

OLLI-PEKKA VAINIO

University of Helsinki

Robert Audi. *Rationality and Religious Commitment*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Robert Audi is one of the most prominent contemporary philosophers, and his reputation is based on philosophical work that is not directly religious. However, later in his career he has engaged with more theological and religious questions. This book collects together his mature thinking about these matters in a concise form. To a great extent, Audi applies now to religion what he wrote a decade earlier in *The Architecture of Reason*.

Those who have read Audi before know what to expect: rigorous, uncompromising analysis, which is sometimes hard going but always rewarding. This is stylistically a prime example of how analytic philosophy of religion should be done. The book opens with a long series of careful distinctions. The first half of the book tries to tackle the question, what does it mean when we speak about rationality of religious beliefs. The rest of the book is committed to certain questions that produce challenges to religious belief, such as ethical disagreements, religious pluralism, the problem of evil and naturalism.

First Audi makes a basic distinction between rationality, reasonableness, justification and knowledge. Being rational basically means having the capacity to reason and being able to give adequate responses to experiences in both theoretical and practical sense. Rationality is more permissive than justification, which entails some public grounds that point towards truth. Being rational means thus merely being consonant with reason. Reasonable acts do not necessarily require justification, and sometimes things that have some minimal justification can be unreasonable. Audi, however, defines reasonability as something that is rational and at least minimally justified. Knowledge is a property of true justified beliefs. Audi claims that it is possible to have religious knowledge but that is not the topic of this book. He clarifies: 'my strategy ... is to consider whether religious commitment can be rational, particularly in the sense in which rationality is consonance with reason, and then to pursue the question whether, given the grounds on which it may be rational, it is also reasonable.' (p. 44)

Audi's strategy differs from, for example, Swinburne's and Plantinga's ways of arguing for theism. The book is dedicated to William Alston and you can see Alston's influence throughout (also the other two gentlemen are given approving comments along the way). Audi aims to prove that there are no *prima facie* obstacles for theism and that theism can defeat the defeaters that challenge its rationality. In other words, Audi tries to draw the borderlines of rationality and point out that theism is within those borders. It might be true that theism is ultimately wrong, and there are other, competing, things within the same borders as well, which might turn out to be true. But when we start arguing about worldviews, this is the starting point that all disputants should recognize. A modest point, but still valuable one.

Audi argues that the traditional theistic proofs succeed in proving that there is at least *some* rational support for theism. If the concept of God is coherent and the existence of God is at least possible, it is not *prima facie* irrational to have theistic beliefs. Yet, it is possible and rational to hold different and mutually opposed worldviews because persons may have 'different evidential and ratiocinative perspectives' (p. 106). Justification of beliefs is for Audi context-specific and he returns to the questions of pluralism and disagreement multiple times along the way. His solution seems to fall in line with other prominent Notre Dame philosophers, such as Peter van Inwagen and Gary Gutting. In sum, we should not surrender to sceptical challenge, which sets the bar of rationality too high. This leads inevitably to looser standards of rationality, but as limited human beings we really cannot do any better. The dangers of relativism are confronted by stressing the need of ongoing reflection and dealing with the defeaters. Audi is pluralist, but not relativist.

The book is filled with acute and commendable points that would deserve closer scrutiny (such as his brilliant treatment of different aspects and dimensions of belief, faith, acceptance and hope) but the heart of the book is well expressed in the following quote that illustrates Audi's sensibility:

Rational religious commitment lies somewhere between a headlong confidence in what we passionately wish to be true and a timid refusal to risk disappointments, between the safety of according to religious beliefs the easy confidence we have in things that bombard the five senses, and the sceptical detachment that comes from suspending judgment on whatever is not plainly evident to all, between a merely aesthetic

participation in religious practices and a dogmatic codification of an outlook on the world, between non-cognitivist attenuation of religious texts and tenets and rigid literalism in understanding them, between apathy and conformism, between scepticism and credulity. Rational religious commitment may be elusive; it differs in many ways from one person to another; and even in single life, it may change much over time, for better or, sometimes, for worse. But if our notion of rationality is not too narrow, if our religious lives are well integrated, if our sense of the mutually enriching interconnections between the religious and the secular is sufficiently keen, and if we do not try to justify needlessly strong cognitive attitudes, we may hope both to construct an adequate theory of rational religious commitment and to progress toward a lasting reconciliation of faith and reason. (pp. 298-296)

This sensibility that tries to balance different elements in one's religious outlook is something that you rarely see. Audi makes a relevant point that too often philosophy of religion concentrates on beliefs and evidence when religious lifestyle consists of several other things than mere propositions. Yet Audi steers away from pure pragmatism and non-cognitivism. Truth and justification are relevant topics in religion but they should not be the only ones. Religion consists of propositional, behavioural, attitudinal and emotional dimensions: 'An overall religious commitment is a commitment to act in certain ways as well as to accept a certain outlook on the world; and it requires doing a certain range of deed, cultivating or nurturing certain attitudes and emotions, and maintaining an openness to responses from other people.' (xi) For Audi, religious life is a balancing act, which is necessarily rather elusive and multiform. Religious commitment is a 'life-choice' rather than just 'cognitive choice'. This necessarily rules out all straightforward solutions to demonstrate the truth or falsity of religious (or any) worldviews.

In addition to trying to provide general rules of public discourse, Audi seeks to sketch a form of religious cosmopolitanism, which results from the integration of relevant dimensions of one's life in a single whole. By integration Audi means that our belief system should be internally coherent, our beliefs should cohere with our desires and emotions and our actions should be grounded in our beliefs and desires. Integration aims at 'theoethical equilibrium', where person's religious, scientific, ethical and aesthetic convictions are constantly changing as they react to new challenges but ideally moving towards greater coherence. This includes also taking into account competing views and cultures. In practice this

means sharing resources with them, gaining more understanding and engaging in co-operative practices.

HANS VAN EYGHEN

VU University Amsterdam

Rob Lovering. *God and Evidence*. Bloomsbury, 2013.

In his book 'God and Evidence: Problems for Theistic Philosophers' Rob Lovering surveys and criticizes various views held among theistic philosophers which he calls defenders of a philosophical Alamo; with theists outnumbered 15% to 85%. The 15% can further be divided among three categories: theistic inferentialists, theistic noninferentialists and theistic fideists. He defines theistic inferentialists as: '(...) philosophers who believe that (a) God exists, (b) there is inferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence, and (c) this evidence is discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice.' (p. 3); theistic noninferentialists as: '(...) philosophers who believe that (a) God exists, (b) there is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence, and (c) this evidence is discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice.' (p. 3); and theistic fideists as: '(...) philosophers who believe that (a) God exists, (b) there is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence, but (c) it is acceptable – morally, if not otherwise – to have faith that God exists.' (p. 3). For the distinction between inferential and noninferential evidence he quotes John Bishop: 'A proposition's truth is inferentially evident when its truth is correctly inferable (...) from other propositions whose truth is accepted; a proposition's truth is non-inferentially (basically) evident when its truth is acceptable (...) without being derived by inference from other evidentially established truths.' (as quoted by Lovering on p. 6). Later on, the noninferential evidence seems roughly to coincide with religious experiences.

The main problem for theistic inferentialists, according to Lovering, is that they have not succeeded in convincing their atheistic academic peers and this is a problem for their defining beliefs. He goes on to list a number of possible solutions which he dismisses as inadequate. The 'adequate' solutions Lovering proposes are that one or more of theistic inferentialists' defining beliefs are false or that one or more of the defining beliefs is cognitively meaningless and thereby neither true nor false.