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Robert Audi, RATIONALITY AND RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

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lest he be constrained by anything distinct from his will. But it is hard to see how God can freely choose his nature *unless* he already has a determinate nature—the very thing McCann is at great pains to rule out—minimally; prior to his choosing, God must be such that, essentially, he is *able* to freely choose a (complete) nature. But, then it seems God is not solely responsible for his nature after all and McCann's God is neither sovereign nor free. Perhaps, as I have suggested, the problem lies in his extreme conception of sovereignty. Perfection does not require it, and traditional theism can get by without it. All that is required for divine sovereignty is that no explanation trace *through* God to some more ultimate context. Why not understand God to be a substance, a fundamental unity that is the final explanation of all reality? If so, God is ultimate in terms of explanation and control, hence as sovereign as can be. Regarding divine freedom, it is not clear that the above limitations would be of any real consequence: being “constrained” by one's nature does not seem to be destructive of freedom. God is still the sole determiner of his action as creator, and his creative activity can still be understood as spontaneous and intentional, hence free, even if planned.

A final worry relates to McCann's employment of perfect being theology. A notorious problem for the perfect being theologian is how to judge between competing modal and value intuitions when erecting a conception of a perfect God. McCann's more fine-grained intuitions can be challenged: contra McCann, some perfect being theologians think perfection entails necessary existence, and that God has the nature he has ontologically prior to his acting. Nor do all agree with McCann that perfection entails simplicity, that timeless existence is the most perfect mode of existence, or that God always acts for a sufficient reason (the Principle of Sufficient Reason is not obviously intuitively true and may be false), or with complete spontaneity in creating. McCann may be right, but he is not obviously so, limiting his project's overall appeal. My worries now stated, McCann's book is a must read for those interested in God's relationship to his creatures for the simple reason that he offers a solution that treats both seriously.

Rationality and Religious Commitment, by Robert Audi. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011. xvi + 311pp. \$45 cloth.

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Among the prolific Robert Audi is a pace-setter with books and articles in epistemology, ethical theory, action theory, and sociopolitical philosophy. With this book Audi explores issues clustered about the rationality of religious commitment, including the support which undergirds religious commitment and the challenges arising from the problem of evil and from naturalism. The book is organized into three broad parts, with the first

looking at epistemological concepts, including varieties of rationality, justification and knowledge. The second part explores the various dimensions and landmarks of religious commitment, including the contours of faith, hope, belief and acceptance. The third examines objections to theistic commitment posed by the complexities of the theistic concept of God, the problem of evil, and the ruling idea of the age, philosophical naturalism.

By religious commitment Audi means more than theistic belief as he sees religious commitment encompassing attitudes, emotions, and behaviors the rationality of which are not identical with belief. The primary issue in this wide-ranging book concerns the rationality of a religious commitment of the sort commonly found among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Perhaps not surprisingly, Audi holds that religious commitment can be rational, by which he means a globally rational person can hold a religious commitment (23, 286–296). To say that religious commitment is rational says that it is consonant with reason; it harmonizes with reason (7). Moreover, Audi holds that a failure of the intellectual support of a religious commitment may not entail a corresponding failure of the religious behavior flowing out of that commitment, if the behavior enjoys adequate non-religious grounds (90–91). Religious behavior may be rational, Audi holds, even if there are no good religious grounds supporting that behavior. One would not be amiss in taking this book as a considered and detailed response to the rash charges of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris (a.k.a. the “new atheists”), that breathlessly allege deep delusion and irrationality of the religious. As Audi puts it, “a religiously committed life, then, can be rational” (288).

He arrives at this result with arguments carrying considerable interest, including a rejection of middle knowledge (223–224, 227), an entertainment that satisficing may be rational (227, note 21), a rejection of the incompatibility of gratuitous evil and the existence of God (229, 231), an argument that practical considerations cannot provide reason for belief (13), and a novel approach to the problem of evil which Audi claims is a “theocentric” approach as opposed to a “cosmocentric” approach. As Audi puts it, “The common approach is to look at the creation and ask whether *it* is good enough to be created by God. My approach is to focus on God, and then ask whether *creating* and *experiencing* the universe is good enough for *God*” (215, emphases in original). The idea of the theocentric approach is that the aggregate value of a particular possible world should include not only the value of the created parts of the world but also the value of divine experiences which are “incalculably great” (217).

Regarding this last result, there may be a tension between the ideas that God could bring about a world less than the best he could have brought about, and that the divine experiences themselves are “incalculably great.” One can imagine a critic claiming that the divine experiences of love and reconciliation may well be valuable and of a magnitude so great as to resist calculation, but, even so, those experiences provide insufficient reason for a perfectly benevolent and altruistic being to prefer a situation of more

creaturely suffering over one with less creaturely suffering no matter the value of the creator's experiences.

Audi's argument for the compatibility of God and gratuitous evil rests in part on the idea that particular instances of suffering are not strictly necessary as constituents of a single possible best of all possible worlds which a perfect being would create (228–229). As Audi puts it, "for even if the worlds God would regard as choiceworthy contain beings relevantly like me, they would not have to contain me in particular to realize an exactly similar good. Thus, it is not true that there can be no gratuitous evil in a world created by an omniscient being" (229). A resentable evil, Audi thinks, may be incompatible with God's existence even if gratuitous evils are compatible. A resentable evil is any the deletion of which would result in a divinely preferable alternative world. Because he holds that God's existence is compatible with gratuitous evil, Audi holds that the standard version of the evidential argument (basically Rowe's first version of the evidential argument) is unsound with a false premise. Could the atheologian rehabilitate the evidential argument by employing the concept of resentable evil rather than that of gratuitous evil? It is not clear, as Audi says little about resentable evil (see pages 230 and 231 for what little Audi says about resentable evils). In any case, this is a research question best left for another occasion.

Like many today, Audi erects much of his philosophical theology upon a foundation of universalist divine love—God loves all humans to the same deep and significant degree (see, for instance, pages 180, 155, 151–152). This love flows, according to Audi, out of the "integration of omniscience with perfect goodness" (193). But what if it is not possible in-principle to love every person to the same significant degree? What if, that is, it is not possible to love maximally and equally? As far as I can see, much if not all of Audi's theological superstructure could rest on a foundation more in line with the sorts of claims found about the partiality of the divine love in the Hebrew scriptures (God loves a particular people) or found in the distinctive Christian scriptures (God loves elected individuals). Why think that the claims of universalist divine love are a muddle? Well, different people have different interests. And, if we hold that love has as a necessary constituent identifying with the interests of one's beloved, then there will be an in-principle obstacle, as no one can knowingly and rationally take as his own incompatible interests. We might understand identifying with as, roughly, caring about what one's beloved cares about because one's beloved cares about it. In response, one might suggest distinguishing between best interests and mere interests, with the former as the relevant consideration, so one might seek to pare the stock of best interests persons have down to a compossible few (roughly, caring about what one's beloved should care about). Even with this distinction, we find an obstacle still as whatever compatibility this paring provides is achieved at the cost of plausibility. If God loves individuals as regards their particularity and singularity, and not just as bearers of universal features, then advancing or identifying with

a thinned set of best interests found among all hardly seems a sufficient fit. And in any case, if divine love relevantly resembles even if it far surpasses the love characteristic of the best of human parenting, then simply meeting only those interests of a beloved child which are interchangeable with those of any other child falls short of the mark. Human parenting at its best involves not just caring about what one's child should care about, but also caring about what one's child cares about. Our beloveds and their cares are not fungible matters.

On a different score, Audi claims that "no practical considerations are, properly speaking, reasons for believing. I may have an eminently rational desire to please Aline and know that I would do so by believing that she sings like Maria Callas (since she would discover my believing it). But this desire-belief combination is not a reason to believe that. It may give me a reason to cause myself to believe it; but that is a reason for action related to this proposition, not for believing it" (13). Practical considerations, then, provide reason for actions, and forming a belief may be an action, but believing is not. So practical considerations can provide reason for acting as if a proposition, call it *p*, were true, but do not provide reason for believing *p*, Audi holds. So, one can rationally act on *p*, and rationally employ it as a premise in her practical deliberations on the basis of practical considerations, but one cannot rationally believe that *p* on the basis of practical considerations.

While this is not a major philosophical point, still there is an air of oddness wafting about allowing practical reasons for acting as if *p* were true and yet excluding practical considerations as reasons for believing *p*. What is the source of this oddness? It is, in part, this: if one is practically justified in the production of something, then, it seems, one is practically justified as regards the product. That is, in the normal causal run of events, acting as if *p* were true, often or habitually, results in one believing that *p* is true. Now, combine this psychological or causal observation with the principles that:

A: for any person *S*, actions α , and events *e*, if *S* is practically justified in doing α , and if doing α foreseeably brings about *e*, then *S* is practically justified in bringing about *e*.

And:

B: for any person *S* and events *e*, if *S* is practically justified in bringing about *e*, then *S* is practically justified in *e*'s obtaining.

If (A) and (B) are plausible, then by allowing practical considerations to motivate belief-formation, the divide between practically justified belief-formation and practically justified belief is lost. Practical considerations can provide reasons for belief as well as belief-formation if (A) and (B) are true. Practical considerations cannot provide epistemic or evidentiary reasons, yet they provide reasons nonetheless. One can form a belief because of a practical reason and hold that same belief because of a practical

reason (contra p. 128). But perhaps one might contend that practical considerations are relevant for actions and not dispositions or states, and believing something is not an action. Maybe so, but maintaining a belief is an action, and if practical considerations can motivate or rationalize preserving or maintaining or holding a particular belief, as well as forming it, then it does not seem in error to hold that practical considerations can provide reasons in support of belief (maintaining it) even if they cannot provide evidence for thinking the belief is true. Now perhaps an Audite might deny principle (A) or (B) or deny that acting as if *p* normally results in believing that *p*. But as with the issue of resentable evil, these are issues best left for others.

All in all, Audi has written a philosophically provocative and insightful book. Its audience should extend beyond those who specialize in the philosophy of religion to include any with an interest in the viability of religious commitment in a time and culture dominated by philosophical naturalism.