

Consciousness, Experience, and Justification

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I

A belief must have justification if it is to count as knowledge. And it is a commonplace thought that in certain circumstances *experiences* can serve as justifications for beliefs. Moreover, many have thought that there is something distinctive about the *way* in which experiences justify beliefs, and that there is something distinctive about experiences which accounts for the distinctive way in which they justify beliefs. In this paper, I seek to elucidate views about experience and justification that can make sense of these thoughts and that can show us why so many have been attracted to them.

I think it is important to try to make sense of these thoughts concerning the justificatory role of experiences, for I suspect that we are losing the ability to see why philosophers have traditionally been attracted to such thoughts. Coherentism and reliabilism, perhaps the two most currently popular theories of epistemic justification, appear simply to reject the idea that experiences can justify beliefs. Thus according to coherentism, the view that 'a belief is justified by its coherence with other beliefs one holds,'¹ it is only other beliefs, not experiences, that can justify beliefs. Although there is little consensus as to how the notion of coherence should be explicated, it is generally agreed that experiences are not the

1 R. Audi, 'Fallibilist Foundationalism and Holistic Coherentism,' in *The Theory of Knowledge: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, L. Pojman, ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth 1993), 269

sort of thing that can cohere with beliefs.² Reliabilism, by contrast, holds that 'a belief is justified if and only if it is "*well-formed*," i.e., it has an ancestry of reliable and/or conditionally reliable cognitive operations.³ In other words, according to reliabilism beliefs are justified, not by experiences, but by being caused by reliable belief-forming processes. Experiences may be formed in the course of such processes, but they need not be, and even when they are, they make no contribution to the justification of the beliefs that are formed as the result of those processes. What makes a belief-forming process justification-conferring, according to reliabilism, is simply that it is reliable, not that it gives rise to experiences. So neither coherentism nor reliabilism seems to allow any room for the traditional thought that experiences justify beliefs.⁴

2 See Audi: 'Whatever coherence is, it is a cognitively *internal* relation, in the sense that it is a matter of how your beliefs (or other cognitive items) are related to *one another*, not to anything outside your system of beliefs, such as your perceptual experience' (268). But J.L. Kvanvig and W.D. Riggs, 'Can Coherence Theory Appeal to Appearance States?' *Philosophical Studies* 67 (1992) 197-217, argue that although 'coherence theorists have universally defined justification as a relation only among (the contents of) belief states,' 'this feature of coherentism is only an artifact of its history and a regrettable one at that' (197). Instead, they recommend that 'coherence theorists ought to devote more attention to the prospects of a coherence theory employing both beliefs and appearances in the class of things over which coherence is defined' (216). Nevertheless, Kvanvig and Riggs do not themselves provide such a theory, and thus they cannot help us understand why philosophers have traditionally been attracted to the thought that experiences can justify beliefs.

Note that although L. BonJour in *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1985) defends a version of coherentism that assigns a special role to 'observational' beliefs, he defines these in a way that makes no reference to sense experience, as he himself emphasizes: 'According to the coherentist account, observation is not essentially tied to sense experience in the way it is for more traditional views, and thus any sort of reliable, cognitively spontaneous belief, no matter what sort of causal process it may result from, can in principle count as observational' (175).

3 A.I. Goldman, 'What is Justified Belief?' in *Justification and Knowledge*, G.S. Pappas, ed. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel 1979), 14

4 I suppose that if a reliable belief-forming process gives rise to experiences, then a reliabilist might wish to say that the experiences produced by this process justify the beliefs produced by this process. But such a position cannot help us make sense of the thought with which I am concerned in this paper, the thought that there is something *distinctive* about experiences which accounts for the distinctive way in which they justify beliefs. For according to the reliabilist, all reliable belief-forming processes justify beliefs in the same way, both those that involve experiences and those that do not: they justify beliefs simply by being reliable.

Of course traditionally it has been (internalist)⁵ foundationalist theories of epistemic justification, not coherentist or reliabilist theories, that hold that experiences can justify beliefs. But I submit that even foundationalists have not succeeded in capturing what it is about experiences that makes them suitable for justifying beliefs. For one popular way of arguing for foundationalism is as follows: (P1) if beliefs are to be justified at all, then some beliefs ('basic' beliefs) must be justified by something besides other beliefs (the epistemic regress argument);⁶ (P2) 'the justifiedness of a belief is a function exclusively of the internal states of the believer'⁷ (the internalist premise); therefore, (C) since basic beliefs cannot be justified by other beliefs, they need to be justified by some different kind of internal state: experiences. In other words, that experiences must be able to justify beliefs is arrived at by a 'process of elimination' argument: the epistemic regress argument eliminates other beliefs as possible justifiers for basic beliefs, internalism eliminates anything external to the mind as a possible justifier for basic beliefs, and so the only remaining candidate for justifying basic beliefs seems to be experience.⁸ This 'process of elimination' argument does not detect anything positive about the nature of experiences that makes them suitable for justifying beliefs; rather, experiences are given the job of justifying basic beliefs because they lack certain features that would make them *unsuitable* for this job: they are *not* beliefs, and they are *not* external to the mind. But this argument does not capture the thought with which I began, the thought that there is something distinctive about experiences that accounts for the distinctive way in which they justify

5 I add the word 'internalist' to qualify 'foundationalism' in order to distinguish the foundationalism with which I am concerned from reliabilism, which can be characterized as an externalist version of foundationalism. See, for example, Bonjour (*Empirical Knowledge*, ch. 3). All subsequent references to foundationalism should be understood to exclude reliabilism.

6 For discussion of the epistemic regress argument, see, for example, Bonjour (*Empirical Knowledge*, ch. 2), and Audi.

7 J.L. Pollock, 'Epistemic Norms,' *Synthese* 71 (1987) 61-95, at 61

8 The importance of this 'process of elimination' argument in motivating foundationalism is suggested by E. Sosa, 'Mythology of the Given,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14 (1997) 275-86: 'On the other side [the side that holds that experiences must justify beliefs] are Schlick, Hempel, C.I. Lewis, and Chisholm, among others. For these it is an "astounding error" to suppose that the mere coherence of a self-enclosed body of beliefs might suffice to confer justification on its members. And it is hard to see what, other than sensory experience, could serve to supplement coherence appropriately so as to explain empirical justification' (278).

beliefs. For this thought is pointing to a distinctive positive feature of experiences that makes them suitable for justifying beliefs. It is not that we need something to justify basic beliefs in order to save ourselves from skepticism, and we assign the job to experiences because we've run out of other choices; rather, independently of any need to answer the skeptic, some have thought that they discerned a positive feature of experiences that makes them inherently suited for the task of justifying certain kinds of beliefs. I do not believe that foundationalists and philosophers generally have succeeded in articulating the nature of this alleged feature, or in explaining how it enables experiences to justify beliefs. In brief, no satisfactory account has yet been given of how experiences justify beliefs.

My aim in this paper is to provide such an account. The thought that experiences justify beliefs is a traditional one, and therefore, I suggest, we should look to traditional conceptions of experience in order to make sense of it. Specifically, I shall argue that a traditional Lockean act-object conception of experience can be employed to explain how experiences are able to justify beliefs.⁹

In section II, I briefly set forth accounts of experience and justification that can make sense of the thought that experiences can justify beliefs. In section III, I explain how the account of experience set forth in section II can be understood as an elaboration of an act-object conception of experience. In section IV, I argue for the correctness of the account of justification set forth in section II, and I then explain how experiences can justify beliefs, insofar as experiences are understood in accordance with the aforementioned act-object conception.

My principal aim in this paper is merely to *motivate* the claim that experiences can justify beliefs by reconstructing its traditional appeal; I do not purport to have a conclusive argument for this claim. In particular, I show how the claim that experiences justify beliefs can be derived from the conjunction of a certain account of justification and a certain version of the act-object conception of experience, but I do not otherwise argue for this conception of experience. Nevertheless, insofar as today we are still attracted to the idea that experiences can justify beliefs, my paper suggests that the act-object conception of experience deserves reconsideration.

9 Thus if my argument succeeds, I will be in a position to explain why 'classical foundationalism accepts the act-object analysis of experience' (J. Dancy, Introduction to *Perceptual Knowledge*, J. Dancy, ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988], 11).

II

In this section, I *briefly* present the accounts of experience and justification that I shall employ in my explanation of how experiences justify beliefs. This brief overview of my position will be followed in subsequent sections by more detailed elucidations of these accounts of experience and justification.

Experiences are *relational* states of subjects: for a subject to have an experience is for him or her to be related in a certain kind of way to an object of a certain kind. I shall sometimes refer to the object to which the subject is related as a *given*, and the relation in which the subject stands to the given as *awareness*, or *consciousness*. So it is an essential feature of an experience that it involves an awareness of a given. Being aware of a given is a *noncausal* feature of the experiencing subject; it is not identical to any causal power or dispositional property of the subject. But the experiencing subject possesses certain causal powers *in virtue of* possessing this noncausal feature; being aware of a given can be said to be the *basis* of certain causal dispositions of the experiencing subject. In particular, an experiencing subject possesses the power to form beliefs of certain kinds; the particular beliefs that the subject can form will be a function of the particular *given* of which the subject is aware. In virtue of being aware of a given, the experiencing subject has the causal power to form beliefs about that given. Alternatively, I will speak of the experience itself as having the power to produce beliefs about the given, and of the experience as having this power in virtue of involving an awareness of that given.

What do I mean in claiming that the experience has this causal power *in virtue of* involving an awareness of a given? The idea is that there is something about the intrinsic nature of being aware of a given that enables one to form beliefs of a certain kind; the causal power is supposed to *flow* from the intrinsic nature of this noncausal feature. The 'in virtue of' and 'flow' relations are *necessary* relations: the claim is not that it is a contingent fact about our world that awareness of a given is conjoined with a certain causal power; rather, the claim is that since it is something about the intrinsic nature of being aware of a given that confers the causal power, it will be true in every possible world that someone who possess the noncausal feature of being aware of a given will also possess this causal power. But although a person possesses this causal power *in virtue of* possessing the feature of being aware of a given, the concept of the former feature cannot be *analyzed* in terms of the concept of the latter, for the former is a causal feature and the latter is noncausal; therefore, not only will it be a necessary truth that a person who is aware of a given will possess the aforementioned causal power, it will also be a necessary *synthetic* truth. Finally, it is part of this account

of experience that this necessary synthetic truth can be known a priori. Once reason becomes acquainted with the intrinsic nature of what it is to be aware of a given, it is able to detect that there is something about this intrinsic nature that confers the causal power in question; reason is able to detect the *necessary* connection between the noncausal feature of being aware of a given and the causal feature of producing beliefs of certain kinds. Reason can detect this necessary connection because not only does the causal feature flow from the intrinsic nature of being aware of a given, but it flows from it in an *intelligible way*, in a way that *makes sense*, so to speak, and therefore in a way that enables reason to know about it a priori. We do not need to experience a constant conjunction between experiences and beliefs in order to infer that experiences have the causal power to produce beliefs; instead, we merely need to know the intrinsic nature of a certain noncausal feature of experience (awareness of the given), and reason can then apprehend *how* the causal power to produce certain kinds of beliefs intelligibly flows from this noncausal feature. For the connection between being aware of a given and being able to form certain kinds of beliefs is not a *brute* necessary connection, it is an *intelligible*, or *rational*, necessary connection, and therefore it is a necessary connection that can be detected a priori by *reason*. Alternatively, we can say that experiences are not mere *brute* causes of beliefs, but are *intelligible*, or *rational*, causes of beliefs. In section 3, I argue that it is implicit in certain traditional ways of thinking about experience that experiences are rational causes of beliefs.

Assuming that experiences are rational causes of beliefs, it follows that experiences can justify beliefs. For I shall argue in section 4 for an account of justification according to which *y* justifies *x* if it is a rational cause of *x*. In brief, *y* justifies *x* if the occurrence of *y* makes the occurrence of *x* a justified, or rational, occurrence. We are inclined to think that rational relations can hold only between propositions and other abstract objects, but in fact we talk about justification precisely when we are concerned with the rationality of concrete, contingent states of affairs. And one way a concrete state of affairs can be rational (perhaps the only way) is if a distinct state of affairs makes its occurrence rational. And *y* can make the occurrence of *x* rational if it makes *x* occur in a rational way, that is, if it is a rational cause of *x*. Justification is the way rationality becomes instantiated in the concrete world, and therefore justification must be a relation that is simultaneously concrete and rational. Rational causation is one such relation (perhaps the only one), and therefore justification can take place by means of rational causation. In particular, experiences can justify beliefs by causing them in a rational way, and experiences can do so in virtue of their possessing a distinctive noncausal feature, the feature of involving an awareness of a given.

III

Our concern is with why philosophers have traditionally been attracted to the idea that experiences justify beliefs. I submit that philosophers have been attracted to this idea insofar as traditional conceptions of experience contain the resources to show that experiences are inherently suited for the task of justification. But the account of experience outlined in the previous section may not seem very traditional or familiar, especially that part of the account that describes experiences as having causal powers that can be known a priori. In our post-Humean age, we may be skeptical that any claim to the effect that we have a priori knowledge of the causal powers of anything could ever have held any attraction for philosophers. In this section, I wish to counter such skepticism, by arguing that the aforementioned account of experience just is an explicit rendering of what is one of the more familiar and traditional conceptions of experience, the act-object conception of experience. (I allow for the possibility that there is more than one account of experience that deserves to be characterized as an act-object conception of experience, and I refer to my account as an explicit rendering of *the* act-object conception merely to facilitate exposition. For what matters here is not whether I have captured the one and only act-object conception, but whether I have captured and made explicit *some* familiar and traditional way of thinking about experience.)

In contemporary philosophy, the act-object conception is generally treated merely as the view that experiences are *relational* states of a subject, and is contrasted (usually unfavorably) with adverbial views that take experiences to be *nonrelational* states of a subject.¹⁰ Given the current unpopularity of the act-object conception, contemporary philosophers remain uninterested in the question of what *kind* of relation

10 See, e.g., J. Dancy (6-7); F. Jackson, 'On the Adverbial Analysis of Visual Experience,' *Metaphilosophy* 6 (1975) 127-35, at 127, and *Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977), ch. 3; W. Sellars, 'The Adverbial Theory of the Objects of Sensation,' *Metaphilosophy* 6 (1975) 144-60, at 145; and S. Shoemaker, 'Introspection and the Self,' in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Volume X, P.A. French, T.E. Uehling, and H.K. Wettstein, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986), 105-7. I should note that although some contemporary philosophers construe the act-object conception as including the view that the objects in question are *mental* objects (Dancy, 7; Shoemaker, 'Introspection,' 105), I shall not be following their lead. I shall not be concerned in this paper with the question of whether the objects of experience are mental or physical (see footnote 21, below), and so I shall take the act-object conception to be neutral on this issue, as does C.D. Broad, *Scientific Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1923), 252.

the act-object conception takes an experience to be. But that is precisely the question we need to investigate if we are to understand what experiences must be like if they are to justify beliefs. In particular, we need to understand the sense in which the experiential relation is, or at least *involves*, something that deserves to be characterized as an *act*.

The above qualification is necessary because it is not the experience as a whole that is characterized as an act, it is a distinguishable part of the experience: the 'awareness' part of the experience. The act-object conception distinguishes three elements of an experience: the subject, the subject's act of awareness, and the object of which the subject is aware (the *given*). If we are to understand the sense in which an experience involves an act, it is the 'awareness' element of the experience to which we must turn our attention.

We can begin to understand how the act-object conception conceives the 'awareness' part of the experience if we consider how the 'awareness' element is supposed to be related to the other two elements of the experience. Although the act-object conception distinguishes three elements in an experience, it conceives experiences as *binary* relations: an experience is a relation between a subject and an object of which the subject is aware. So although the act-object conception distinguishes three elements in an experience, only two of these function as *relata*; the third, the 'awareness' element, seems to function in a different way. In a sense that I shall subsequently make more precise, the 'awareness' element seems to function as the relation itself, for it is that through which the *relata* become related. The subject is experientially related to the object in virtue of being aware of it; the act of awareness relates the subject that is aware with the object of which he is aware.

In isolating the 'relation' part of the experience (the 'awareness') as a distinct element in the experience, an element distinct from the *relata*, the act-object conception commits itself to the view that experiences are *not* internal relations. In David Lewis's words, 'an internal relation is one that supervenes on the intrinsic natures of its *relata*: if X1 and Y1 stand in the relation but X2 and Y2 do not, then there must be a difference in intrinsic nature either between the Xs or between the Ys.'¹¹ So, for example, the 'is taller than' relation is internal, for it supervenes on the heights of its *relata*, and the height of a person is one of her intrinsic properties. That the 'is taller than' relation obtains between two people is nothing over and above the facts of the two people existing and being particular heights. More generally, there is no more to the obtaining of

11 D. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986), 62

an internal relation than the relata instantiating certain intrinsic properties. Since the way an object exists is by instantiating intrinsic properties, we can say that there is no more to the obtaining of an internal relation than the existence of its relata. But according to the act-object conception of experience, there is more to the existence of an experiential relation between a subject and an object than the existence of that subject and object; there is also this 'extra thing,' the act of awareness that relates the subject and the object. Internal relations are precisely those relations that do not need extra concrete entities to relate the relata, for they supervene on the intrinsic properties of their relata. Whereas experiences are not internal relations, and therefore do require an additional concrete element to relate the relata. And how can the act of awareness succeed in relating a subject of experience to an object of experience? The 'awareness' element of an experience can succeed in doing so because (according to the act-object conception of experience) it is essentially relational, in that it is impossible for an act of awareness to exist without the existence of a subject of that awareness and an object of that awareness, a subject and object that are related to each other via that awareness. In more familiar terminology, *consciousness* (i.e., awareness) is always consciousness *of* something; consciousness is always *directed* towards the object of consciousness, in that it always directs the conscious *subject* towards the object of consciousness.¹²

The act-object conception conceives consciousness as essentially relational,¹³ in that there is something about the intrinsic nature of consciousness that necessitates that it exist by relating its subject to some object of consciousness. The act-object conception conceives the act of conscious-

12 See F. Brentano, *Psychology From an Empirical Viewpoint*, O. Kraus and L. McAlister, eds., A. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell, and L. McAlister, trans. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul [1874] 1973): 'Every mental phenomenon is characterized by ... direction toward an object' (88). See also E. Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, W.R. Boyce Gibson, trans. (New York: Collier 1962): 'If an intentional experience is actual, carried out, that is, after the manner of the *cogito*, the subject "directs" itself within it towards the intentional object. To the *cogito* itself belongs an immanent "glancing-towards" the object, a directedness which from another side springs forth from the "Ego," which can therefore never be absent' (109).

13 Broad defines an *act* as 'something which cannot exist by itself, but can only exist as a constituent in a complex, whose other constituent is its object' (252). He immediately goes on to say that the act 'is, of course, the characteristically mental factor in such a complex'; he thus seems to be defining the act-object conception as a conception that takes consciousness to be essentially relational.

ness and the object of consciousness as distinct entities,¹⁴ but it holds that there is a necessary connection between them, in that it is impossible for consciousness to exist in the absence of *some* object of that consciousness. It also holds that this necessary connection is *intelligible*, and can therefore be known by a priori reflection on the nature of consciousness. In other words, by a priori reflection on the nature of consciousness, reason can detect its relational nature, the impossibility of it existing in the absence of a distinct object of consciousness. Reason can detect the existence of an intelligible necessary connection between consciousness and some distinct object of consciousness.

Not only is the act-object conception committed to conceiving consciousness as essentially relational, it is also committed to conceiving it as essentially *active*: consciousness can exist only in the form of an *act* of consciousness. We have seen the sense in which the act-object conception takes experiences to be *relations*; what we now need to understand is the sense in which it conceives these relations as involving *acts*. And we need to be very careful here, for we are not accustomed to thinking of experiences as acts. Experiences are *passive* states, in that they are states of the subject that are caused by something external to the subject. But perhaps the most familiar concept of *act*, or *action*, takes an act or action to be a state with a certain kind of internal cause, and thus does not allow for the possibility of passive acts. What we need is a concept of act or action that does allow for the possibility of passive acts. In order to recover such a concept, let us turn to Locke.¹⁵ According to Locke, 'the efficacy whereby the new Substance or Idea is produced, is called, in the subject exerting that power, Action' (*Essay* II.xxii.11). What Locke is saying here

14 G.E. Moore insists upon this point at length in 'The Refutation of Idealism,' *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1922), 1-30. See, for example: 'We have then in every sensation two distinct elements, one which I call consciousness, and another which I call the object of consciousness. This must be so if the sensation of blue and the sensation of green, though different in one respect, are alike in another: blue is one object of sensation and green is another, and consciousness, which both sensations have in common, is different from either' (17). Broad argues for the same point as follows: 'It does seem clear that, when I have a sensation of a red triangular patch, some things are true of the patch itself (*e.g.*, that it is red and triangular) which it is very difficult to believe to be true of my sensation of the red patch. If so, it seems necessary to hold that the sensation and the sensum are not identical; that the sensum is an objective constituent of the sensation; and that there is another constituent which is not objective and may be called "the act of sensing"' (257).

15 Quotations from J. Locke are taken from the following edition: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, P.H. Niddich, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon 1975).

is that a state is an *action* if and only if its intrinsic nature is such as to be able to produce an effect; it is that state of the cause which makes it efficacious. On Hume's view of causation, there are no actions in this sense, for causes do not *produce* their effects, they are merely *followed* by their effects.¹⁶ On Hume's view, there is nothing about the intrinsic nature of a cause that makes it necessary that it should be followed by its effect; it is just a contingent fact that certain kinds of events are always followed by certain other kinds of events. Whereas for Locke, an event can be said to cause another event only if there is something about the intrinsic nature of the first event that necessitates the occurrence of the second event. In Locke's terminology, only *actions* can produce effects ('All power relat[es] to action'; *Essay* II.xxi.4), where an action just is something the intrinsic nature of which makes it necessary that its occurrence should result in an effect.

Since for Hume the connection between a cause and its effect is contingent, it can be known only empirically. But for Locke, since the connection between a cause and its effect is necessary, the possibility arises of a priori knowledge of this connection. For Locke, something can produce an effect only if it is *active*, only if there is something about its intrinsic nature that makes it necessary that it should result in an effect. Locke allows for the possibility that if one has knowledge of this active, or efficacious, part of a cause's nature, then one can know by a priori reflection on it *what* effects the cause will produce, for one can just 'see' how the cause's powers *flow* in a necessary and intelligible way from its active nature. According to Locke, we can conceive of only two kinds of action: motion and thinking (*Essay* II.xxi.4; II.xxii.11). In other words, Locke is saying that by a priori reflection on our ideas of motion and thinking, we can see that motion and thinking are essentially *active*, in that their natures are such as to result in effects. Whereas Hume denied that we have a priori knowledge of any causal powers, and thereupon concluded that there were no actions in Locke's sense, Locke held that we could have a priori knowledge of at least some of the causal powers of motion and thinking, for the active nature of these 'entities' could be detected by reason. In section V, I shall address the question of whether an adherent of the act-object conception of experience should be concerned with Hume's denial that we can have a priori knowledge of an object's causal powers. But my immediate concern is to understand how

16 Quotations from D. Hume are taken from the following editions: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Niddich, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon 1978) and *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3rd ed., L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Niddich, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon 1975).

the act-object conception conceives experiences as involving acts, and so I need to explore further Locke's claim that thinking is an act(ion).

In claiming that thinking is an act, and that thinking is the only kind of *mental* act, Locke must be understood as employing the term 'thinking' in a broad sense so as to encompass a variety of different kinds of mental acts.¹⁷ For Locke characterizes 'Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, [and] Willing' all as 'different actings of our own Minds' (*Essay* II.i.4). Given my concern here with the act-object conception of experience, I am especially interested in Locke's characterization of perception as an act. For Locke categorizes perception as an act even though 'in bare naked *Perception*, the Mind is, for the most part, only passive; and what it perceives, it cannot avoid perceiving' (*Essay* II.ix.1). For Locke, there is nothing contradictory about the idea of a passive act, for to describe a state as passive is to say something about what caused it, whereas to describe it as an act is to say something about its intrinsic nature. Recall that in order to understand the act-object conception of experience, we are in need of a concept of act that allows for the possibility of passive acts. We now see that Locke's concept of act nicely meets our need.

The act-object conception of experience can now be summarized as follows. Not only are experiences *relational* states of a subject, they are also *active* states of a subject. An experience is an *act* in that there is something about its intrinsic nature that makes it necessary that it should produce an effect (given appropriate background conditions). What is it about the intrinsic nature of an experience that makes it active, or efficacious? It is the 'awareness' element of the experience, the 'consciousness' element. According to the act-object conception of experience, consciousness is an entity that is both essentially relational and essentially active. And just as one can know a priori that consciousness is relational, and that therefore there is an intelligible necessary connection between consciousness and some distinct object of consciousness, similarly, one can know a priori that consciousness is active, and that therefore there is an intelligible necessary connection between an experience and (at least some of) its distinct effects.

The act-object conception is usefully contrasted with a functionalist account of experience. Whereas the (analytic) functionalist defines the property of being in an experiential state as the property of being in a state with certain kinds of causal powers, and remains neutral on the

17 See especially *Essay* II.xix for Locke's explicit use of the term 'thinking' in a broad sense. In this chapter, Locke characterizes various different kinds of mental acts as different 'modes of thinking.'

intrinsic nature of the 'stuff' that is the basis of these causal powers (thus allowing for multiple realization), the act-object conception purports to be characterizing the intrinsic, noncausal nature of an experience, but then holds that this intrinsic nature is active, in that it is necessary that any state with such an intrinsic nature will have certain kinds of causal powers (presumably the same causal powers that the functionalist incorporates in his definition of experience). So whereas both functionalism and the act-object conception hold that it is a necessary truth that, for example, experiences cause beliefs of certain kinds, the functionalist takes it to be an analytic truth, where the act-object conception takes it to be a synthetic truth that can be learned by a priori reflection on the intrinsic nature of experience. On the act-object conception, experiences do not merely cause beliefs, but they are *rational* causes of beliefs, in that there is a substantive (i.e., nonanalytic) but *intelligible* necessary connection between experiences and beliefs. Since the connection is *intelligible*, it can be detected a priori by *reason*. More precisely, *rational* causation is causation that is the exercise of a *rational* causal power. And a causal power is *rational* if and only if the causal power has a noncausal categorical basis with which it stands in an intelligible necessary connection. Given the intrinsic nature of the categorical basis, it is *rational*, that is, it is *intelligible*, that this categorical basis should give rise to and be connected with the causal power in question, and therefore an *intelligence* (i.e., *reason*) can know that such a connection exists. According to the act-object conception, experiences have the rational causal power to produce beliefs of certain kinds, and they possess this causal power in virtue of the intrinsic nature of the categorical basis of that causal power, such categorical basis being the 'consciousness' element of experience. Both functionalism and the act-object conception acknowledge the necessary truth of certain claims about the causal powers of mental states, but they offer sharply different accounts of this necessity. Insofar as one finds functionalist analyses to misrepresent what we all know about the meaning of our mental terminology,¹⁸ one will prefer the account of this necessity given by the act-object conception.

Given that my ultimate goal is to explain how experiences justify beliefs, I am especially interested in the claim that experiences are rational causes of *beliefs*. I submit that it is implicit in certain traditional and familiar ways of thinking about experiences that in fact experiences

18 I am thinking here of the familiar complaint that functionalist analyses leave out the 'qualitative' aspects of experiences. See, e.g., N. Block and J.A. Fodor, 'What Psychological States Are Not,' *Philosophical Review* 81 (1972) 159-81, and D.J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996).

are rational causes of beliefs. For not only have philosophers traditionally held that experiences cause us to form beliefs about the objects of experience, but they have traditionally *not* held this view as the result of a belief in functionalism, for functionalism is a relatively new philosophical account of the mind. Rather, philosophers have traditionally held that experiences cause beliefs about the objects of experience as the result of their view that in experience, the object of experience is *given*, or *presented*, to the subject. This view is also expressed by saying that the subject is *acquainted* with the object of experience, and is thereby able to form true beliefs about it. Such traditional talk of *presentation*, *givenness*, and *acquaintance* is notoriously difficult to make sense of and elucidate. My suggestion is that the best way to reconstruct such talk is in terms of there being something about the intrinsic nature of experiential awareness that *intelligibly necessitates* that a subject who is aware of some object of experience will have the causal power to form true beliefs about that object of experience. In other words, in explaining that experiences cause beliefs in virtue of the fact that the experiencing subject is *acquainted* with the object of experience, traditional philosophers are in effect saying that experiences are not merely causes of beliefs, but are *rational* causes of beliefs in the sense distinguished earlier.

In order to justify my suggestion about how notions such as acquaintance should be understood, let me spell out this traditional philosophical account of how experiences cause beliefs in somewhat more detail. An experiencing subject's power to form true beliefs about the object of experience can be seen as a combination of two distinct causal powers: the power to form thoughts about the object of experience, and the power to form *true* thoughts about the object of experience. With regard to the first causal power, the traditional story is that an experiencing subject is able to think about the object of experience in virtue of the fact that the experiencing subject is *aware* of the object of experience: the idea is that this relation of awareness in effect brings the object of experience before the mind (it *presents* the object of experience to the mind, it *gives* the object of experience to the mind) in a way that enables the subject to think about the object without need of an identifying description.¹⁹ More specifically, the subject is able to refer *demonstratively* to the object of experience in

19 Compare H.H. Price, *Perception* (London: Methuen 1932): 'The *subject* or *subject-matter* about which we think must be somehow brought before the mind, if we are to think about it, and it cannot always be brought there by previous thinking, or we should have an infinite regress. This means that something must be *given*. And sensing is one of the ways (I do not say the only one) in which subject-matters for thought are given to us' (7).

virtue of the fact that the subject is *acquainted* with it, where the notion of acquaintance is 'the notion of an immediate presence of object to mind such as would make it intelligible that the mind in question can entertain singular propositions, targeted on the object in the special way in which singular propositions are.'²⁰ But how is an 'immediate presence of object to mind' supposed to be 'such as would make it *intelligible*' that the mind is able to think about that object? My suggestion is that to say that it is intelligible that the mind can think about an object that is immediately present to it is just to say that a relation between a mind and an object *counts* as immediate presence if the intrinsic nature of that relation is such as to make it necessary in an *intelligible way* that a mind related to an object in that way will be able to think about it. Thus the thrust of the traditional account is that an experience enables the subject of the experience to think about the object of the experience in virtue of the fact that the 'awareness' element of the experience relates the subject and object of the experience in a relation of *immediate presence*, that is, in a relation the intrinsic nature of which is such as to intelligibly necessitate that a subject that stands in that relation to an object will have the power to think demonstratively about that object. In the terminology I have been employing, the traditional account is claiming that an experience has the *rational* causal power to produce demonstrative thoughts about the object of experience in virtue of the intrinsic nature of the 'awareness' element of the experience. Talk of acquaintance, presence, and givenness are just equivalent ways of getting across the idea that the causal power in question is a rational one.

Whereas the first causal power at issue here is the mere power to think about the object of experience, the second causal power is the power to form certain kinds of *true* thoughts about the object of experience. What the traditional story says here is that in virtue of being aware of the object of experience, not only can the subject think about the object of experience, but it also has the power to detect certain of its sensory properties,²¹

20 J. McDowell, 'Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space,' in *Subject, Thought, and Context*, P. Pettit and J. McDowell, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon 1982), 140

21 I remain neutral on the question of whether the sensory properties in question are mental or physical; similarly, I remain neutral on the question of whether the *objects* of sensory experience are mental or physical. My concern in this paper is not to explain how experiences justify beliefs about the external world; rather, my goal is the more modest but also more basic one of explaining how it is *ever* possible for an experience to justify a belief of *any* kind. Those who hold that the objects of sensory experience are always mental objects are traditionally known as sense-data theorists; contemporary defenders of sense-data theory include F. Jackson (*Perception*) and H. Robinson, 'The General Form of the Argument for Berkeleyan Idealism,' in

and thereby form true beliefs to the effect that the object of experience (thought about via a demonstrative mode of presentation) has those properties. Again, the idea is that because the object of experience is immediately present to the mind, the mind does not need to guess as to the nature of the object of experience, or infer to its nature on the basis of evidence; rather, it is immediately *acquainted* with (at least part of) its nature, and thereby has direct knowledge of it. Acquaintance is here being thought of as a 'direct cognitive relation' to an object (B. Russell, 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description,' reprinted in N. Salmon and S. Soames, eds., *Propositions and Attitudes* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988], 16). But what exactly is a direct cognitive relation to an object? Russell emphasizes that acquaintance is not judgment (16), which suggests that we should not think of acquaintance as itself a kind of knowledge, but as a relation which makes knowledge possible. Acquaintance is a *direct* cognitive relation insofar as the knowledge it makes possible is direct knowledge, knowledge that is not justified by other pieces of knowledge (i.e., *basic* knowledge). So just as we earlier characterized acquaintance as an immediate presence of object to mind such as would make it *intelligible* that the mind is able to think demonstratively about the object, similarly, we should also characterize acquaintance as an immediate presence of mind such as would make it intelligible that the mind is able to form certain kinds of true, noninferentially justified thoughts about the object of experience. (Why such thoughts should count as justified will be investigated in the next section.) And just as the thrust of the first part of the traditional story about how experiences cause beliefs is that the intrinsic nature of the 'awareness' element of experience is such as to intelligibly necessitate that a subject that stands in that relation to an object will have the power to think demonstratively about the object, similarly, the thrust of the second part of the traditional story is that the intrinsic nature of the 'awareness'

Essays on Berkeley, J. Foster and H. Robinson, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon 1985), and 'The Objects of Perceptual Experience II,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume 64 (1990) 151-66. Those who hold that the objects of sensory experience are sometimes familiar medium-sized physical objects (i.e., tables and chairs) generally subscribe to what is referred to as the *disjunctive conception* of experience; for discussion of the disjunctive conception, see, for example, H. Langsam, 'The Theory of Appearing Defended,' *Philosophical Studies* 87 (1997) 33-59; J. McDowell, 'Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge,' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982) 455-79 and 'Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space'; and P. Snowdon, 'Experience, Vision, and Causation,' in *Perceptual Knowledge*, J. Dancy, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1981) and 'The Objects of Perceptual Experience I,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume 64 (1990) 121-50.

element is also such as to intelligibly necessitate that a subject that stands in that relation to an object will have the power to form certain kinds of true demonstrative beliefs about the object. In effect, what talk of acquaintance, presence, and givenness is trying to do is to help the listener see that there is an a priori synthetic connection between the intrinsic nature of awareness (that is, consciousness) and the aforementioned causal powers of experience.

But given that the traditional story seems to have nothing to say about the intrinsic nature of consciousness, *why* should the listener think that there is an a priori synthetic connection between the intrinsic nature of consciousness and the aforementioned causal powers of experience? I submit that the traditional story has nothing to say about the intrinsic nature of consciousness because it takes consciousness to be a *simple* phenomenon. It accepts Locke's view that our idea of consciousness is a simple idea.²² Since consciousness is a simple phenomenon, its intrinsic nature can only be shown, not described. The idea is supposed to be that when one becomes conscious of one's consciousness, one is able to obtain knowledge of the intrinsic nature of consciousness; one learns that consciousness is like *that*, so to speak.²³ And the hope is that if one reflects on *that*, one will be able to see that there is an intelligible necessary connection between *that* and certain of the causal powers of consciousness. The goal of the traditional story about how experiences cause

22 See *Essay* II.vi and II.ix.1. What Locke claims here is that our idea of 'Perception, or Thinking' is simple (II.vi.1), but I believe that my use of the term 'consciousness' is virtually equivalent to Locke's use here of the terms 'perception' and 'thinking.'

23 See *Essay*: 'What Perception is, every one will know better by reflecting on what he does himself, when he sees, hears, feels, etc. or thinks, than by any discourse of mine. Whoever reflects on what passes in his own Mind, cannot miss it: And if he does not reflect, all the Words in the World, cannot make him have any notion of it' (II.ix.2). See also Brentano (101-37) for a discussion of how a subject is able to be conscious of his own consciousness. Moore emphasizes the difficulty of becoming conscious of consciousness, but insists that it can be done: 'When we refer to introspection and try to discover what the sensation of blue is, it is very easy to suppose that we have before us only a single term. The term "blue" is easy enough to distinguish, but the other element which I have called "consciousness" — that which the sensation of blue has in common with the sensation of green — is extremely difficult to fix. That many people fail to distinguish it at all is sufficiently shown by the fact that there are materialists.... The moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see *what*, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. Yet it *can* be distinguished if we look attentively enough, and if we know that there is something to look for' (20, 25).

beliefs is to guide the listener's reflection so that he will be able to detect this necessary connection for himself.

I have argued in this section that it is implicit in some traditional ways of thinking about experience that experiences are rational causes of certain kinds of true beliefs. These traditional ways of thought are naturally described as comprising the act-object conception of experience. In the next section I argue for an account of justification according to which, assuming it is true that experiences are rational causes of certain kinds of true beliefs, it then follows that experiences can also *justify* these beliefs.

IV

I shall motivate my account of justification by pointing to a certain lacuna in the recent epistemological literature. Epistemologists distinguish between two necessary but jointly sufficient conditions for a belief being justified: the believer must *have* justification for the belief, and the belief must be *based* on the justification.²⁴ If only the first condition is met, the belief is said to be merely *justifiable*;²⁵ both conditions must be met if the belief is to be justified (Korcz, 171; J.L. Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* [Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 1986], 81). What we lack is a theoretically motivated explanation of *why* both of these conditions must be met in order for a belief to be justified; why is it not sufficient that only the first condition be met? What we need is a *unified* account of what justification is that will nevertheless enable us to understand why two distinct conditions must be met in order for a belief to be justified. We need to understand how these two conditions relate to each other and the complementary roles they each play in a coherent story about justification.

Such a unified account has seemed elusive because of the difficulty in discerning how the two conditions could fit together. Whereas the basing

24 P.K. Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989), 8

25 'A belief is merely justifiable for a person S when S possesses reasons sufficient to justify the belief, but has not made any appropriate connection between the reasons and the belief, and consequently remains unjustified in holding the belief. The appropriate connection would be the belief's being based on the reason' (K.A. Korcz, 'Recent Work on the Basing Relation,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 [1997] 171-91, at 171). 'In such a situation [i.e., a situation in which a belief that P is merely justifiable] one might believe that P solely for the wrong reason' (Moser, 156).

relation is generally taken to be some kind of *causal* relation,²⁶ the *justification* relation (i.e., the relation between an entity and a belief in virtue of which the entity renders the belief justifiable) is generally taken to be some kind of *rational* or *logical* relation. (A justification for a belief is just a *reason* for that belief.) Rational and causal relations seem to be very different kinds of relations, and it may be difficult to see what the nature of justification could be if both kinds of relations must obtain in order for a belief to be justified.

The difficulty is compounded, I suggest, as the result of a widespread misconception of what kind of rational relation justification is supposed to be. Despite its problems, coherentism retains its appeal because of the appeal of the idea that only other beliefs can serve as justification for beliefs. The appeal of this idea stems from the assumption that rational relations can hold, in the first instance, only between abstract objects such as propositions, and that therefore, if justification is a rational relation, it can hold only between entities that have propositional contents.²⁷ In other words, it is assumed (mistakenly, in my view) that a belief can stand in a rational relation to some other concrete entity only in virtue of their propositional contents standing in a rational relation. Let us note how this assumption compounds the difficulty of understanding how the justification and basing relations fit together. For not only is it (mistakenly) assumed that rational relations can hold, in the first instance, only between abstract objects, it is also (correctly) assumed that causal relations *cannot* hold between abstract objects. The basing and justification relations are operating at different levels, so to speak — the justification relation is operating at the level of the *contents* of the relata; the basing relation, in virtue of being a causal relation, is operating at the

26 See Korcz's review of the recent literature on the basing relation; according to Korcz, 'the standard view is that the correct analysis of the basing relation will be some sort of causal analysis' (171). A notable dissenter to this standard view is K. Lehrer, *Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon 1974), 122-6. For present purposes, I shall simply note my agreement with Goldman's insistence that Lehrer's counterexample to the standard view is unconvincing (22, n.8). For an example of a causal analysis of the basing relation, see Moser (156-8).

27 Thus C. Wright, 'McDowell's Oscillation,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48 (1998) 395-402, sees coherentism as 'generated by the principle that justification is essentially a rational relation. That seems to require that it can obtain only between *conceptually structured* items — things that carry or are somehow indexed by propositional content' (395). See also D. Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,' in *Truth and Interpretation*, E. LePore, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986): 'The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes' (311).

level of other features of the relata — and therefore it is difficult to see how these two relations can ‘combine’ to produce something of epistemic interest to us, that is, a state of affairs in which a belief is justified.

Epistemologists have failed to explain how the justification and basing relations fit together, I am arguing, because of their mistaken assumption that rational relations can hold only between abstract objects. What we need to remember is that what needs to be justified is not a proposition, but a certain *attitude* towards that proposition: belief. If we begin by making the assumption that justification is essentially a relation between propositions, we shall find ourselves unable to give a theoretically motivated account of what it means for a *belief* in that proposition to be justified. So let us not make this assumption, and instead focus on elucidating the notion of a justified belief. I submit that a belief is justified, not merely justifiable, if and only if holding that belief is a rational thing to do.²⁸ So what we need is an explanation of how a (concrete) action can be rational. My suggestion is that one way (perhaps the only way) for an action to be rational is for that action to be caused in a rational way. Something is caused in a rational way (i.e., something has a rational cause) if it is caused as the result of the exercise of a rational causal power. And as I explained earlier (section III), a causal power is rational if and only if it stands in an intelligible necessary connection with its categorical basis.

This account of justified belief — that a belief is justified if it is caused in a rational way — can easily explain why it is necessary that in order for a belief to be justified, two distinct conditions must obtain: the believer must have justification for the belief, and the belief must be based on the justification. On this account, a *justification*, or *reason*, for a belief is just a state that *can* cause the belief in a rational way; the belief

28 My concern in this paper is, of course, with *epistemic* justification, the kind of justification required for knowledge, and so what I am saying here is that holding a belief is a rational thing to do only if the belief is *epistemically* justified. In other words, I am committed to the admittedly controversial view that the only way a belief can be justified is by being epistemically justified; I am denying, for example, that a belief can be ‘pragmatically’ or ‘practically’ justified but epistemically unjustified. For a defense of the view that it is impossible for a belief to be practically justified and epistemically unjustified, see E. Mills, ‘The Unity of Justification,’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58 (1998) 27-50. Mills allows that a person ‘might be practically justified in doing things which will predictably result in her epistemically unjustified acceptance of [a belief]’ (33), but argues (convincingly, I believe) that it does not follow that the person is practically justified in accepting the belief.

will be *based* on the justification if in fact that justification *does* cause the belief in a rational way. (Remember that a rational causal power, like any causal power, is exercised only in the presence of appropriate background conditions, and therefore just because something can be a rational cause does not mean that it will be.) The two conditions on a belief being justified are just the conditions that there in fact be something that can serve as a rational cause of that belief, and that the something in question actually be a rational cause of that belief. The two conditions seemed difficult to fit together because of the mistaken assumption that the rational and causal relations at issue operated at different levels, the rational relation at the level of abstract propositions, the causal relation at the level of concrete states of affairs. But now we see that both relations operate at the concrete level, for the rationality at issue here refers to the way in which the causal relation is instantiated. As I noted earlier (section II), justification should be thought of as the way that rationality gets instantiated in the concrete world, and the only way I know of in which this can occur is by means of rational causation. Therefore, a belief is justified if it is caused in a rational way.

My account of justification also provides a unified explanation of why both experiences and other beliefs can justify beliefs. The explanation is that both experiences and beliefs can be rational causes of beliefs. We have already discussed how experiences can cause beliefs in a rational way, and since our primary concern here is with the nature of experiential justification, I will just briefly sketch how beliefs can be rational causes of other beliefs. *Inference* is the process by means of which one or more beliefs produce a new belief in a rational way. Like experiences, (conscious) beliefs²⁹ have a noncausal feature in virtue of which they have the power to produce beliefs of certain kinds. Whereas in the case of experience the feature in question is consciousness of an object to which the subject can demonstratively refer, in the case of belief the feature is consciousness of a proposition, the proposition that is the content of the belief. To this difference in the objects of consciousness corresponds a difference in the rational processes by which beliefs are

29 My concern here is with conscious beliefs only. I am not claiming that all beliefs are conscious, but I am assuming that only conscious beliefs can be *rational* causes of beliefs. A conscious belief is a belief in which the subject is related to the content of the belief by means of the relation of consciousness; I remain neutral on the question of whether there are unconscious beliefs in which the subject is related to the content of the belief by means of some different kind of relation. For trenchant criticism of the popular philosophical view that there are unconscious beliefs, in the sense of beliefs that do not have *access* to consciousness, see S.P. Stich, 'Beliefs and Subdoxastic States,' *Philosophy of Science* 45 (1978) 499-518.

caused. In the case of experience, the belief is produced by means of the subject *recognizing* that the object of consciousness instantiates certain sensory qualities. Whereas in the case of belief, the subject, in virtue of being aware of the propositional contents of one or more beliefs, also becomes aware of some logical consequence of those propositional contents (the logic in question need not be deductive), and thereby comes to believe that logical consequence. The subject *infers* to the truth (or probable truth) of some proposition which he had not previously believed: in virtue of his awareness of the logical relations between this proposition and propositions that he already does believe, he comes to believe the 'new' proposition, also. Thus inference is a process in which beliefs produce a belief by means of the subject becoming aware of some logical consequence of his beliefs.

Not only does my account of justification provide a unified explanation of why both experiences and beliefs can justify beliefs, but it also suggests a possible explanation of why experiences and beliefs are the only kinds of entities that can justify beliefs. In other words, my account suggests a rationale for epistemological *internalism*, the view that only internal states of a believer can serve as justifications for his beliefs. On my view a justification for a belief is a state that can be a rational cause of the belief, that is, a state that can cause the belief as the result of an exercise of a rational causal power. Recall that a causal power is rational if and only if it stands in an intelligible necessary connection with its categorical basis. Consider the suggestion that it is only conscious states, states that involve the relation of consciousness, that can have rational causal powers. Such a suggestion seems *prima facie* reasonable, in that the laws of *physical* nature do not seem to be such as can be known a priori, and so presumably do not involve intelligible necessary connections.³⁰ If this suggestion is correct, then only conscious states can justify beliefs, and internalism is vindicated. (And if the only conscious states that can be rational causes of beliefs are experiences and other beliefs, then experiences and beliefs will be the only kinds of entities that can justify beliefs.) Internalism is vindicated because it is shown to be, not some arbitrary additional requirement 'tacked on' to our concept of

30 I take it that most philosophers hold that the laws of physical nature are contingent, and so cannot be known a priori. Even philosophers such as S. Shoemaker, 'Causality and Properties,' in *Time and Cause*, P. van Inwagen, ed. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel 1980), and 'Causal and Metaphysical Necessity,' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 79 (1998) 59-77; and C. Swoyer, 'The Nature of Natural Laws,' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1982) 203-23, who claim that the laws of physical nature are necessary, nevertheless hold that these laws can only be known a posteriori.

justification and/or knowledge, but rather a requirement that can be *derived* from a theoretically motivated account of the nature of justification.

Having differentiated between the processes by which experiences and beliefs justify beliefs, we are now in a position to make sense of the familiar thought with which we began (section I), the thought that there is something distinctive about experiences that accounts for the distinctive way in which they justify beliefs. To summarize, a belief is justified if it has been caused in a rational way; a belief is justified *by* its rational cause or causes. Both experiences and beliefs can cause beliefs in rational ways, so both experiences and beliefs can justify beliefs. But the way in which experiences justify beliefs is *distinctive*, in the sense that the rational causal process by which experiences produce beliefs (*recognition*) is different from the rational causal process by which beliefs produce beliefs (inference). Moreover, this difference in how experiences and beliefs justify beliefs corresponds to a difference in the objects of experiences and beliefs. Inference requires that the subject be aware of a logical consequence of the object of one or more of his beliefs, and insofar as it is propositions that have logical consequences, inference requires that the object of belief be a proposition. Whereas successful recognition requires that the subject be *focusing on* or *attending* sufficiently to the object of consciousness, and therefore the object of experiential consciousness must be an object to which one can attend. (How much attending or focusing is needed might depend on various factors, including the nature of the sensory quality being recognized, for it seems plausible to hold that some sensory qualities are more difficult to recognize than others, and that the more difficult it is to recognize a sensory quality, the more attention is needed in order to do so.) But propositions are not the sort of thing to which one can attend.³¹ Therefore, the (or at

31 The notion of *attention* under discussion here is helpfully elucidated by M.G.F. Martin, 'Sense, Reference and Selective Attention II,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume 71 (1997) 75-98: 'Arguably, it is part of the manifest image of the mind that we are aware of objects of sense experience in a different way from being aware of the objects of thought, and that this is reflected in the ways attention can relate one to an object of sense as opposed to thought.... It is tempting to think of experience in terms of a whole array of items stretching beyond what I have focused my attention on at a time — an array over which I could move my attention, as a beam or spotlight. It is as if I am aware of the whole array at a time, albeit more or less determinately, whether I now focus my attention on one part of it or not; and my awareness of some element of it can explain why I shift my attention from one part of the scene to another. There seems to be no corresponding array of items to shift one's attention over in thought: if we think of thoughts as determinations of attention, then there can be no way of thinking of something without thereby

least, *an*) object of experiential consciousness must be something other than a proposition;³² in accordance with traditional usage, we shall refer to it as a *given*. So we may say that experiences justify beliefs in a distinctive way (i.e., the rational causal process of recognition) in virtue of a distinctive feature they possess, the feature of involving an awareness of a given. Experiences justify beliefs in this way *in virtue of* involving an awareness of a given, in the sense that experiences possess the power of producing beliefs via the process of recognition in virtue of possessing the noncausal feature of involving an awareness of a given. The noncausal feature is the *intelligible* ground of the causal power, and therefore it can be known a priori that anything with that noncausal feature will also have the causal power in question.

Of course another distinctive feature of the justificatory role of experiences is that they 'bring justification to an end.' In the case of beliefs justifying a belief, it can always be asked whether the justifying beliefs are themselves justified, but in the case of an experience justifying a belief, the question as to whether the experience is justified does not arise, for experiences are not the sort of thing as to which it makes sense to ask whether or not they are justified. It may be said that experiences can justify beliefs even though they themselves do not *need* to be justified. Laurence Bonjour rejects foundationalism because he rejects the possibility of an entity that can justify beliefs without itself needing to be justified (*Empirical Knowledge*, ch. 4).³³ But on my account of justification and experience, we may plausibly hold that experience is such an entity. Given that an entity is justified only if it is caused in a rational way, I submit that the question of justification arises only for entities that *can* be caused in rational ways. But it seems plausible to hold that experiences *cannot* be caused in rational ways, for experiences are always

to some extent to be attending to it' (78). See also M.G.F. Martin, 'Setting Things Before the Mind,' in *Current Issues in Philosophy of Mind*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 43, A. O'Hear, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998): 'We can attend to objects that we perceive in ways not present when merely thinking about them.... In perception, focal attention seems to range over objects which are already objects of awareness, and a motive for directing your attention to something is to find out more' (171).

32 Compare Shoemaker, 'Introspection': 'Perception is in the first instance a relation to *nonfactual* objects; we perceive facts by perceiving objects that they are facts about — e.g., we perceive that the branch is bent by perceiving the branch' (102).

33 Bonjour has since embraced foundationalism; see his 'Foundationalism and the External World,' *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13: *Epistemology*, J. Tomberlin, ed. (Malden, MA: Basil Blackwell 1999).

caused solely by physical brain processes,³⁴ and it seems plausible to hold that physical causes are never rational causes. Thus we have the familiar idea that brain processes are *brute* causes of experiences. Therefore the question of justification does not arise for experiences. Experiences can justify without themselves needing to be justified, because they can be rational causes but cannot themselves be caused in a rational way. Such a distinctive character well suits our image of experiences as the means by which the nonrational physical world ‘enters into’ the rational mind.

V

I hope that I have now met my goal of providing an account of how experiences justify beliefs. To that end, I have argued for an account of justification according to which justification is a matter of rational causation (section IV), and have set forth an account of experience according to which experiences are rational causes of beliefs (section III). I have not argued for this account of experience, but have merely elucidated it and shown its connections to certain traditional ways of thinking about the nature of experience, most notably the act-object conception of experience. Insofar as my aim has been merely to explain the traditional appeal of the idea that experiences can justify beliefs, and not to defend it, an argument for my account of experience is not needed. Nevertheless, I do not mean to suggest that my account of experience has no bearing on some popular objections to the idea that experiences can justify beliefs. In particular, I have attempted to present my account of experience in such a way as to undermine certain widely-accepted claims to the effect that there is something incoherent about the idea of an experiential given.³⁵ More generally, although a complete defense of my account of experience is beyond the scope of this paper, I have attempted to present

34 In claiming that experiences cannot be caused in rational ways, I am understanding ‘experiences’ as applying only to experiences characteristic of the five senses and bodily sensations. I remain neutral on the question of whether such arguably sensory states as feelings and emotions can be caused in rational ways, and thus I also remain neutral on the question of whether issues of justification arise for feelings and emotions.

35 Examples of such claims can be found in W. Sellars, ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,’ reprinted in W. Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1963); BonJour (*Empirical Knowledge*, ch. 4); and J. McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1994), Lecture I.

this account of experience in such a way as to emphasize its *prima facie* plausibility.

But can it be plausibly maintained that experiences are rational causes of beliefs, or that rational causes exist at all? Recall that in claiming that experiences are *rational* causes of beliefs, I am committed to the view that it is a priori reflection on the intrinsic noncausal features of experience that reveals to us that experiences have the causal power to produce beliefs. In other words, I am claiming, with Locke, that we can have a priori knowledge of some of the causal powers of experiences. But hasn't Hume shown us that we cannot have a priori knowledge of the causal powers of anything? How can an account of experience that claims otherwise be taken seriously?

Although Hume *claims* that we cannot have a priori knowledge of the causal powers of anything,³⁶ he has by no means *shown* this claim to be true. Hume is trying to 'prove a negative'; his strategy for doing so is to consider a wide variety of noncausal features, to insist that we can obtain no a priori knowledge of causal powers that flow from those particular noncausal features, and then to argue that the representative nature of those noncausal features provides good inductive evidence for the general claim that we have no a priori knowledge of the causal powers of anything.³⁷ But in fact Hume's choices of noncausal features are not sufficiently representative: he does not consider any noncausal features that involve the relation of *consciousness*. He does not consider such features because he denies their existence: Hume rejects an act-object conception of mental states, and thus does not acknowledge a distinct

36 Hume 'affirm[s], as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation [i.e., the relation of cause and effect] is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings a priori; but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other' (*Enquiry* IV.i, 27). Reasonings a priori are unavailing, according to Hume, because 'when we reason a priori, and consider merely any object or cause, as it appears to the mind, and independent of all observation, it could never suggest to us the notion of any distinct object, such as its effect; much less, show us the inseparable and inviolable connexion between them' (*Enquiry* IV.i, 31).

37 Hume also purports to have a direct a priori argument that shows that we can have no a priori knowledge of causal powers; see *Treatise*: 'There is no object, which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we form of them. Such an inference wou'd amount to knowledge, and wou'd imply the absolute contradiction and impossibility of conceiving any thing different. But as all distinct ideas are separable, 'tis evident there can be no impossibility of that kind' (86-7 [I.iii.6]). See also *Enquiry*, 29-30 (IV.i). For decisive criticism of this 'separability of distinct ideas' argument, see B. Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1977), 47-52.

'consciousness' or 'awareness' element in mental states. Recall that the act-object conception understands consciousness to be essentially relational, in that it relates a conscious subject to an object of consciousness. Hume, of course, is notorious for denying the existence of a self that is distinct from and conscious of 'perceptions'; for Hume, all there is to the mind is a series of successive perceptions that are related by resemblance and causation (*Treatise* I.iv.6). Although Hume explicitly denies only the existence of a substance that is conscious of perceptions and not consciousness itself, it is clear that he is committed to denying both, for if he were to admit the existence of acts of consciousness, he would need what are in effect substances to be the subjects of those acts (Shoemaker, 'Introspection,' 105). Note that the bundles of perceptions that constitute minds for Hume are related only by resemblance and causation, not by consciousness; in fact, nowhere does Hume recognize a relation of consciousness or awareness. Hume's experiential perceptions are such things as colors, tastes, smells, pains, emotions, and desires; they do not include states of awareness of colors, tastes, smells, or anything else. Whereas I am taking experiences to be relational states of a mind, Hume takes his 'perceptions' to be objects, and he takes the mind to be a group of such objects. So we should not be misled by Hume's talk of 'perceptions' into thinking that he recognizes the existence of a *relation* of perception, awareness, or consciousness. In brief, Hume rejects an act-object conception of mental states.³⁸

Of course, nothing I have said shows that the act-object conception is right and Hume is wrong about the question of whether consciousness is relational. My concern in this section has been only to argue that, assuming that consciousness is relational and is something distinct from the object of consciousness, Hume has given us no reason to think that we could not have a priori knowledge of the causal powers that flow from consciousness. In particular, he has given us no reason to doubt that we have a priori knowledge that experiences, in virtue of involving a consciousness of a given, have the causal power of producing true demonstrative beliefs about the sensory features of that given. Insofar as

38 It is particularly instructive in this context to note the contrast between Locke's ideas of reflection and Hume's ideas of 'reflexion.' Whereas Locke's ideas of reflection include ideas of 'the Actions of the Mind about its Ideas,' actions such as 'Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing' (*Essay* II.i.4), Hume's ideas of reflexion are limited to ideas of 'passions, desires, and emotions' (*Treatise* I.i.2, 8), for Hume has no room for such 'actions of the mind' in his ontology. Hume's ideas of reflexion are merely ideas of impressions that are produced by other ideas (*Treatise* I.i.2, 8). For Locke, perception is a relation between a mind and one or more of its ideas, whereas for Hume, perceptions just are (Lockean) ideas.

such a view of experience is required for making sense of the idea that experiences can justify beliefs, it deserves to be taken seriously.³⁹

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