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Urges

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1. Introduction

How do we know how we are motivated to act? In many cases, this knowledge is not easy to acquire. A parent might discover that they desire to have another child indirectly, for instance, after consulting with loved ones or their therapist. In other cases, motivational self-knowledge is easy to acquire. One class of cases involves knowing how one is motivated to act having settled on a course of action in deliberation. My focus in this paper is on another class of cases that does not seem to involve a deliberative route. For example, when one feels an urge to have another bite of cake, one is aware that one is moved to do this in an intuitively direct and immediate fashion: we feel, in the moment, *pushed*, *pulled* or *attracted* to the cake. This paper develops a theory of urges and the nature of our epistemic relation to them.

This paper has two objectives. First, to carefully distinguish and examine three elements: urges, feelings of urges, and capacities we have to control our urges. Second, to outline and motivate an epistemology of urges that fills a significant lacuna in work on self-knowledge. The account I defend weaves together those three

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elements. On my account, feelings of urges and exercises of control over them play coordinate roles in providing agents with knowledge of their urges.

Conative self-knowledge is comparatively under-discussed in the philosophical literature on self-knowledge (the few examples include Fernández 2007; Lawlor 2009; Ashwell 2013; Peterson 2019; Byrne 2018). Of what there is, there is little discussion specifically of 'active' or 'occurrent' motivational episodes like urges and impulses. This work has implications for a range of areas in the philosophy of mind and action, self-knowledge, and moral psychology. By isolating and providing an account of urges in relation to other motivational states, we come to better understand a distinctive aspect of the range of states at the frontier of mind and action that fall under the traditional label *passions*. By investigating the epistemic role of urge experiences, the account contributes to our understanding of the phenomenology of motivational states like desire, emotion and sensation, in particular, the active embodied character of such experiences.

A distinguishing feature of my account is its synthesis of work in the psychology of action and action control with philosophical work on the nature of emotion and desire. My hope is that this account provides us with a keener sense of the elements involved in exercising free and responsible rational agency: what exercising self-control in the face of temptation involves, and what one brings into view when one self-consciously reflects on one's impulses.

The plan is as follows. §2 provides a preliminary characterisation of urges and outlines the central epistemological task of the paper. §3 explores three approaches to giving such an epistemology. I identify key strengths of the approaches, but outline respects in which these accounts are unsatisfactory. In light of this, the final two sections develop the positive proposal of this paper. §4 motivates a framework that distinguishes between urges, feelings of urges, and exercises of capacities we have to control our urges. §5 develops the central epistemological proposal on which urge experiences provide agents with apparent reasons to self-ascribe urges (that is, to judge or believe that one has a particular urge), with exercises of control playing a supporting role in this process.

2. Preliminaries

This section provides a preliminary characterisation of the theoretical target in contradistinction with psychological phenomena like bodily sensations, emotion and desire (§2.1). I then examine the main epistemological questions to be answered in this paper (§2.2).

2.1. Characterising Urges

I will begin by providing a preliminary characterisation of urges: by example, then by comparison with other mental states, and by their key features.

Examples

The target phenomenon is what, in everyday contexts, we call 'urges', 'impulses' or 'inclinations' to act. To latch on to the concept, let us start by listing some paradigmatic examples.

First, consider appetitive states like hunger and thirst which involve urges that are oriented toward eating and drinking respectively. Second, consider episodes that are not appetitive, but nevertheless homeostatic in nature. For example, itches, pains, or the feeling of a full bladder are constituted, in part, by an urge to scratch, to alleviate the pain sensation, or to urinate respectively. Third, take some emotional states. For example, the emotion of fear activated by a stalking predator can involve a strong urge to flee. More benignly, take the strong impulse to embrace a loved one when reunited after a long separation, or the urge to laugh after hearing a joke. Fourth, take habitual urges like the urge to check one's phone or to fiddle with one's hair. Fifth, take urges born of addiction such as the urge to smoke a cigarette which might be categorised as quasi-appetitive or habitual.

We could go on listing examples. It is striking that when we stop and reflect, we find urges everywhere in our physical and mental lives. Thus, getting clear on urges and our epistemic relation to them serves to clarify what seems to be a basic element of our practical life.

Relation to Emotion, Sensation, Desire and Attention

How exactly are urges related to other mental phenomena like sensation, emotion or desire?

While some sensations like itches *involve* urges (Hall 2008), the concept of an urge is clearly distinct from that of a bodily sensation. First, urges do not necessarily involve sensations; for example, the urge to look at a lascivious stimulus or appetising food need not involve any discernible bodily sensation. Second, not all sensations involve urges, for example, the sensation of a cool breeze need not involve any urge. Similarly, while many emotions *involve* urges, the concept of an urge is clearly distinct from that of an emotion. First, some urges are not usually categorised as emotions: the urge to eat is not typically thought to be an emotion, though it is *accompanied* by certain affective components. Second, not all emotions involve urges; for example, a state of contented happiness. Theories of emotions that centralise the urge-related concept of 'action readiness' rightly conceive of emotions as more functionally complex states that involve, for example, appraisals (see Arnold 1960; Frijda 1986; Scarantino 2014).

The relationship between urges and desire is more complicated owing to the flexible use of 'desire' in the philosophical literature. To attribute a desire to ϕ, in the broadest sense of that term, is to describe the agent as having been motivated to ϕ without any specification of what it is that motivated her (Nagel 1970). 'Desire', in a narrower sense, is a subset of motivational mental states. Numerous accounts exist; for example, some identify desires with goal-directed behavioural dispositions (Smith 1994), affective experiences (Strawson 1994), representations of reward (Schroeder 2004) or beliefs or quasi-perceptions with evaluative/normative content (Gregory 2016; Stampe 1987). So, we may ascribe to an agent who, say, intentionally puts on a hideous uniform, a desire to do so (broadly construed), even if she does not want to (narrowly construed).

Clearly, not all desires in the broad sense are urges since many actions may be explained without appealing to an urge. Many urges, though, would qualify as a desire in the broad sense (Davidson 1963, 686). A trickier question is how urges are related to desire in the narrow sense given the myriad accounts. Only on some

accounts of desire in the narrow sense are urges types of desire.[1] One possible point of divergence concerns the relation to behaviour. Urges, as we will discuss, seem to have an essential connection with behaviour, whereas some accounts of desire do not (for example, the pure affective or reward account).

To sum up, urges are distinct from sensations, emotions, and desires (narrowly construed). The notion of an urge cuts across familiar psychological categories and the account I will give reflects this. But we should not lose sight of the fact that urges are *components* or *aspects* of such states.

Features

To impose more theoretical order, I wish to extract several features that seem to unite the phenomenon of urges. Firstly:

1. Urges play a role in prompting action or behaviour more generally.

Urges seem to have a connection with behaviour in at least the following way: if agent A has an urge, then, necessarily, there is some behavioural response ϕ that A has an urge to perform. I emphasise that my formulation in terms of prompting *behaviour* is intended to be more inclusive than the theoretically-laden idea that urges motivate *action*. For example, some motor urges such as the urge to laugh involve behaviour attributable to the agent, even though there is room for philosophical contestation about whether laughter is action proper (O'Shaughnessy 2008, 465).

The second feature concerns the *etiology* of urges:

2. Urges are not the *direct result* of exercises of volitional or rational powers.

Urges are said to 'come over one' or 'assail one unbidden', as opposed to being something that is in one's power to directly bring about. We cannot just choose or

[1] For contemporary philosophical discussions of a notion of desire on which urges would qualify as an active desire, consider 'action-desires' (Mele 2003); 'direct object desires' or 'desires-to-do' (O'Shaughnessy 2008, 465–6). For discussion of desires that explicitly centralise the notion of an urge or impulse as a component or aspect, there are the 'incentive salience' desires of Holton (2009). Peterson (2019) discusses 'attraction' involved in desire. Tamar Schapiro opts for the Kantian term 'inclination' (see Schapiro 2009; Schapiro 2021). I discuss some related notions drawn from psychology in fn.13.

decide to have an urge to ϕ, nor form an urge to ϕ in response to reflecting on reasons to ϕ. As Schapiro (2009, 233) writes, "We cannot author our inclinations in the same direct way that we author our actions." Note the qualification about *directness* does not rule out that we can *indirectly* 'cultivate' inclinations (Schapiro 2021, 46).

The third feature concerns the *kind of control* we can exercise over urges once they arise:

3. Urges can be recalcitrant to attempted exercises of volitional or rational control over them.

We can normally inhibit our urges, or at least attempt to. However, in many cases, our ability to exercise control is not perfect: if one is unsuccessful, then the urge in question is *recalcitrant*. This is not to rule out the possibility of perfect control; perhaps we can imagine highly trained individuals who can very quickly and effectively suppress certain urges to extinction at will.

The fourth feature concerns the relationship between urges and consciousness:

4. Urges can be *consciously experienced*, contributing to a specification of what it is like for the agent with the urge.

Experiences of urges have a distinctive phenomenology: in some sense to be clarified, we describe feeling an urge to ϕ as involving the feeling of being pushed, pulled or attracted to ϕ. We seem to very naturally appeal to such descriptors or metaphors concerning force or movement. Note that the formulation of this feature should not be misread as the stronger claim that urges *just are* phenomenally conscious experiences. That urges are (always/normally/sometimes) consciously *experienced* does not entail that they *are* experiences just as the fact that my nose is (always/normally/sometimes) visually experienced does not entail that my nose is a conscious experience. This feature therefore does not foreclose on the coherence of the idea of *unconscious* urges.

There is much more to say about the relationship between urges and consciousness. Indeed, this relationship will play a prominent role in my positive proposal (§4--5).

Ontology

Before turning to the epistemological issues that are the main focus, a final clarification concerning the ontology of the phenomenon under discussion.

The terms 'impulse' and 'urge' more naturally pick out a kind of *occurrence* or *event*: something with temporal parts that unfolds over time and has a beginning and end, however short-lived.[2] Similarly, *feeling* or *experiencing* an urge or impulse are also events: when we feel an urge, there is the event of our feeling that urge. In contrast, the terms 'inclination' or 'being inclined' are naturally understood as stative which, in contrast, picks out something that lacks temporal parts (Steward 1997). While, at a very general level, to be inclined is to be disposed in a certain way, there are distinctions to be made. On the one hand, there are *habitual* inclinations which are similar to character traits in being long-standing dispositional states. For example, the inclination to overshare in conversation is a stable state like character traits such as honesty. On the other hand, some attributions of inclinations are contextually understood to be tightly connected with having certain occurrent impulses: the inclination to cry, for example, is connected with now feeling an urge to cry. This state of inclination constitutively depends on an occurrence, namely, your having or feeling an urge (Soteriou 2013): *ceteris paribus*, if your urge to cry disappears, you will no longer be inclined to cry. This paper is largely focussed on the occurrent notion; for that reason, I will focus on the terms 'urge' or 'impulse'. However, where necessary, switching to 'inclination' is harmless provided we are mindful of these differences. Now, I return to the epistemology of urges.

2.2. The Epistemological Task

We can think of the acquisition of self-knowledge as requiring a warranted transition from the 'base' state *M* which is the object of knowledge to the 'concluding' state (the self-ascription of *M*) (labels are from O'Brien 2005). Though I use the term 'concluding' here, this should not be taken to imply that the transition is inferential. The key explanandum of this paper is how it is that one acquires epistemic warrant

[2] Etymologically, these terms are related to verbs that describe events: *pressing*, *driving*, *forcing* and so on.

for the judgement or belief that one is in *M*. We can further decompose this explanandum as follows:

> (Q_1): What warrants an agent *A* in believing themself to have an *urge* to ϕ (rather than another action-oriented state)?
>
> (Q_2): What warrants an agent *A* in believing themself to have an urge *to* ϕ (rather than to ψ)?

(Q_1) and (Q_2) frame the epistemic task in terms of epistemic warrant. By 'warrant', I have in mind the general epistemic property marking beliefs as being conducive to the satisfaction of standards required for knowledge. Following Burge (2020, 39), generally, "epistemic warrant certifies knowledge, absent counter-warrants, internal incoherence, and Gettier failures." I focus on warrant in order not to foreclose on accounts that follow an influential approach that bifurcates warrant into *justification* and *entitlement*.[3] While warranted beliefs conduce to knowledge, they can fall short of knowledge and can be false (ibid.). This is all I want to say about warrant for now; the kind of warrant I am interested in and its basis will be discussed in more detail as I develop my proposal in §5.

The general philosophical interest in self-knowledge, though, is not in just *any* account of how one may be warranted in self-ascribing one's mental states. As mentioned, our access to conative states like urges seems epistemically *special* in comparison with our access to many hidden dispositional desires. Following Byrne (2018, 4), we can isolate two special-making properties. One's access may be *peculiar* in the sense that one possesses a distinctively first-personal means of acquiring knowledge of one's urges. Or one's access may be *privileged* in the sense that it is more likely to amount to knowledge relative to beliefs about one's dispositional desires (or some other comparison class). An explanation should clarify which of

[3] Roughly, justification is *reasons*-mediated: an agent's belief's being justified requires that the belief be formed on the basis of (accessible) reasons. Entitlement is warrant unmediated by reasons. Generally, entitlements to beliefs are secured by their being produced by properly functioning reliable competences. See Burge (2020, 53, fn.20). §5, in particular, fn.25 discusses how my positive proposal relates to these two forms of warrant.

these two senses is relevant. Thus, we have a third explanandum, assuming knowledge of our impulses is special:

> (Q_3): What explains the respect in which this warranted self-ascription is either peculiar (with respect to the way in which it is formed) or privileged (with respect to likelihood to amount to knowledge)?

We can distinguish different types of explanation (cf. O'Brien 2005). An explanation of an agent's warrant to some concluding state is *top-down* if it appeals to features of the concluding state and its content. For example, some accounts of doxastic self-knowledge ground the warrant of beliefs about what beliefs one has in terms of their constituting a pre-condition for critical reasoning (Burge 1996; Shoemaker 1996). An explanation is *bottom-up* if it appeals to features to do with the nature of the base state and/or its content. For example, some accounts of doxastic self-knowledge appeal to the phenomenology of a judgement that *p* as providing a reason for one to self-ascribe the belief that *p* (for example, Peacocke 1998). Note that explanations can have top-down *and* bottom-up features since they are not mutually exclusive.

Each type of explanation is more naturally allied with a certain species of warrant. For example, many top-down explanations appeal to *entitlements* to the relevant concluding state that 'need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject' (Burge 2003, 458). A prominent class of bottom-up explanations—one's focussing on explaining how transitions to the concluding state can be epistemically appropriate *from the agent's perspective*—is likely to appeal to notions like an agent's reasons or justification. Note, though, that not all bottom-up explanations have this focus. Some views propose that the relevant psychological transitions are the products of sub-personal reliable 'self-scanning' mechanisms (Armstrong 1968). There need not be, from the agent's perspective, any reason or justification on which the relevant self-ascription is based. Nevertheless, these explanations strictly speaking qualify as bottom-up because the nature and content of relevant base-state *M* is explanatorily relevant as *input* to these self-scanning mechanisms, the output of which is the concluding self-ascription of *M*.

This paper aims to show that it is possible to provide a type of bottom-up explanation that explains how the base state figures in providing the agent with apparent *reason* to form a self-ascription of her urge. I take it to be a key attraction of

the proposed explanation that it provides an account of how the relevant self-ascriptions are epistemically appropriate from the agent's perspective. I focus on *peculiarity* rather than privilege as marking out this kind of self-ascription as special. Specifically, I will argue that there is a distinctive form of *synchronic* epistemic access— that is, access granted *in having an urge*— that is available only to the agent of that urge.

3. Three Approaches

There is not much systematic philosophical work devoted to the analysis of urges and their epistemology. This section explores some existing discussions to extract candidate answers to the epistemological question. They can be categorised as embodying three different approaches that I label *inferential*, *perceptual* and *deliberative*. I offer a diagnosis of what the approaches get right, but also what they get wrong that will inform my account (§3.1--3.3).

3.1 Inferentialism

Inferential accounts of self-knowledge hold that we acquire warranted beliefs that we are in some mental state on the basis of an *inference* made from some content.[4] A well-known inferential account due to Alex Byrne suggests that we acquire knowledge of our mental states on the basis of following certain self-verifying epistemic rules. For the case of desire, Byrne (2018, 161) suggests the rule, "If ϕ-ing is a desirable option, believe you want to ϕ." Byrne argues that following this rule is knowledge-conducive because it is practically self-verifying: if one follows the rule, then one will count as wanting to ϕ (Byrne 2018, 162). This process secures 'transparent' self-knowledge in the sense that the rule's antecedent concerns worldly content, as opposed to one about a mental state.

Another account due to Krista Lawlor suggests that we perform a "causal inference to the best explanation" based on what she calls 'internal prompts': mental events like

[4] I follow Byrne's usage of 'inference' as "causal transitions between belief states…if one reasons from P to Q (or, equivalently, infers P from Q), one's belief in P causes one's belief in Q." (Byrne 2018, 15).

occurrent thoughts or mental images (Lawlor 2009, 62). For example, one might infer that the best explanation for why one is persistently imagining sun, sand and ice cream is that one wants to go to the beach. These contents constitute *evidence* for the presence of certain mental states.

Can we extend such accounts to handle urges? Both accounts are committed to the route to self-knowledge as being mediated by particular contents that constitute the inferential basis for the self-ascription. For Byrne, this will be a worldly content, whereas for Lawlor this will be an internal prompt. So, the viability of an inferential account then hinges on being able to find a suitable basis for self-ascriptions of urges. However, it is unclear what such a basis would be.

Take the urge to yawn. What content would one appeal to in order to form a Byrne-style epistemic rule? While feeling bored or sleepy may be correlated with having an urge to yawn, one's awareness of a building urge is not necessarily preceded by a belief that what one is attending to is boring, or that one is tired. There are also many cases where one may find something boring, or believe oneself to be tired, without having an urge to yawn. So, epistemic rules formed based on such conditions will not be practically self-verifying in the way Byrne argues his other rules are. There are problems too for Lawlor's account: when we know we have an urge to yawn, we do not seem to perform an inference to the best explanation. Rather, this knowledge seems to be based directly on the present *experience* of an urge to yawn– the very kind of 'internal prompt' that affords knowledge of the dispositional desires that Lawlor's account is more appropriate for.[5] My reservation about inferential views, simply put, is that the primary way in which we know our urges does not require drawing an inference from some content, but seems to just involve *feeling* them.[6]

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[5] I do not deny that experiences of urges involve certain mental phenomena that qualify as 'internal prompts'. As I will argue later (§3), experiences of urges involve conscious motor imagery.

[6] A related view is Fernández (2007) according to which self-ascriptions of desire are made based on grounds that 'bypass' the desire itself. This account cannot be straightforwardly applied to urges since Fernández takes the awareness of urges themselves as grounds for the ascription of some desires (Fernández 2007, 529–30). So a 'bypass' account needs to appeal to other grounds, in which case the foregoing problems apply.

3.2 Perceptualism

Perceptual accounts vary considerably in their metaphysics and epistemology. At the level of metaphysics, there are different views about what characteristics qualify an account as perceptual in the first place. *Thick* characterisations posit the existence of dedicated perceptual mechanisms (for example, 'inner sense' capacities) that may share certain features of 'outer' perception, whereas *thin* characterisations insist only on a metaphysical independence between the *object* of perception *M* and *M*'s being self-ascribed, presumably through some mediating causal process.[7] With respect to epistemology, some perceptual accounts tell an entirely sub-personal reliabilist story (Armstrong 1968), whereas others appeal to perceptual *experiences* that play a person-level justificatory role in the self-ascription. Given how thinly it is possible to understand perceptuality, I do not argue against perceptual accounts as such. My target is instead a recent perceptual view developed by Rowland Stout on which we perceive inclinations through proprioceptive feelings that arise in *resisting* them.

When we describe the feeling of an urge, descriptors and metaphors to do with *forces* or *movement* seem unavoidable; for instance, we say that urges involve experiences of pushing and pulling. Why do these metaphors seem apt? A promising answer is that urges involve the feeling of forces that push and pull. Nico Frijda briefly suggests that emotional urge experiences involve the interplay of "[the] excitation of action tendency on the one hand and inhibition of that same action tendency on the other" (Frijda 1986, 405). Stout (2022, 288) suggests that Frijda "does not go far enough" in *merely* saying that resistance is a *part* of the feeling of bodily inclinations and develops a novel perceptual account of bodily inclination.

According to Stout, bodily feelings like feeling dizzy or feeling one's skin crawl involve 'apparent bodily indications': an awareness of what one's body is apparently indicating to one. Bodily inclinations are a species of apparent bodily indications, specifically, "a bodily inclination to do something is just such an appearance…[it] indicates what one is apparently about to do" (Stout 2022, 279). Stout proposes that

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[7] This distinction roughly lines up with Shoemaker's (1996, 224) distinction between 'object' and 'broad' perceptual models, as well as Byrne's (2018) distinction between 'extravagant' vs. 'economical' detectivism.

one is aware of such an indication through resistance and so one is "aware of an inclination simply by resisting it, and more generally, by interacting with it" (Stout 2022, 289). To illustrate, the idea is that one's urge to, say cry, is an indication that one is about to cry which one is aware of *in* the exercise of resistance put up to one's body. Stout describes resistance as "the perceptual tool by means of which you are aware of your inclination": one employs resistance as one would one's sense of touch to feel the outline or weight of a stone (example from Stout 2022, 289).

Frijda and Stout are right to highlight the contribution of resistance and interaction in the typical experience of an urge. However, I have reservations about how Stout's proposal goes beyond Frijda's in claiming that proprioceptive feelings of resistance and interaction are *sufficient* to capture our ordinary awareness of our urges. This is because one can be aware of one's resistance to a bodily movement without apparent awareness of an urge or active *inclination*. Suppose a scientist invents a device that can attract one's arm upward. Wishing to thwart the scientist's efforts, one resists the movement of one's arm. If successful, one can be aware of a feeling that one's arm is about to rise through resisting. However, I submit that one would not be aware of any *urge* one has to move one's arm. Why? Where one experiences an urge to ϕ when resisting it, one is not aware of one's resistance to just any kind of force. Simply, what one resists is one's *own* activity and this activity itself contributes to the feeling of an urge. The omission of the epistemological contribution of this discrete element gives Stout's perceptual view a certain spectatorial or indirect character.[8]

We can develop this phenomenological point by reflecting on another thought experiment. Consider an imaginary race of creatures that Galen Strawson calls *Weather Watchers,* who "possess a conception of an objective, spatial world. But they are constitutionally incapable of any sort of behaviour, as this is ordinarily understood" (Strawson 1994, 251). The Weather Watchers are *wholly* passive and so constitute a more radical possibility than individuals with locked-in syndrome, who may retain limited capacities for motor imagery and actions.

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[8] This is not to say Stout does not recognise urges are action-oriented; after all, he writes that the feeling of resistance indicates 'what one is apparently about *to do*' (Stout 2022, 279, emphasis added). My concern is about what is doing the epistemological work; on Stout's view, it is the feelings arisings in resistance/interaction external to the urge.

Can we imagine the Weather Watchers to have urges? No, by stipulation, they lack any capacity to *respond* or *act*. This limits the kind of *experiences* Weather Watchers can have: they cannot *feel* an urge to ϕ. Feeling an urge to ϕ involves the experience of *being active*, that is, the experience of the initiation of one's active capacities. This is crucially distinct from passive experiences of activity: a Weather Watcher can be sensorily or perceptually aware of changes that he or she is *subject* to, but cannot experience *being active*.[9]

Now, it is important to note that the active character of urge experiences I am highlighting here does not entail that one is presently engaged in the action. Simply feeling an urge to cry, say, is not (yet) crying. But this leaves open that feeling an urge might involve the distinctive feelings involved in the involuntary priming or preparation of one's active capacities.[10] We will return to the phenomenology of such experiences in §4 and tie these phenomenological observations to work in the psychology and neuroscience of action and action control.

3.3. Deliberativism

In a series of recent works, Tamar Schapiro defends a broadly Kantian account of inclination. According to Schapiro, inclination is the activity of what she calls your 'inner animal', that is, the exercise of your nonrational motivational capacities. On her Kantian account of our psychological architecture, inclination in rational agents is the starting point or trigger for a distinctive kind of practical deliberation that she calls 'the moment of drama':

> When you feel thirsty, your inner animal is already seeing and responding to the world, moving itself through its instinctive practical thinking. Its activity is underway. But you—by which I mean, the part of you that

[9] Compare William James who distinguishes between three forms of experiences of activity: "[i.] 'elementary' activity involved in the mere *that* of experience, in the fact that *something* is going on, [ii.] activity felt as 'ours' and [iii.] activity ascribed to objects" (James 1905, 8). As I will explain later, the 'active' character of urge experiences is not to be identified with what is called 'the sense of agency' (§4).

[10] There is no inconsistency, then, with accounts that locate agency as the activity of a *whole* organism (Burge 2009; Steward 2012). On these accounts, the priming 'activity' in question would be sub-agential.

> determines yourself to act on or against your inclination—are not thereby determined. You are, instead, in a condition I call 'being drawn out of yourself'…To be drawn out of yourself just is to be in the moment of drama. [86]
>
> [W]hen you are in the moment of drama, you are at a crossroads. You can take the high road, by accepting your freedom and attempting to humanize your impulse, or you can take the low road, by avoiding your freedom and dehumanizing yourself. (Schapiro 2021, 161)

For Schapiro, the moment of drama is the condition of being influenced but not determined to act, wherein one is faced with a choice between what she calls the 'high' road and the 'low' road. The high road involves taking responsibility over whether to 'incorporate' the inclination into one's maxim, that is, deciding on a description of one's impulse under which it is worthy of choice (Schapiro 2021, 132). The low road involves acting on one's inclination *as if* an animal (one 'dehumanises' oneself).

For our purposes, I wish to highlight that on Schapiro's view, the inclinations of rational agents like us secures *awareness* of inclination. Why? Because inclination is *constitutively* connected to the triggering of a distinctive kind of deliberation (the 'moment of drama'). As Schapiro writes, "reflection…is *built into* the condition of having an inclination" (Schapiro 2011, 158).[11] And since the moment of drama involves awareness of the inclination, inclination constitutively involves *awareness* of inclination: "Your deciding mind is simultaneously aware of your instinctive mind [that is, your 'inner animal']" (Schapiro 2021, 89).

One feature of Schapiro's account of inclination that is deeply perceptive is the respect in which awareness of an urge involves awareness of being active. As Schapiro puts it, my impulses are not "simply psychological events that I observe as I would internal weather" (Schapiro 2009, 253). This, I argued earlier, is missed in Stout's

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[11] "[T]here is", Schapiro writes, "an internal rather than an external relation between (1) being in the condition of having an inclination to eat that chocolate cake, and (2) asking myself, 'should I eat that chocolate cake?'" (Schapiro 2011, 158). Here Schapiro explicitly differentiates her view from Korsgaard's view on which 'stepping back' from inclination and posing the deliberative question is a distinct act from the having of inclination (Korsgaard 1996, 93).

perceptual view which has a certain spectatorial character. However, an aspect of Schapiro's Kantian model of human inclination strikes me as psychologically unrealistic. Schapiro claims that urges invariably induce higher-order reflection. Everyday examples of urges seem to challenge this claim. Consider someone who is engrossed in a film and spontaneously rearranges their posture in response to some feelings of discomfort. Or consider a climber who is attempting a tricky crossing. They feel the prick of a panicky urge to retreat, but due to years of training is capable of swiftly re-focussing, thereby 'shutting out' the urge.

These are situations where agents are subject to urges without *reflectively* engaging with them. Considering cases like the climber's in particular shows that it is possible even to respond or exercise control over urges without reflective engagement. As I will later discuss, we possess non-reflective capacities for inhibitory control over our urges and it is plausible that this capacity is what puts us in a position to deliberate on whether to act on our urges in the first place. I am not denying that it is *possible* for urges to prompt deliberation. Nor am I yet questioning a striking aspect of Schapiro's view, namely that it forecloses on the possibility of unconscious urges (more in §4).[12] What I am airing scepticism of is that their entry into our stream of consciousness *necessarily* takes the deliberative form that Schapiro describes where reflection is "built into" having an inclination.

3.4. Three Lessons

Three lessons that can be learnt as a result of considering the three approaches evaluated in this section. These lessons will directly inform both the metaphysics and epistemology of urges that I will go on to develop.

Lesson one: The *experience* of an urge seems to play a key role in the epistemology of urges. If my objection to the inferential approach is right, one does not come to know that one has an urge by performing an inference (to the best explanation) from premises supplied by awareness of parts of one's mental life that fall short of awareness of the urge itself. However, properly incorporating this lesson requires further work. What are urges? And how are they related to associated conscious

[12] This is likely a product of her 'first-person' methodology, see Schapiro (2021, 24).

experiences? What do such experiences involve? What calls for further theorising, then, is the nature, and relation between, these two elements.

Lesson two: The experience of an urge to ϕ involves the experience of *being active*. This is the aspect of urges that I argued is missing in Stout's construal of our awareness of urges as exhausted by feelings of resistance. Nevertheless, some epistemological role is plausibly played by feelings of resistance, or more generally, exercises of control. We feel our urges particularly keenly when they come into conflict with our will. Here, further theorising is required to investigate the relationship between urges, action control, the phenomenology of urges, as well as the epistemological role that exercises of control can play.

Lesson three: Whether or not urges are things of which we are necessarily conscious, urges are not *necessarily* items on which we deliberate. There are forms of non-reflective interaction with our urges that are *prior* to deliberation on our urges. Once again, we need a more precise understanding of the metaphysics of urges, as well as further investigation of the non-deliberatively setting in which we exercise capacities over our impulses and how impulses affect our stream of consciousness in such settings.

The following two sections undertake these tasks in the development of a theory of the metaphysics and epistemology of urges. The account I defend holds that conscious experiences of urges play a central role in an account of our special knowledge of our urges, with exercises of control playing a key supporting role under certain conditions. The theory is developed in two stages. The first stage motivates a framework that distinguishes between urges, conscious feelings of urges, and exercises of capacities we have to control one's urges (§4). The second stage develops the epistemological account (§5).

4. A Metaphysical Framework

We need to get precise about what urges are. To this end, I start by examining several different components that are involved in an ordinary situation in which we experience an urge. Without loss of generality, consider the following example: you

see someone do something embarrassing, but in order not to offend, you attempt to resist laughing and enjoy a distinctive experience of being 'pushed' toward laughter.

4.1. Decomposing the Example

We can extract several key elements from this scenario:

> (A): activity that would result in a behavioural response ϕ (for example, overt laughter) if there is no intervention,
>
> (B): an exercise of control over this activity,
>
> (C): an experience with a distinctive phenomenology.

Let's take a closer look at each element.

(**A**). The first type of element goes under various labels in a broad range of philosophical and psychological accounts of emotion, bodily sensation, addiction, affordance, appetitive behaviour, etc. where the concept of an urge is readily invoked. This common element is 'prepotent' activity that tends to the production of a certain behavioural response ϕ, unless there is an intervention.[13] We can think of this activity as the *covert* stage of the corresponding overt behavioural response (Jeannerod 2006).

As briefly discussed in §2.1, the *initiation* of this activity is *non-voluntary*, that is, not initiated by choice, and *non-deliberative*, that is, not initiated by—nor, more

[13] In the context of the emotions, (A) is picked out as part of associated action tendencies which involve 'central nervous system activation' to do with action preparation and may involve the "absence of any muscle activation" or some "preliminary or complete muscular activity" (Frijda 2017, 40). See also the discussion of 'action impulses' in Frijda, Ridderinkhof, and Rietveld (2014). Tiffany (1990) cashes out urges borne of drug addiction in terms of perceptually triggered 'automatized action schemata' (see also Yalachkov, Kaiser, and Naumer 2010). Dual-process models of appetitive behaviour appeal to the perceptual cueing of 'automatic approach biases' (Brignell et al. 2009). McClelland (2020) discusses strongly potentiated responses, picking up on the relationship between affordance and action potentiation (Ellis and Tucker 2000). McClelland and Jorba (2022) posit 'automatic motor initiations' to explain the directly motivating force of states like pains and itches (cf. Hall 2008). Habits are described as involving response dispositions that can be automatically activated by contextual cues (Neal, Wood, and Quinn 2006, 198). For an overview of the neurocognitive mechanisms of automatically activated responses, see Ridderinkhof et al. (2011).

generally, directly responsive to—the state of one's practical deliberations. As in the example, this activity may be triggered by a *stimulus* (for example, a sensation or percept), although, other urge-based responses like yawning may arise *spontaneously* (Jackson et al. 2011). Whether stimulus-elicited or spontaneous, tokens of this activity fall under *types* that fix a normal course of events against which we can describe tokens as having been *completed* or not. An important feature of (A)-type elements is that they are *possible* targets for control in contrast with certain reflex responses, for example, pupillary contractions.[14]

(**B**). While the *initiation* of elements of type (A) is non-voluntary, whether, when, or how the corresponding response is manifested is within the scope of one's control, to varying degrees. This leads us to (B): the exercise of some element in the set of physical and mental capacities one has to control elements of type (A). This set includes many of the capacities under the rubric of 'cognitive control': capacities for motor control and inhibition, the direction of attention and thought, memory retrieval and suppression, etc.[15] By exercising one or more of these capacities, one can (attempt to) exert control over *whether* the relevant response comes to be manifested in overt behaviour, *how* it is manifested, and *when* it is manifested. For example, one can exercise control over whether one laughs by inhibiting the response at its earliest covert stage prior to manifestation in overt behaviour, as well as the manner in which one laughs, and for how long.[16]

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[14] Morsella, Gray, et al. (2009) suggest that this factor explains why we have consciously experienced urges of certain bodily processes like blinking and breathing, but not others like peristalsis and bronchial dilation. The former allow for control conflicts involving conflicting skeletomotor plans, as when withholding blinking, whereas the latter, which involve smooth muscle effectors, cannot.

[15] For discussions of mechanisms for inhibitory control, see Curtis and D'Esposito (2009) and Sel and Shepherd (2020); on the direction of attention, see Posner and Snyder (2004); on executive control over memory operations, see Anderson and Green (2001).

[16] Sripada (2021) develops an account of self-control in terms of the skilful exercise of such cognitive control capacities to regulate what he calls 'response pulses': stimulus-triggered rapid (hundreds of milliseconds) biases in psychological mechanisms to produce a certain response. Sripada's theoretical posit of a 'response pulse' is grounded in an interpretation of conflict task paradigms used to study cognitive control. It is plausible that urges, which arise over much longer timescales, are constructed from these atomic elements.

(**C**). The third type of element is the distinctively *active* phenomenology characteristic of urge experiences. As discussed, a key feature that contributes to this phenomenology is *awareness of being active*, that is, an awareness of the initiation of one's active capacities (say, in response to stimuli). Like awareness of voluntarily initiated action, it contrasts with awareness of changes that one is merely *subject* to, as when pushed by an external force (recall §3.2). However, it is crucially distinct from ordinary action awareness insofar as one's urge to laugh does not involve awareness of *voluntarily* exercising one's active powers. So experiencing one's urge to laugh does not involve a 'sense of agency' when glossed specifically as "the sense the agent has that he or she is the *author* of that action" (Pacherie 2007, 2), or, in the present case, the author of the impulse to laugh.

Nevertheless, it involves a more general *sense of being active* of which the sense of agency is a sub-species: one experiences exercising one's active power to laugh (compare de Vignemont 2020 on the 'sense of bodily agency'). As with agentive experiences, this experience may be *recessive*, that is, its contribution to what it is like for an agent may be faint and peripheral (Gallagher 2012).[17]

One final, but important, elaboration on experiences of urges. Reflections on their phenomenology reveal that conscious urge experiences provide agents not just with a blank sense that they are impulsively active, but with an awareness of the *direction* of those impulses. Take the following phenomenological description by Strawson, who observes that "the inclination to act set[s] up a kind of automatic anticipatory ghosting of appropriate action…a kind of vaguely proprioceptively perceived sketching of movement in one's limbs" (Strawson 1994, 286). What Strawson is trying to latch onto here is *conscious motor imagery*: imagery of action *in the absence of motor output*.[18] We can elaborate on the nature of motor imagery at the phenomenological and functional levels.

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[17] The sense of agency and, more generally, the sense of being active is conceptually distinct from the sense of *ownership* (Gallagher 2000). The sense of ownership tracks changes that are felt to involve oneself, but not whether this change is the product of an agent's active as opposed to passive capacity. So, the external manipulation of a deefferented arm can be felt with a sense of ownership provided sensory afferent pathways remain intact, but not with the sense of activity.

[18] Note that I focus here on *conscious* motor images, though not all motor images are conscious. See Jeannerod (2006, 26) on 'implicit' motor imagery and Nanay (2020)'s functional characterisation.

Phenomenologically, motor imagery has distinctively 'actional' content. While visualising oneself ϕ-ing from a third-person perspective involves a conscious mental image, this is not motor imagery. Conscious motor imagery as of one's ϕ-ing is "experienced from within, as a result of [a] 'first person' process involving mostly a kinesthetic representation of the action" (Jeannerod 1995, 1419). This can be accompanied by imagery of anticipated sensory/perceptual feedback from ϕ-ing (Grush 2004). Support for the claim that mental imagery has actional content comes not just from introspection, but from work on mental chronometry where there is considerable evidence that motor imagery inherits features of overt actions concerning their associated timing, difficulty and bio-mechanical constraints (Jeannerod 1994, 380–3).

Functionally, motor imagery forms a central part of action preparation and plays a crucial regulatory role in ensuring successful action performance.[19] There is a significant body of evidence that there is overlapping activation of the motor system in the brain when subjects undergo conscious motor imagery and when they actually execute actions (for a review, see Jeannerod 2001). A well-known interpretation of this data is that motor images are *simulations* of actions that invoke the same motor representations that are involved in action execution (Jeannerod 2006).[20] On this model, motor imagery lies on the *covert* end of a continuum the other end of which lies overt action. A key distinction for present purposes is that while motor imagery is voluntary in the case of intentional rehearsal of actions, motor imagery can also be *involuntary* (Nanay 2020, 394). It is *involuntary* conscious motor imagery that is a core constituent of (C).

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[19] On 'forward model' accounts, the activation of motor commands generates signals to initiate action, as well as an 'efference copy' (Wolpert and Ghahramani 2000). In the case of conscious motor imagery, efferent signals from an activated motor command are suppressed. The associated efference copy is fed into a 'forward model' to generate sensory predictions that can be compared with actual sensory input to guide online action control. On the 'emulator' approach, forward modelling does not just involve the activation of the motor system, but emulators that model sensory and musculoskeletal systems (Grush 2004).

[20] By 'motor representation', I mean representations of actions and how they unfold that are employed in preparing for and executing action. This will involve, at the lowest level, representations of fine-grained information concerning sequences of muscle activations and joint displacements, but also of certain action outcomes abstracted from such details (Pacherie 2008; Butterfill and Sinigaglia 2014).

This is key to understanding the earlier noted datum that descriptors to do with *forces* seem apt to describe felt urges. A plausible reason why a felt urge for another bite of cake is aptly described as involving the feeling of being *pulled* or *attracted* to the cake is that the perception of the cake is sustaining a covert response in which one acts on the cake. Conversely, the feeling of being *pushed* seems apt for urges, say to flee a predator, where perceived objects in the environment sustain covert responses that involve moving away from the perceived object.

I emphasise that while conscious involuntary motor imagery is an *aspect* or *component* of urge experiences, it is *not sufficient* to constitute a feeling of an urge. For example, an individual who has spent all day practising a tennis shot might find themself involuntarily rehearsing the shot as she drifts off to sleep.[21] There is a clear phenomenological difference between the 'cool' rehearsal of action and the 'hot' experience of an urge to engage in such action, though the paucity of experimental work on this specific contrast (as far as I am aware) forces me to be neutral on the exact neurophysiological difference.

4.2. Identification

Which of these types of element should we identify as the urge? We can make progress on this question by reflecting on which element is the best fit for the pre-theoretical roles we normally associate with urges. On this basis, I suggest that there are at least three reasons to identify urges with elements of type (A).

First, identifying urges with elements of type (A) clearly explains an urge's *causal* role in the production of behaviour since an urge to ϕ involves causally efficacious changes that result in ϕ-ing unless there is some intervention. Such an explanation seems inconsistent with identifying the urge to laugh with (B)—that is, exercises of control—to the extent that the relevant exercise of control is to *inhibit* or *defer* one's (prospective) ϕ-ing.

Second, identifying urges with element of type (A) allows us to vindicate, at face value, the idea that urges are possible *objects of control*: what we resist in resisting an urge to laugh is precisely the activity that would be outwardly manifested as laughter.

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[21] Thanks to Rowland Stout for this example.

In contrast, identification with (B) would wrongly make urges, not *what we control*, but the *exercise* of control itself. But this does substantial violence to commonsensical intuitions: subjects can be assailed by an urge to ϕ without yet having exercised control. This consideration also tells against identifying urges with (C) because it would wrongly make control *over* urges principally a matter of exercising control over our own experiences. However, experiences themselves do not seem to be the right objects of control, as opposed to those behaviourally prepotent responses that are *associated* with the relevant experiences.

Third, identifying urges with elements of type (A) allows us to preserve a metaphysical distinction between urges and conscious urge experiences so as not to foreclose on a substantive theoretical possibility. It ought to be a live theoretical question for empirical psychology whether it is *psychologically* possible for there to be unconscious urges. The concept of an unconscious impulse is hardly alien to psychological theorising (for example, Freud 1964; Morsella and Bargh 2012). If it should remain an open question whether unconscious urges are psychologically possible, then we should avoid identifying urges with elements of type (C) which would take the unwarranted further step in making them *metaphysically impossible*. In contrast, my proposal to identify urges with elements of type (A) incurs no such commitment.

This identification of urges with elements of type (A) appears, in places, to be assumed in valuable work on the functional anatomy of various urges (Jackson et al. 2011).[22] However, some have voiced a differing view, identifying urges with (B), or some interaction of (A) and (B), in the course of identifying the neural correlates of the 'urge-to-action' neural circuit underlying the data presented in Jackson et al. 2011. For example, Rothwell and Edwards (2011, 251) write that "[a]n urge to act is an *expression of the interaction* between [two] systems" namely "[a] basic stimulus–response coupling and a supervisory system with a power to withhold the response" (see also de Haan 2011, 248–9).

[22] Only 'in places': Jackson et al. (2011) are somewhat equivocal as pointed out also by Rothwell and Edwards (2011).

A concern to respect the distinction between reflexive behaviour and impulsive behaviour appears to be driving this identification (Rothwell and Edwards 2011, 251; de Haan 2011, 248–9). However, respecting such a distinction does not motivate this identification. I accept that some automatic reflexive responses are different from urge-based behaviours in that the former cannot be cortically inhibited or controlled (for example, spinal cord reflexes like pain withdrawal responses). But this does not entail that urges are necessarily *inhibited* as opposed to that they *can be* directly inhibited. So, we can recognise urges as possible targets for control while respecting a contrast with the activation of certain reflex arcs.

Overall, I think the balance of considerations concerning fit with pre-theoretical roles favours the present identification. If this is right, then there is an intuitive framework that suggests itself to interpret the imagined case introduced at the start of this section. What we call the urge to laugh is non-voluntarily initiated activity of the kind that leads to laughter if there is no intervention. This activity is of a kind that is possible for one to exercise control over. Since laughter is incongruent with one's goal not to offend, one inhibits this activity before it manifests in overt behaviour. The experience one enjoys is what we call 'feeling an urge'. A final note: While this framework distinguishes urges, urge experiences and exercises of control, we should not lose sight of the fact that these different elements are often functionally connected, and so concurrent. For example, the active urge to laugh is often accompanied by some degree of awareness of the urge, which in turn provides the impulse as a consciously available target for control.

5. The Epistemology

With the metaphysics now in place, we are in a position to return to the main epistemological task. The central thesis I defend is:

> **URGE EXPERIENCES PROVIDE REASONS:**
> The experience of an urge to $\boldsymbol{\phi}$ can provide an apparent reason for one to self-ascribe the urge to $\boldsymbol{\phi}$.

To unpack my proposal, I will explain and qualify my claim that conscious states or experiences can provide apparent reason for their self-ascription (§5.1). I then

elaborate on how my central thesis enables one to provide answers to the three epistemological questions (Q_1)—(Q_3) (§5.2). In the course of this, I suggest how to properly situate the role of control in the epistemology of urges, namely as *enabling* certain urge experiences to provide apparent reasons for their self-ascription. Finally, I give arguments in favour of the account and explain its advantages over rival accounts (§5.3).

5.1. Framework: Consciously Based Self-Ascription

A highly plausible idea on which I draw is that conscious mental states can provide apparent reasons for their self-ascription by dint of their phenomenology. This idea was initially proposed by Peacocke (1998) to explain how conscious judgements can give reasons to judge that one has a certain belief. It uses a framework that has come to be known as the 'Reasons Account' (Gertler 2020). Details of the framework have since been defended, refined and developed in various ways (O'Brien 2007; McHugh 2012; Silins 2012). For consistency with how the framework was originally articulated, I first discuss the framework's key claims in the terminology of epistemic reasons. I then explain how it is related to other epistemic notions like warrant or justification in which some subsequent accounts are stated.

The key commitment of the framework is that conscious states themselves can provide apparent reasons for their self-ascription by dint of their phenomenology.[23] The fact that it is conscious states *themselves* that can provide such reasons distinguishes the view from 'inner sense' accounts that evoke distinct higher-order perceptions *of* those states. Epistemic reasons for an agent to believe that *P* are features that make it epistemically appropriate for the agent to believe that *P* by standing in the relation of truth-conducive support for the content *P*.[24] The reason

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[23] A modest assumption of the Reasons Account is that phenomenally conscious events normally secure the connection required for their self-ascription, that is, they may be available to 'access consciousness' (Block 1995). When it obtains, the connection is one in which "[the base state] is access-conscious *because* it is phenomenally conscious" (Peacocke 1998, 92). The Reasons Account need not take a more substantive position on the nature of this connection other than that some such connection stably obtains in well-functioning psychologies under normal conditions. Thanks to the Editors for recommending I flag this assumption.

[24] Peacocke's proposal holds that states 'provide' or 'give' epistemic reasons. While these are basic notions in the original formulation, it is consistent with most approaches that 'factor' this into two

that a conscious state *M* is said to provide for a corresponding self-ascription has three properties. The relevant reason provided is:

- *Prima Facie*: While *M* makes it epistemically appropriate to self-ascribe *M to some extent*, whether it is appropriate all things considered turns on what other evidence or defeaters there may be.

- *Immediate*: The apparent reason one has in virtue of *M* does not depend on whatever reason one may have for other beliefs (Pryor 2005; Silins 2012).

- *Apparent*: Reason provided by *M* to self-ascribe *M* does not merely obtain, but is apparent or accessible to the subject, in some sense to be elaborated (McHugh 2012).

Where an agent's self-ascription of *M* is appropriately based on the apparent reason provided by *M* to self-ascribe *M*, then that self-ascription is on the right track to qualifying as self-knowledge (absent counter-warrants, Gettier failures or incoherence). The resulting self-ascription of *M* will be 'consciously based' (Peacocke 1998, 71), that is, formed in response to a reason that is apparent to her. In this way, the self-ascription of *M* is rationally intelligible from the agent's perspective.

Before expanding on what it means for conscious states to provide *apparent* reasons, it will be helpful to map the idea of 'providing apparent reasons' onto other epistemological notions like warrant or *ex ante* justification (where analogous features hold). This is important as the main questions (Q_1)-(Q_3) are framed in terms of warrant. In the case of warrant, if an agent self-ascribes a mental state *M* on the basis

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components: the reason, and the mental state that enables possession of that reason by providing access to it (more shortly). How this factorisation goes will turn on one's ontology of reasons, either as facts (*qua* truth-makers for propositions) or mental states/events. My use of the term 'feature' is intended to allow neutrality here. Whichever ontology one holds, these elements—the fact that one feels an urge, or one's feeling the urge itself—qualify as reasons because they conduce to the truth of the corresponding self-ascription either by constituting or being a constituent of a fact that supports its truth. Peacocke's proposal is not amenable to views insisting that reasons for belief must be propositional contents represented in an agent's psychology (Burge 2013). On pain of circularity or collapse into inferential/inner sense views, the proposal denies that the self-ascription is formed on the basis of a transition from some proposition that is the content of a state like belief or, perhaps, perception. For those who endorse a propositionalist ontology, see fn.25 for how the present framework can be reformulated.

of the apparent reason provided by *M*, then that self-ascription is warranted, that is, conducive to the satisfaction of standards required for knowledge, absent the presence of defeaters and so on. What warrants the agent to the self-ascription is the relevant conscious state against the background of the agent's being reliably competent to self-ascribe the relevant conscious state by dint of its phenomenology (more on competence shortly). In the case of justification, if experience *M* provides an agent with an apparent reason to self-ascribe *M*, then *M* gives the agent prima facie and immediate justification (Silins 2012). The mental state *M* constitutes what Pryor calls a 'justification-making' condition: it contributes toward *making* a corresponding self-ascription epistemically appropriate (Pryor 2005, 203, 215).[25]

I wish to expand on the sense in which the relevant reason is apparent or available to the agent, and to explain *how* this is the case (see also Peacocke 1998; McHugh 2012). The sense in which *M* is an apparent reason to self-ascribe *M* has two components. First, the conscious state *M* self-ascribed makes a contribution to the specification of the agent's total phenomenology. In this sense, the *reason* or *warranting element* is consciously apparent to the subject. Since the reason itself is the target, call this form of access to the reason *de re*. Second, the agent is sensitive to the truth-conducive relation that *M*-type experiences bear on the corresponding self-ascription. In this sense, what is available to the agent is not just the reason, but its status *as a reason* or *as an element that warrants* one to make the self-ascription. Since it is the status of the reason *as a reason* that is the target here, call this form of access *de dicto*.

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[25] This emphasis on justification-making helps to underscore once again some important details about the notion of reason-providing operative in Peacocke (1998). Pryor (2005) distinguishes justification makers from justification *showers*. Justification showers are apt to serve as premises of possible arguments in support of a belief. Pryor also calls these 'dialectical' reasons. However, the notion of reason-provision in Peacocke does not involve dialectical reasons. Rather, conscious states 'provide reason' in exactly the sense that a Pryorean justification *maker* provides justification, that is, it contributes to *making* a self-ascription epistemically appropriate. This notion of justification is to be distinguished yet still from the one operative in Burge (2020) on which justifications are warrants by propositional contents represented in an agent's psychology (*supra* fn.24). I can stay neutral on this; if one prefers Burge's account of justification and reasons, a Burgean recasting that eschews reasons-talk would be that the phenomenology of conscious states constitutes a contribution to an *entitlement* (non-reasons-based warrants): subjects are entitled to self-ascriptions of conscious states formed by exercising reliable competences to self-ascribe such conscious states in response to their phenomenology.

What form does the sensitivity that underpins access de dicto take? In my view, the relevant notion of sensitivity is plausibly cashed out in terms of a reliable epistemic *competence* (Sosa 2010; Sylvan 2014): a disposition of the agent to identify *M*-type experiences *as such* on the basis of their phenomenology. That is, the agent reliably judges that they are in *M* on the basis of an *M*-type experience only if they *are* in *M*. This will involve an associated sensitivity to defeaters: where the agent is liable to be mistaken, they are not disposed to exercise their competence to self-ascribe on the basis of phenomenology (McHugh 2012, 155). So, if an agent aims to self-ascribe an urge that they are subject to, then they can exercise this competence to self-ascribe an urge on the basis of experience.[26] Such a competence is plausibly part of the possession conditions of the concept of the relevant mental state (Peacocke 1998, 87ff; McHugh 2012, sec. 7).

Considering points of similarity and difference with perceptual judgements helps to illustrate these ideas. Perceptual experiences of colour can provide apparent reasons for subjects to form person-level colour judgements (for example, a visual experience of a red patch can provide one with a reason to believe that the patch is red). Obviously, a key difference between perceptual belief and consciously based self-ascription is that the perceptual belief in the content that the patch is red is based on the *content* of the perceptual experience, whereas the belief that one is in conscious state *M* will draw on both the experiential mode and its content. Nevertheless, as with consciously based self-ascriptions, for a perceptual experience of a red patch, say, to appear to one to be a reason to judge that the patch is red, it is not sufficient simply to enjoy such an experience: one must have an underlying sensitivity to the truth-conducive relationship between red colour experiences and red colour judgements. This sensitivity is cashed out in terms of a reliable disposition to recognise red colour experiences *as such* on the basis of their phenomenology. This will include sensitivity to defeaters; for example, given abnormal lighting conditions, subjects will refrain from taking colour appearances at face value. Plausibly, the possession of such a disposition is part of the possession condition for the colour concept.

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[26] The notion of competence, I think, nicely develops closely related notions employed by Peacocke ('rational sensitivity') and McHugh ('non-theoretical sensitivity') and ties it into existing discussions within virtue-theoretic projects in epistemology (see Sosa 2010; Sylvan and Sosa 2018).

This analogy with colour judgments is also instructive in clarifying the operative notion of reliability. The disposition we are interested in assessing for reliability is the competence to make explicit person-level judgements about an urge one has. Reliability does not require infallibility: it is possible for agents to mistakenly exercise this competence to rationally self-ascribe some conscious state *M* in response to some other distinct conscious state *M′*, yet not be in *M*.[27] Reliability of the relevant competence is determined by some measure comparing the proportion of (i) true self-ascriptions of *M* resulting from exercises of that competences in response to *M* to (ii) total exercises of that competence in response to *M*. Note here that reliability concerns the proportion of true to total *exercises of that competence*, and not proportion of true self-ascriptions to total *M* experiences. The same range restriction holds for colour judgements: the reliability of an agent's competence to make true colour judgements concerns some measure comparing true red colour judgement resulting from exercises of her perceptual competences to the total number of judgements resulting from exercises of those competences– *not* total red perceptual experiences he or she might undergo.[28]

The approach I take, then, is to outline the nature of urge experiences and the associated capacities and conditions that enable urge experiences to provide apparent reasons for an agent to self-ascribe an urge. As far as I know, there has been no attempt to extend this approach to cover motivational states. While the approach has a simple structure, certain challenges that arise for **URGE EXPERIENCES PROVIDE REASONS**. These challenges, I will claim, can be met by drawing on the role of control. I turn now to the three questions discussed in §2.2.

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[27] Compare Silins (2012, 299) on *fallible* justification for self-ascriptions. For a defence of the reliability of such competences despite possible misidentification, see McHugh (2012).

[28] This reflects the simple fact that the reliability of a competence is concerned only with ranges where it is exercised. An individual Ann might have a highly reliable competence to identify species of trees that she chooses not to exercise. The fact that she perceives numerous trees daily without stopping to exercise it—say, because she has better things to do—in no way impugns the reliability of the competence we suppose her to have-- she could *if she decided to* accurately exercise that competence. Thanks to the editors for pressing me to clarify this point.

5.2. Answering (Q_1)–(Q_3)

Recall:

> (Q_1): What warrants an agent *A* in believing themself to have an *urge* to ϕ (rather than another action-oriented state)?

Naturally, my answer to (Q_1) appeals to the *phenomenology* of urge experiences themselves. That is, the fact that urge experiences have the distinctive phenomenology they do contributes to how subjects can be warranted in self-ascribing urges. However, matters are not so straightforward.

Here's the problem. We noted that urge experiences can be phenomenologically *recessive*, that is, their contribution to what it is like for an agent at some time can be faint and marginal. Consider, for example, absent-mindedly responding to a fleeting impulse to scratch as you daydream. Or consider rearranging your position in your car seat in response to a brief feeling of an urge generated by an uncomfortable sensation. These recessive urge experiences provide you with access to the reason-giving state *de re* insofar as it makes *some* marginal phenomenological contribution. But it is possible that these experiences being insufficiently attended to means that you lack access *de dicto*: though you feel the urge, you simply do not exercise your competence to recognise it *as a reason* to make the self-ascription. In such cases, one would lack an *apparent* reason to self-ascribe the urge, even if the urge experience retains its reason-giving force.[29]

Note that such cases are not counterexamples to **URGE EXPERIENCES PROVIDE REASONS** which merely states that urge experiences *can* provide apparent reasons to self-ascribe an urge. What these cases *do* require, however, is some account of the factors that enable warranted self-ascriptions based on urge experiences. Enter the role of *control*:

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[29] The problem discussed here does not presuppose any commitment to the stronger idea that attention is *necessary* for propositional or doxastic justification for the corresponding self-ascription. For discussion, see Silins and Siegel (2019).

CONTROL AS ENABLER:

Exercising control over an urge to $\boldsymbol{\phi}$ can enable associated urge experiences to provide an apparent reason to self-ascribe an urge to $\boldsymbol{\phi}$.

The observation that exercises of control can play a role as an enabling condition explains why many salient experiences of urges involve attempts to exercise control over them. For example, it is when *inhibiting* or *resisting* the impulse to laugh that the felt impulse is made especially salient as non-voluntarily initiated. In conflict situations, control is required to resolve between competing intended and non-voluntary responses. In such situations, the exercise of control opens up a duration in which there is likely to be a phenomenologically salient conflict between the act one wills and the relevant impulsive response.[30] Here, the feeling of an urge that may have been recessive comes to occupy one's attention (more on 'occupying' attention shortly). The subject, then, comes not just to have access de re to the reason-providing event in virtue of its being conscious, but access *de dicto*: the agent can exercise their reliable competence to self-ascribe the relevant urge on the basis of its phenomenology.

Two points of clarification. First, the claim that control is an *enabling* condition does not entail that it is a metaphysically *necessary* condition. The illumination of a room with visible light is an enabling condition for being visually aware of an object, though it is not a necessary condition since operating a night-vision device may serve just as well. It is possible for self-ascriptions of urges to proceed simply on the basis of the experience of an urge when the experience is not recessive. For example, the overwhelming urge to respond to severe pain can be known simply by feeling the urge and its subsequent expression in behaviour without any exercise of control.

Second, the suggestion that control leads urge experiences to occupy an agent's attention should not be understood as introducing higher-order awareness *of* the urge experience as a mental particular. This would be incompatible with the framework's main contention that conscious states *themselves* provide reasons for self-ascription,

[30] Where control is difficult, such experiences may be accompanied by feelings of effort which highlights the conflict of the urge with one's will (Shepherd 2016).

and distorts the phenomenology of such attentional shifts.[31] Here, Peacocke's distinction between being the *object* of attention and *occupying* attention is key (Peacocke 1998; compare Watzl 2017, ch.4).

Phenomenologically, the change in the conscious elements that occupy one's attention—say, from the perception of a predator to the conscious feeling of an urge to flee—is not like the shift from one object of attention that you are causally related to to another— say, from the predator to the tree next to it. When some action you are trying to perform (say, to parallel park your car) comes to take up your attention, you might attend to objects in the environment to perform the action. But the way in which the action comes to occupy your attention here cannot be identified with coming to attend *to* those physical objects or some mental particular (a trying, perhaps). Similarly, when your attention shifts from a perception of an object to a felt impulse to act, it is the simulated action one has an urge to do that occupies your attention. You might attend to objects in your environment, but the manner in which your attention is taken up is not the same as the manner in which physical or mental particulars comprise objects of attention. The relevant attentional shift is not from one object of attention to another, but between what comes to *occupy* attention. As Martin (1998, 103) writes, "We can see Peacocke's talk of…[actions, thoughts, etc.] occupying the attention as indicating…[they are] *determinations* of the attention, rather than something independent of one's attention to which one then applies this faculty."

I take **CONTROL AS ENABLER** to be motivated mainly by phenomenological reflection. However, I want to briefly consider two points made in empirically informed work in psychology on cognitive control and motor imagery that can enhance our understanding of how exercises of control might enable urges and associated imagery to become phenomenologically salient.

First, Jeannerod identifies two general factors that affect the degree to which motor preparations become conscious in the form of motor imagery. He suggests the role of *duration* writing, "If motor preparation (normally very brief) could be prolonged, the intention to act would become progressively a motor image of the same action"

[31] Thanks to the editors for pressing me to clarify this.

(Jeannerod 1994, 190). Jeannerod also suggests the role of *shielding* from attenuating signals. He notes that amputees or those with deafferented limbs have conscious motor imagery of acts that would usually be "cancelled as soon as the corresponding movement was executed (perhaps by the incoming signals generated by execution itself)" (ibid.). Here he hypothesises that "[when] motor imagery occur[s] with execution deliberately blocked or delayed, the representation would be protected from cancellation and would become accessible to conscious processing" (ibid.). If these factors apply to motor imagery associated with the *involuntary* motor preparations constitutive of an urge, then we have a plausible hypothesis about *how* **CONTROL AS ENABLER** is true. Control actions that prolong or shield motor preparations from attenuation make it more likely that they are consciously processed, which in turn make it more likely that they occupy attention.

Second, some experimental work on the subjective aspects of cognitive control suggests a correlation between response conflicts and the strength of urge experiences. A central experimental paradigm used to study cognitive control is the *conflict task*, so-called since it involves subjects having to control responses that conflict with task-relevant goals. A well-known example is the Stroop test where subjects are asked to state the colour of a printed colour word. While the colour and the colour word match in congruent trials, this is not the case for incongruent trials (for example, 'BLUE' printed in red). Success requires subjects to selectively inhibit an automatic tendency to read the word in favour of an intended response. We can think of the activation of this automatic tendency as an extremely brief urge that the agent has to exercise inhibitory control over (Sripada 2021; *supra* fn.13). In a series of experiments with this type of experimental design, Morsella, Wilson, et al. (2009) present evidence that *incongruent* trials (those involving response conflict) were correlated with urge experiences that received the highest self-reported strength rating.

With the answer to (Q_1), I turn now to:

> (Q_2): What warrants an agent *A* in believing themself to have an urge *to* ϕ (rather than to ψ)?

Drawing on the earlier discussion of the phenomenology of urge experiences, my answer to (Q_2) is that we know the content of our urges on the basis of *involuntary*

conscious motor imagery: if *A* has a conscious experience of an urge to ϕ, then *A* has warrant to believe it is ϕ*-ing* she has an urge to perform on the basis of involuntary conscious motor imagery as of ϕ-ing. For example, the fearful but motionless agent in hiding can know that they have an urge *to flee*, as opposed to laugh or yawn, on the basis that they enjoy a simulated experience as of fleeing.

It is important to note that the motor representations that underlie conscious motor imagery will be situated within an *action hierarchy* involved in the supervision and control of action (Jeannerod 1994; Hamilton and Grafton 1993). To illustrate, the onset of fear involves the activation of abstract relational goals (for example, avoiding object *o*) which get fleshed out into planned context-specific sub-goals (say, to get over the fence ahead) (Frijda 1986; Scarantino 2014). These in turn give rise to increasingly specific action specifications involving motor representations that specify particular goal-directed act-types (like a running jump over the fence) (Butterfill and Sinigaglia 2014), until we get to very fine-grained motor representations at the lowest level specifying muscular activations and joint displacements that are apt to be transformed into movements.

Some, but not all, such motor representations will be consciously available to the agent in the form of motor imagery (Brozzo 2017). For example, schemas specifying patterns of muscular contraction, and associated sensory feedback will rarely be available, except for highly trained athletes who may have the capacity for conscious access to fine-grained motor imagery. In most cases, the content of the associated conscious motor imagery will be comparatively coarse-grained; for example, in the case of fear, one might entertain imagery as of one's *leaping over the fence* without a specification of ways of using particular effectors (for instance, as of using one's right hand to pivot one's waist over the fence with such-and-such force).[32]

Finally, I turn to consider what, if any, feature marks out self-knowledge of one's urges as epistemically special:

[32] Thanks to Daniel Morgan for encouraging me to consider this.

(Q_3): What explains the respect in which this warranted self-ascription is either peculiar (with respect to the way in which it is formed) or privileged (with respect to likelihood to amount to knowledge)?

According to **URGE EXPERIENCES PROVIDE REASONS**, conscious feelings of urges provide subjects with apparent reasons to self-ascribe their urges, and in some cases, exercises of control play an enabling role in this process. The account's emphasis on conscious experience is what constitutes the peculiar way that subjects self-ascribe their urges. Since the urge experiences are taken to provide reasons by dint of their phenomenology, the corresponding self-ascriptions are formed on the basis of reasons available only to the subject. Moreover, it explains the *synchronic* character of this access: an agent will have an apparent reason to self-ascribe *as and when* she feels the distinctive push and pull of an impulse.

Several important clarifications are in order before proceeding further. The first clarifies the claim in §2 that my account provides a bottom-up explanation that specifically explains how self-ascriptions of urges can be rationally intelligible from the agent's point of view. The basis for this claim should be clear: if **URGE EXPERIENCES PROVIDE REASONS** is true, then self-ascriptions of urges are made for what appears to be a reason available to the subject—*viz*. conscious urge experience base states—that warrant and rationalise that self-ascription from her point of view. Note, however, that the proposal does not entail that mere rational intelligibility *tout court* is sufficient for warrant. Warrant is externally grounded. More precisely, the framework requires that the relevant reasons are apparent to the agent *as reasons* to self-ascribe an urge in virtue of exercises of reliable competences. These competences are dispositions to self-ascribe an urge to ϕ on the basis of some urge experience *only if one has an urge to* ϕ (*supra* §5.1).

The second also concerns the commitments of the proposal. It is important not to interpret the proposal in ways that would overstep what is possible to establish on the basis of conceptual and phenomenological reflection. Neither **URGE EXPERIENCES PROVIDE REASONS** nor **CONTROL AS ENABLER** entails that (i) *every* urge is conscious, or that (ii) every exercise of control *suffices* to provide one with awareness of one's urges as such, nor that (iii) *every* exercise of control is conscious. Given the identification of urges in functional terms, it is neutral on empirical questions about

the neural correlates of urges, urge experiences, or the various capacities for control, though the metaphysical account in §4 can inform such investigations.

The third concerns whether my view might qualify as a perceptual theory. As discussed (§3.2), if all that is required to qualify as such is mere metaphysical independence between urges and the consciously-based self-ascriptions, then the present account is, in that thin sense, perceptual. There is, I think, nothing objectionable about this since we lack reason to rule out un-ascribed urges.[33] Moreover, it should be clear that the foregoing emphasis on the active phenomenology of urge experiences and the role of conscious motor imagery motivates an approach to the epistemology of urges that is much closer to some treatments of the epistemology of *action* (see Peacocke 2006) than to the epistemology of the environment through ordinary sense perception.

5.3. Motivating the Proposal

I have set out my proposal and explained how it answers the three epistemological questions. I end this section by outlining several considerations that motivate the view. I explain why they favour my proposal over competitors.

First, the proposal develops a coherent and plausible epistemology of urges. Moreover, it does so within an independently attractive framework that has been plausibly applied to cognitive events and states like judgement and belief. It is attractive, in part, because it explains how urges can be rationally self-ascribed from the agent's point of view. Those same attractions accrue to the present proposal. While I do not argue here that this framework is correct in every domain of self-knowledge of conscious states, the present proposal is something that theorists working within this framework who also have ambitions to provide a *unified* account of self-knowledge can draw on. In contrast, I have argued that other frameworks such

[33] This is not to say there are no reasonable grounds to contest the label; see the response of Peacocke (2012, 184–6) to O'Brien (2012).

as Byrne's inferentialist framework face apparent difficulties in extending their approaches to cover urges.[34]

Second, the proposal provides us with an epistemology that is faithful to the phenomenology of urges. As noted at the outset of the paper, we seem to be aware of our urges simply in feeling them while in their grip. The proposal shows how to develop this basic phenomenological observation into a plausible account that centralises the epistemic role played by conscious urge experiences. Rival accounts such as Stout and Schapiro's have a comparatively weaker claim to fidelity with the phenomenology of urges. Both distort the phenomenology in different ways: Stout's sole appeal to proprioceptive feelings of resistance or interaction makes our experience of urges unnecessarily *indirect*, whereas Schapiro unnecessarily situates our awareness of urges within a higher-order *deliberative* context.

Third, the account is grounded in a plausible metaphysical framework that motivates a distinction between urges, feelings of urges and (exercises of) capacities for control. The framework coheres well with our pre-theoretical intuitions about urges and clearly anchors the phenomenological aspects of urge experiences in work on the psychological mechanisms of action and motor control. While the metaphysical framework may subsequently be endorsed by rival approaches, I take my epistemological proposal to be a simple and natural way to understand the proper epistemic contribution made by these elements once we have properly separated and

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[34] An anonymous reviewer asks if my account of urge experiences could be co-opted by a Byrne-style inferentialist. After all, Byrne has provided inferential accounts of self-ascriptions of a wide range of phenomena including pain sensation. These involve following an inference rule connecting content about 'qualities of painful disturbances'—'p-propositions'—to the corresponding content *that one feels a pain* (Byrne 2018, 149). A central difficulty I raised for the inferentialist was about finding a suitable content to serve as a premise of an analogous inference rule for urge ascriptions. While I cannot establish this is impossible here, there remains a *prima facie* difficulty. To see this, note that in contrast with my approach, Byrne cannot appeal to urge experiences *themselves* as the basis for self-ascription because what is needed is something apt to serve as the premise of an inference, namely, a proposition. The associated motor imagery will similarly not suffice: there are strong reasons to hold that motor imagery has a distinctively motoric *non-propositional* format, and so is not apt to comprise a premise of an inference rule (Butterfill and Sinigaglia 2014). But even if some kind of translation into propositional format were possible, such a content would clearly make for an unreliable inference rule because motor imagery is associated with non-urges (for example, intentional imaginary rehearsals of actions; §4.1). Another place to look is the content of the proprioceptive feelings of resistance that Stout (2022) appeals to. If so, my objections to Stout would carry over.

understood them. For example, *pace* Stout, once we grant that the conscious feeling of an urge to ϕ can play an epistemic role, we weaken the temptation to treat the proprioceptive feelings that result from exercises of control as exhausting our conscious awareness of our urges.

6. Conclusion

Experiences of urges, impulses or inclinations are among the most basic elements in the practical life of conscious agents. This paper has developed a theory of urges and their epistemology synthesizing work in psychology and the philosophy of mind to clarify the metaphysics, phenomenology and epistemology of urges.

According to the epistemological account presented here, urge experiences can provide agents with reasons to self-ascribe their urges. Control, I claim, plays an enabling role in this process, especially, in cases where such experiences may otherwise recede into the background. The exercise of control can focalise a conscious experience of an urge, thereby enabling it to provide an apparent reason to self-ascribe the urge. Moreover, one can be warranted in believing one has an urge *to* ϕ, *in particular*, by dint of the conscious motor imagery that is a constituent of the experience of an urge. The ascription of an urge on the basis of such reasons can constitute a distinctively first-personal way of coming to know how one is motivated to act.

I motivated my account by appeal to three sets of grounds. First, I argued that the present proposal is a plausible account of how agents know their urges, one that avoids the problems that I have raised for other views (§3). Second, by centralising the *active* phenomenology of urge experiences, while recognising the supporting role played by control capacities, I argued that my account remains faithful to the phenomenology of urge experiences (§4). Finally, I showed that my account is a natural and complementary development of an independently plausible metaphysics of urges.

The theory promises to contribute to our understanding of a wide range of psychological phenomena. For example, urges are routinely appealed to in theorising about the proper functioning of our capacity for desire, emotion, appetite, habit,

perceiving affordances, and bodily sensation (*supra* fn.13). Theorists can draw on this framework to explain the distinctively active or motivational aspects of these target states. Moreover, the arguments presented in (§4.2) motivate a clear and precise metaphysical framework with which to interpret empirical work on the neural correlates of urges. Beyond normal functioning, there are also clear applications of the proposal to accounts of psychiatric conditions involving disordered impulses like drug addiction, Tourette syndrome and so on. All of this, I hope, advances our ability to answer perennial philosophical questions beyond those concerning self-knowledge, like the nature and phenomenology of impulsive and weak-willed action, what self-control involves, the requirements for free and responsible agency, and other questions arising from our condition as self-conscious, rational, but impulsive, agents.

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