidence that does in fact suffice to justify to belief.' (p. 50)

But this seems hardly a reconciliation: for if the external epistemological facts justify the person in spite of their being unknown to her, either they do justify her, or they do not. But E&C say that only the accessible facts are *sufficient* for justification. Hence the external facts, even if they are in some sense available to the person, do not really justify. It is like saying that the person has reasons for her belief, but that these reasons are not *her* reasons. And in so far as one says this, the thesis is fully internalist.

Another important theme to understand (E) is its relationship to the ethics of belief debate in epistemology which is analysed in particular in Chapter 7 ('The Ethics of Belief'). As we noted above, (E) is free from any ought. But the full development is:

- (O2) For any person S, time  $t$ , and proposition P, if S has any doxastic attitude at all towards P at  $t$ , and S's evidence at  $t$  supports P, then S epistemically ought to have the attitude toward P supported by S's evidence at  $t$ .

Unlike Locke and Clifford, C&F do not associate evidentialism (nor internalism) to *moral* obligations. This would be confusing reasons for belief and reasons for action, and to merge two distinct senses of ought: an epistemic ought and a moral ought. The confusion is objectionable on two counts. In the first place, it seems to imply that, like for any moral ought, the agent is under the obligation to perform a certain action intentionally or voluntarily. Hence, it seems to imply that belief is in some sense voluntary. This invites the familiar objection that, given that belief is not voluntary, and that 'ought' implies 'can,' there are no obligations to believe at all. In the second place, it confuses two kinds of obligations, moral and epistemic. That the two

are distinct can be seen for instance from the fact that although it can be permissible morally to do A and permissible to do not A, when A and not A are contrary actions, it is not permissible epistemically to believe P and not P. Of course a pragmatist, like James, who holds the view (1) above and accepts that there are epistemic duties as well as doxastic voluntarism, would reject the asymmetry. But Feldman argues that although there are epistemic obligations, they are not of the kind which have to be answered by any voluntary believing. They are more like *role* obligations: if you are a parent, you are under the obligation to take care of your children, if you are a teacher you are under the obligation of being competent, etc. What are the obligations in the case of beliefs? To follow your evidence. According to pragmatism and to the moral deontological conception of justification, there are various sorts of reasons for beliefs: some evidential, some practical. Evidentialism denies this: its distinctive thesis is that the *only* kind of reasons there are for beliefs are evidential reasons, and they are not commensurable to practical reasons. In other words, for evidentialism, *obligationes non colliduntur*: there is not one single ought, semi-practical, semi-epistemic, which could be applied both to beliefs and to actions, and there is no competition between epistemic and non epistemic reasons for believing, for there are only epistemic reasons, governed by the evidence one has.

What exactly are the epistemic obligations? (O2) says that if the subject has evidence for P she ought to believe P. The usual problem with this is: What amount of evidence? When does a body of evidence support a proposition? If the evidence is weak, should we believe P? Certainly, it is better to have little evidence for a belief than to have no evidence at all. But believing upon little evidence seems to be almost as objectionable as believing upon no evidence at all. This should not be an objection if the relation of evidential support and the notion of 'having sufficient' evidence were defined, and that it is not an easy matter. But E&C do not really tell us what it is here. A natural interpretation of evidentialism goes through the notion of degree of belief, and in this sense Bayesian epistemology is evidentialist. But E&C do not say much about this, and concentrate upon full belief. Another familiar problem is that the notion of sufficient evidence may be pragmatically or contextually constrained, so that, in the end, it is not simply evidence which justifies, but the amount of evidence that a subject has contextually at one moment or other. E&C are right that it does not refute evidentialism as such, but at least it invites some

sort of contextualist line about knowledge, which they do not address in this book.

I agree with E&C that there are epistemic obligations, or at least epistemic norms, in the weak sense for which they argue. In particular, the normative commitments of belief are revealed by the fact that there is a Moorean paradox when one says ‘P but I do not have evidence for P.’ Feldman argues rather in terms of epistemic value: our epistemic obligations derive from our epistemic value, where an obligation is relative to a kind of aim that one has. Many philosophers take the chief epistemic value to be truth or knowledge. But Feldman argues that neither entail (O2). Only the epistemic value of *rational belief* properly grounds our epistemic obligations. Hence, if there is an aim for belief, or a norm for belief, it is evidence, not truth. In Chapter 10 ('The Truth Connection'), Conee argues that ‘a proposition is epistemically justified to someone when it is evident to the person that the proposition is true’ (p. 252). Not only is this an internalist claim, but it also has a strong anti-realist ring.

It also seems to yield counter-intuitive results. A first consequence of this account is that ‘according to evidentialism, if a person has strong evidence for a false proposition F she should believe that falsehood’ (p. 184). And ‘a person who irrationally believes a lot of truths is not doing well epistemically. In contrast a person who forms a lot of false beliefs rationally is doing well epistemically.’ But that seems to be a *reductio* of the view. Another consequence was pressed by de Rose. We can take a Clifford-like example. A ship owner believes, on fairly good evidence, that his ship is safe. He hears about a report by an expert about the ship, but avoids reading it because it may undermine his present belief. The strange result of evidentialism is that the ship owner should believe that the ship is safe, for the only evidence he has tells him this. Or at best the man must suspend judgment. Not a very Cliffordian result! In answering this objection, Feldman says that until the ship owner has seen the report, there is no reason for him to stop believing that his ship is safe. This answer is strange, since it seems to say that the ship owner should believe on the basis of the evidence that he *considers* to be good. Our intuition, with Clifford, is that he is here guilty of negligence, and that he should look at the report, once he hears it, hence that he should not believe what he actually believes.

The difficulty here seems to be the same as that which arose above with the quote (IE). My own intuitions here lie on the externalist

side: the evidence that is accessible to one is not enough to justify a belief. This does not imply a disagreement with the view that beliefs are justified by evidence. One may hold, with Williamson, that our evidence is what we know. The reason why the ship owner does not believe what he ought is that he does not know, and he ought to *know* about his ship. Feldman would probably reply that where knowledge is not attainable, a reasonable belief is enough. The person ‘is doing the best he can’ (p. 185). But in the ship owner case, he is precisely not doing the best he can. Sometimes evidentialism seems too modest a view. It invites the objection that if it is always better to have evidence rather than knowledge, then the best way to avoid error is to restrict oneself to as little evidence as possible, by forming the fewer beliefs possible.

I cannot deal with all the papers. In their well-known piece ‘The Generality Problem for Reliabilism’ E&C argue that reliabilism is at pains in defining reliability across contexts. In ‘Authoritarian Epistemology,’ they criticise a number of views (by Alston, Plantinga and Foley) according to which rationality for beliefs can be had independently of evidence. In ‘First Things First’ and in ‘Making Sense of Scepticism’ they deal with the most global issues of meta-epistemology (the sceptical threat, the circularity argument in Agrippa’s problem). When they deal with scepticism, E&C defend the view which they call ‘seeming evidentialism:’ our *prima facie* evidence is enough to avoid sceptical challenges. Although they reject Reidian epistemologies for which all our beliefs are innocent unless proved guilty, I could not see the difference with such epistemologies here. Sometimes, E&C say that evidentialism is a kind of minimalist epistemology: it does not claim that knowledge depends upon the cognitive capacities of the subject or the aetiology of his beliefs. It is a theory of justification which just says that evidence is what justifies. And it is compatible both with foundationalism and coherentism (Chapter 2). Still, evidentialism involves strong internalist commitments, not all of which are easy to accept.

Conee and Feldman’s defence of this view manifests an admirable clarity and honesty. This is first-rate work in epistemology and everyone interested in these central issues ought (a philosophical ought!) to have their book on their shelves.

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