

The Architecture of Reason: The Structure and Substance of Rationality

Robert Audi

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GROUNDWORK

The architecture that surrounds us is quite varied. There are differences in shape, height, composition, and style. But every building has some foundation, even if it is as shifting as planks on a sandy beach. It also has a superstructure rising from that foundation, even if it is just a single story. The metaphor of foundations and superstructure has, at least since Aristotle, seemed to many philosophers to apply to our beliefs.¹ It is one thing, of course, to take it to apply to the psychology of belief: to maintain, for instance, that our beliefs are ultimately based on experience in some causal way and that they divide into the experiential in the foundations and the inferential in the superstructure. It is quite another to apply this architectural metaphor to normative notions: to hold, for example, that what ultimately justifies those of our beliefs that are justified is some aspect of experience. Similar questions arise for rationality. It is essential that we both distinguish and connect the psychological and epistemic aspects of the metaphor. I will, then, consider the architectural picture in both the psychology and the epistemology of cognition, particularly in relation to the development and structure of belief on the psychological side and, on the epistemological side, in relation to justification and knowledge.

1. SOURCES AND GROUNDS OF JUSTIFICATION

When I look directly at the piano keyboard before me in the full light of the concert stage, I plainly see its ebony and ivory, the fallboard behind the keys, and the raised top. This visual experience is a ground both *of*

beliefs I have and *for* a multitude of beliefs I could have but do not form. The experience is thus both a causal and a normative ground. I take note of the prominence of the maker's name in gold letters, and I believe that the letters are in a gothic font. I also see the spaces between the keys; but these I do not attend to, and I form no belief about them. Seeing them clearly, however, I have in that very experience a justification for believing that they are not two inches wide. That is obvious from what I see, and my justification for believing it is so good that I not only may rationally believe it, in the sense that my believing it would be consonant with reason, but should believe it if (as is unlikely) the proposition occurs to me: it would be unreasonable not to believe it. Granted, if I happened to be asked if the spaces were that wide, I would readily say that they are not, and would believe what I said. But it does not follow that I had formed this belief before there was any occasion to do so, and it is doubtful that I did.² Our justification for believing something may precede the belief itself, and some grounds for justification never issue in belief at all.

I am of course taking the notion of justification to be applicable to belief, even if its more common employment is in connection with action.³ There is no question that one may *justify* a belief by arguing for it. This is roughly a process of providing one or more premises that support the proposition believed. The justifiedness of belief may be understood on this basis: it is the property a belief possesses in virtue of being based on grounds of a kind that a successful justification of it would provide. These grounds might be either premises for the proposition believed or something experiential, such as a perceptual basis for holding the belief. The notion of justified belief, then, is no less clear than that of a belief based on justifying grounds citable in meeting a challenge of the belief. That notion is both clear enough for the work it will do here and epistemologically indispensable.

There are countless things that a single experience justifies one in believing. This is the point to be stressed here. It matters less whether one holds that the propositions in question are in some implicit way believed: the ground for believing them is there, whether or not it produces all the beliefs it can justify. In my view, nature does not build, or incline us to build, unnecessarily; but everyday experience does give us materials to build as the need arises. Nature is at once psychologically economical and normatively generous. Perception underdetermines belief, producing far fewer beliefs than it can support; but it overdetermines justification, providing justifying grounds for far more beliefs than we normally form and yielding far more justification than we need as warrant for many beliefs we do form.

Hearing is quite like seeing in all this. There is the auditory experience of the music, there are certain beliefs evoked by it, and there are multitudinous dispositions to form beliefs should appropriate questions or needs arise. I hear a rolling melody in the left hand; I notice the rich tones and form the belief that the piano has a good bass. I acquire justification for believing, but need not in fact believe—or disbelieve—the musically unimportant proposition that some of the melody is above middle C.

As different as the senses are from one another in quality, they all have the capacity to ground belief and its justification as I have illustrated. But the senses are not our only sources of belief and justification. Looking inward in a self-conscious moment, I am aware of my musical experience. This awareness provides a ground for justified introspective beliefs whether I form them or not. It has this much in common with sensory experience, though in other ways introspection and sensory experience are quite different.⁴

Memory should also be recognized as a source of justifying grounds and, in that sense, a source of justification. Suppose that after the concert I am asked whether the pianist was wearing a long sleeveless dress. I may have noticed that she was and simply remember this; or I may have retained a sufficiently definite image of her which I as it were consult, forming the belief that she wore a long sleeveless dress only on the basis of that image; or, quite apart from imagery, it may simply seem to me, as I consider the question, that she was wearing a long dress. (That in this third case I am remembering and not merely imagining might be confirmed by my recognizing the dress when I see it later.) In each case, I may be memorially justified in believing that she wore a long dress. In the first case, memory can preserve both my belief and its justification; in the second, it preserves the basis of that justification: my image. In the third, something we might call the sense of remembering is what both yields and justifies my belief.

Memory is different from perception and introspection, the other common experiential sources of justification, in at least three respects. First, memory is preservative in a way introspection is not. The latter, unlike the former, occurs contemporaneously with its object and dies with its disappearance. Memory often preserves a non-propositional memorial ground of justification, as in the case of the retained image of the pianist. Second, even where memory is a source of justification, it is apparently not by itself a source of belief: for instance, it is perception that produces the belief that the pianist is wearing a long dress; memory retains this belief. Third, memory is not, in the same basic way as perception, a source of knowledge. I may know something *from* memory, but not unless I came to know it in some other way, as by seeing that it is so. Knowledge from memory is more

like a book from a library than like fruit from a tree. For knowledge, memory is preservative, not generative.⁵

Perception, introspection, and memory have been conceived as experiential sources of justification: each provides, in the distinctive elements it brings to consciousness, justificatory grounds. It is chiefly these grounds that philosophers have had in mind in contrasting experience with reason as a source of belief and justification. Compare, for instance, justification based on what one hears and justification based on elementary logical intuition, as in an awareness that if some bears are pets, then some pets are bears. There is ample warrant to contrast experience and reason, particularly if the kinds of justification acquired in each case are importantly different. But the contrast can mislead. The *use* of reason requires having an experience of some kind, and, often, having an experience implies the use of reason.⁶ Nonetheless, even if the use of reason requires having an experience, say one of considering some proposition, it does not follow that this experience is what justifies every belief arrived at through that use of reason.

For some purposes we may want an overall rubric for the four standard sources of belief and justification—perception, introspection (consciousness, in one sense), memory, and reason. To frame it we can simply distinguish between intuitive, or, in one sense, reflective, experience and the other kinds just described: sensory, introspective, and memorial. We may then construe all basic justification as broadly experiential. Consider, for example, the question whether a desire must have an object, that is, be *for* something. Just from reflecting on the concepts that figure in the question, we can be justified in believing that this is so; and if I believe this on the basis of sufficient reflection about the question, I am justified in believing it.

If we regard reflection as a kind of experience, then the justification here is experiential; if we restrict the notion of experience to objects in the empirical world and construe the relevant reflection as concerning abstract objects, or at least as different from, and not evidentially dependent on, perceptual or introspective experience, then the justification should not be considered experiential. The clearest terminology preserves the distinction between experiential and reflective (intuitive) justification, whatever theory one holds about their nature. But it is important to see that a kind of experience, in the sense of mental activity or conscious awareness, occurs in both cases and, in each, supplies grounds for many more beliefs than we need to form.

Each of the four sources of belief and justification, then, may be said both to *provide* justification *for* believing and to *confer* justification *on* beliefs: on

actual beliefs appropriately based on those sources.⁷ This terminology is common and not inappropriate, but strictly speaking the sources provide, in the sense that their operation gives us, *grounds* of justification, and it is these that confer justification. Our perceptual capacities, for instance, enable us to see things, and the visual experiences we thereby have are grounds of visually justified beliefs. It is quite similar with the other three sources, and in speaking of sources of justification and of their conferring justification, or as simply justifying beliefs, this is the idea we should keep in mind.

Some philosophers may here think of a dilemma put forward by Wilfrid Sellars: if experiences are non-conceptual, they do not stand in need of justification but have none to give; and if they are conceptual (e.g., entailing belief), they may provide justification but also stand in need of it and hence cannot play a foundational role.⁸ This argument may be buttressed by the idea that only propositions stand in logical relations to the propositional objects of beliefs, and non-conceptual experiences can at best stand in causal relations to the beliefs in question. The commonest response to accepting the argument is to claim that only a coherence theory of justification can succeed. This argument and related ones have been discussed at length by many philosophers, and there is no need here to deal with it in detail.⁹ Several points, however, may be made briefly.

First, the argument depends for much of its plausibility on the idea that justification, like money, can be received only from what has it. To assume this without argument is to beg the question against the intuitive, common-sense view that perceptual grounds can confer justification, as opposed to transmitting it. Granted, in justifying a claim that it is densely foggy by saying (e.g.) ‘I see dense fog’, one expresses a belief whose content is “conceptualized.” But that the *expression* or indication of one’s ground is conceptual does not necessarily mean that one’s ground itself is. Citing a ground in this justificatory way is intrinsically conceptual. Citing it in this way, however, constitutes giving a *reason* in defense of the claim being supported or explained; the reason, though it indicates the source of one’s ground (vision), is not itself that ground (visual experience). The *fact* that I see it is my reason—and a good one—because it identifies my ground.

Second, suppose the ground itself *is* conceptual, as with seeing a green arrow as such. This may require conceptualizing what one experiences in terms of the concept of an arrow. It does not follow that the grounding visual *experience* needs or even admits of justification, and neither seems to be the case. The conceptual, as opposed to the doxastic (the belief-constituted) need not admit of justification.

Third, an experience may have *qualities*, such as the visual sense of the dense grey of fog, that—quite apart from whether they are believed to

belong to it—*can* stand in “logical” relations to the content of the proposition believed. The phenomenal property of my having a visual impression of grey is in a certain way appropriate to the property of being grey: the internal instantiation of the former is at least arguably best explained by causation by the external instantiation of the latter.

A fourth point here concerns the very notion at issue. The justification relation is epistemic, not logical. Conferral of justification, then, need not (at least on that count) be inferential. This point is easily missed because ‘justification’ has a process sense as well as a status sense, and plainly the process *is* conceptual.¹⁰ The two senses are related in the way I described in arguing that the notion of justification applies to beliefs: roughly, they possess the property (justifiedness) provided that the process as directed toward them would succeed. Nothing about the notion of justification entails that justifiedness can never be experientially rather than inferentially grounded. A ground that confers it, moreover, may stand in a broadly causal relation to the belief justified by it (as well as in other sorts of relations).

None of this is to suggest that coherence has no place in understanding justification. It will soon be shown to have an important role in this quite consistent with the conception of justification (and rationality) being developed. It should be stressed, however, that coherence itself does not admit of justification and hence must be viewed as, like experiential grounds, conferring it rather than transmitting it. Once certain facts are seen in perspective, what is plausible in the Sellarsian dilemma can be accommodated without accepting its conclusion.

I have spoken of four basic sources of justification. I doubt that any general argument shows that there can be no other basic sources, i.e., sources whose justificatory power is non-derivative, in the sense that it does not come from further sources. But it is not clear that there are other basic sources, particularly considering how broad the notion of perception is.¹¹ Perception is not necessarily tied to the five senses. It could occur through some other causally sensitive modality associated with the right sorts of experiential responses.¹² I will, then, sometimes refer to these four sources of justification as the standard sources, but I leave open the possibility of other basic sources.

The theory I am developing can also provide for a variety of non-derivative sources of justification and knowledge. This need not require radical changes in the theory, as opposed, say, to broadening the range of experiential qualities relevant to justifying beliefs. There is, however, no reason to think that any other sources play the same role in the notion of justification that operates in the standard descriptive and critical practices of

normal adults.¹³ It appears that the four standard sources of justification are the only sources of it which do not need to earn their justificational credentials, as extrasensory perception presumably would, by correlation with one or another kind of ground already taken to generate justification. The visual impression of rain, for instance, unquestionably provides a measure of justification to believe that it is raining. Consider, by contrast, a bodily sensation that I take to indicate that it is raining. If it can provide justification, it must first be seen to do so, as where it is traced to an arthritic joint that reliably reacts to the weather.

How is the justification we have been exploring to be conceived? The notion is too basic to admit of analysis in terms of a set of notions that are at once simple and significantly less problematic. We might say that a justified belief is one that there is adequate reason for the believer to think true; but, as suggestive as this is, it transfers the burden of analysis to the relevant notion of adequate reason. We can say that a justified belief is one that is rationally acceptable, which, in turn, might be taken to mean that one does not deserve criticism, from the point of view of rationality, for holding it.¹⁴ But does being beyond rational criticism imply justification? I think not. I could escape such criticism for holding an unjustified belief if it has been ineradicably implanted in me by brain manipulation. In any case, this kind of analysis invites assimilation of justification to rationality, which will shortly be shown to be significantly different and is surely also no easier to understand. One might say that justified beliefs are those that are reliably produced or sustained.¹⁵ One might also say that a justified belief is one that appropriately expresses epistemic virtue.¹⁶ These views each have something to recommend them. I cannot discuss them here, but the account I offer will capture many of their plausible features.

On my view, and in broad terms that will be clarified in this chapter and the next, justification, for any kind of element, is *well-groundedness* of a rather full-blooded sort, ample well-groundedness, we might say; and a justification is roughly an adequate ground. For beliefs, one kind of adequate grounding is the sort that commonly goes with a belief's directly (non-inferentially) resting on one or more of the standard sources I have described. Another, to be described in Chapter 2, is (adequate) *indirect* grounding—roughly, inferential grounding—in those same sources. It seems to me that it is because a justified belief is well-grounded that it has most of the properties, such as permissibility, reasonableness, and appropriateness to epistemic virtue, that other accounts stress. What a theory of justification should do is provide a good indication of how justification arises, how it is transmitted and communicated, how it may be strengthened or overridden, what sorts of things have it, and how they are con-

nected with other things that have it and with the wider notion of rationality. A well-groundedness theory can provide the basic materials needed to account for each of these five aspects of justification, both for the case of belief and for other cases, such as that of action and desire, that will be explored in Part II.¹⁷