

Audi, Robert. Action, Intention, and Reason. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993. xi + 362 pp. Cloth, \$43.50; paper, \$18.95 -- This volume collects thirteen papers by Robert Audi on action theory, all but two previously published, and dating back as far as the early 1970s. The reader should not be misled by the book's publicity, which proclaims that we are being given "for the first time... a full version of his [Audi's] theory of... human action" (back cover). Despite such claims, this volume is no more than a collection of papers, and consequently it does not offer the depth and continuity one would expect from a book-length treatment. Still, this is a collection of very fine papers, and collectively they constitute an important and influential theory of action.

In a useful overview written especially for this volume, Audi distinguishes four major problem areas in action theory: first, the nature of action (e.g., what actions are, how they are individuated); second, the explanation of action (e.g., the relation of desires and beliefs to action); third, free will; fourth, rational action. The book takes up each of these areas in turn. (The most important topic in action theory not discussed is the ontology and individuation of actions.) Among the theses Audi defends are a nomic explanatory account of action (Ch.1), an analysis of intending in terms of believing and wanting (Ch.2), a compatibilist account of free will (Chs.7 and 10), and a theory of rational action as "well grounded" in rational desire (Ch.11).

Philosophy, as Audi practices it, is a complex and often messy business. The volume begins with a 1973 paper that analyzes

wanting in terms of seven lawlike propositions. (By far the simplest of the seven is this: "S wants p if and only if: under favorable conditions, S has a tendency to avow that he wants p" (p.39).) Now it would not occur to many philosophers that anything interesting could come of what looks like such a hodgepodge of truisms, many of which in the end require Audi's patient qualification and interpretation. Here as in many other chapters, readers looking for simple and elegant analysis may be frustrated. But Audi's method pays dividends in the end. The point of this complex and rather tedious-looking list of laws is to explain wanting as a theoretical concept analogous to the concept of an electron or a magnetic field (p.36). And how better to assess the thesis that wanting is a theoretical concept than by attempting to formulate a theoretical definition in terms of such lawlike propositions? Anyone interested in eliminative materialism would be well-advised to take note.

A characteristic feature of Audi's more recent essays is to press an analogy between action theory and epistemology (in Chs.3,10,11,12,13). Sometimes the analogy seemed to shed little light on either topic. In the previously unpublished Chapter 10, for instance, Audi uses the claim that 'if you know you can't be wrong' to illustrate in detail the ambiguity of 'if my action is caused then it must occur.' Obviously there is a ambiguity in both sentences regarding the scope of the modal operator. But in the first case the ambiguity is so obvious as to be essentially harmless, while the ambiguity in the second case was noticed in Antiquity and remains well-recognized.

A more interesting analogy to epistemology is made in the last chapter (first published in 1990). There Audi uses internalism in epistemology as a model for an internalist theory of rational action. According to the former theory, an agent's belief can be justified only if the agent has access to what justifies the belief. Audi makes the parallel argument for rational action: an agent's action is rational only if the agent has access to the grounds (beliefs, desires) that make the action rational. This line of thought sheds real light on the problem of rational action. But I wonder whether the analogy holds as well as Audi believes. It seems easy to imagine cases where, caught by surprise, I act in a way that strikes me (even on reflection) as unmotivated and inexplicable, but turns out to have been just the right thing to do. Such actions, I should think, might well be considered rational. And there seems to be this reason for a disanalogy with knowledge: Beliefs are long-term dispositions that we are expected to regulate on the basis of new information. Actions, in contrast, span brief periods of time; once complete they are not subject to change. The internalist constraint on justified belief, reasonable given our expectation that agents will modify their beliefs on the basis of reflection, is hence not always suited to actions. Sometimes we have to act without thinking, and in these cases our motivations can be unclear. Yet even then, I think, we can speak of rational and irrational action. -- Robert Pasnau, Catholic University of America