

characterized (e.g. the goal of simplicity); and a goal is *epistemically* utopian if, although not utopian in the first two senses, criteria for determining whether the goal has been achieved cannot be specified (e.g. the goal of truth given a realist, non-epistemic conception of truth) (Laudan, 1984, pp. 52–53). If a charge of utopianism can be successfully made against some putative goal, that goal has been rationally criticized and is irrationally held as a goal of inquiry.

A goal *fails to accord with the values implicit in communal practices and judgments*, or fails to reconcile theory and practice, if its espousal and advocacy is incompatible with actual scientific practice or judgment (e.g. the scientific community's explicit goal of refraining from postulating unobservables while utilizing in practice the so-called 'method of hypothesis') (Laudan, 1984, pp. 55–59). If it can be shown that an explicitly avowed goal conflicts with the goals which seem implicitly to inform judgment and practice, that goal has been rationally criticized and is irrationally held as a goal of inquiry.

Why are goals which are criticizable by these two strategies irrational? Why are these two criteria of axiological critique properly thought of as being epistemically or normatively forceful? Laudan justifies the first, the utopian strategy, in terms of a conceptual analysis of rationality:

... it is at the very core of our conception of the rational and the reasonable that anything judged as satisfying that family of concepts must, in appropriate senses, be thought to be both possible and actionable. To adopt a goal with the feature that we can conceive of no actions that would be apt to promote it, or a goal whose realization we could not recognize even if we had achieved it, is surely a mark of unreasonableness and irrationality (Laudan, 1984, p. 51).

Leaving the status of conceptual analysis aside,⁹ why should the fact that a goal is utopian count as a rational objection to it? Pursuing such a goal is irrational, for Laudan, because one would not be able to realize it, or know it if one had. That is, such a goal could not be *instrumentally* pursued. Here Laudan's presupposition of an instrumentalist conception of rationality is evident. But as we saw earlier, instrumental reasons are not the only sort of reasons there are. If we take seriously Laudan's earlier (1977) pronouncement on rationality, according to which rationality is a function of good reasons rather than instrumentality, then we see that one can pursue a utopian goal if one has good reasons for doing so — even if the goal is indeed utopian, so that one does not have a good instrumental reason for such pursuit. The point can be seen by applying it to Laudan's own view. He urges us to embrace an instrumentalist conception of rationality. Why, on his view, should we do so? Not because it is instrumental for the achievement of some other goal. Rather, Laudan offers us arguments, by conceptual analysis, which are supposed to

⁹Laudan is clear that metamethodology should on his view have both naturalistic and conceptual components. See, e.g., Laudan (1987a), p. 231.