

Introspecting Motivational Dispositions

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Until quite recently, in the literature on introspection there has been only a passing glance given to desire. This is despite the central place that desire plays in our lives, and the fact that we are more likely to explicitly ask ourselves what we *want* than what we *believe*. Yet the current leading models of introspection were developed primarily by thinking about the introspection of beliefs. By thinking about belief, it is argued that – despite the name “introspection” – we know what we believe by looking outwards, not inwards. In particular, I introspectively know that I believe that *p* by asking the outward-directed question *whether p*.

As interest has spread to introspection of other mental states, there has been a lot of effort to try to make introspection of these mental states fit the outward-looking structure of belief introspection. Several of these outward-looking accounts of desire introspection have been proposed, all centering around judgments of value.¹ Although their details differ, these all involve something along the lines of: we know that we desire that *p* by inferring this from a judgment that *p* is valuable.

Such an account is outward-directed (we direct our attention to the putative object of desire and ask about *its* value), and as such has the advantage of fitting belief and desire introspection into the same mold. However, these accounts leave out our epistemic access to a very important part of desire – the *motivational* aspect of desire. This close connection with motivation is what has led many to think that desires are just dispositions towards actions, and, I will argue, is something that theories of introspection of desire ought to be able to explain. If being motivated is part of desiring, an account that leaves out how we know we are motivated will at best give us a story about how we know what we *like*, and not what we *want*. Knowing how we are motivated seems to

¹Byrne (2005) “Introspection,” *Philosophical Topics*, 33(1), 79-104; Byrne (2011) “Knowing What I Want,” In J. Liu and J. Perry (Eds.), *Consciousness and the Self: New Essays*, Cambridge University Press; Fernandez (2007) “Desire and Self-Knowledge,” *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 85(4), 517-36; Moran, R. (2001) *Authority and Estrangement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

require an epistemic process that is more internally directed than the model for belief. I will argue that it is by *detecting our dispositions towards action* that we detect our motivations. I will also argue for several desiderata that such an account must meet, and give a sketch of how we might detect motivational dispositions.

Firstly, and most obviously, the account must not require that we have to wait to see how we act in order to know how we are motivated. Although sometimes we know our motivations after the fact, there are cases where we have first-personal epistemic access to them prior to action. We can also know our motivations even when the action is *not* produced, and, I will argue, this is often when we know our desires best. Self-control is thus an important part of the introspective process by which we know what we want, when self-control frustrates our motivational dispositions. Self-control must therefore be understood as a capacity that disrupts the manifestation of a disposition.

A second desideratum for the account is that it helps explain why we are more reliable in detecting motivation when we are faced with the object of desire than when we are at a theoretical remove from it. Although in the introspection literature much effort is spent trying to get an account that explains how we could have perfect privileged access to our mental states, I will argue that we're often not as good at this as is usually assumed. An account that ties the detection of motivation to the process by which our desires manifest in action explains this.