**Doxastic Agent’s Awareness**

When performing actions, we can be aware of what we are doing in virtue of being the one doing it. Or, at the very least, we can be aware that we are doing *something*. While to an extent contested, this is nevertheless a familiar claim – that we can enjoy a so-called ‘agent’s awareness’ and/or ‘sense of agency’ in acting on the world. For example, suppose that Sally is opening a jar. The thought is that she can be aware of opening the jar even if her eyes are closed, and arguably even if her fingers happen to be numb. Or in any case, her experience is different from how it would beif she passively watched things happen to her. She wouldn’t be surprised to find the jar unscrewed once she opens her eyes – the jar is open because *she* opened it. And the thought isn’t just that we can form beliefs about what we are doing. It is a claim about certain forms of conscious experience which can then ground our self-ascriptions.

Standardly, philosophers have limited the scope of agent’s awareness to intentional actions, or at the very least actions – as we might initially expect. In contrast, I argue here that agent’s awareness also extends to beliefs. This is to broaden the framework to introduce *doxastic agent’s awareness*: an agentive awareness of making up one’s mind and keeping it made up with regards to one’s beliefs. Such awareness is possible because our awareness of performing a given action can be more or less rich, and I will suggest that in performing certain mental actions we see ourselves as forming and sustaining our beliefs. For example, suppose that Julia deliberates about Smith. She weighs the pros and cons and makes up her mind, thus concluding that Smith is a bad politician. I want to say that in doing all this, Julia is aware of making up her mind and forming a belief. This is still to ground the relevant awareness in our performance of actions, but to argue that in this way our experience can also encompass an awareness of mental *states.*

In order to grip onto its significance, I initially motivate doxastic agent’s awareness as a way of accounting for our self-knowledge of belief, and in particular, our use of the so-called ‘transparency method’. I also offer independent arguments, and the thesis bears additional importance for the agent’s awareness and sense of agency research programme.

The paper proceeds as follows. In §1, I introduce the question of what warrants our self-ascriptions of belief. By way of a reply in §2, I start presenting the thesis on the table – that we have an agentive awareness of them. This prior awareness, I propose, grounds our self-ascriptions. In §3, I offer additional arguments that we can possess doxastic agent’s awareness.

I also want to clarify that my ultimate aim in this paper is to advocate relevant phenomenological and epistemic parities from the practical domain to that of belief. To a large extent, for example, I will assume that we at least sometimes have a distinctive form of experience when we act and which represents what we are doing. But ultimately, I would also be satisfied if the reader extended their preferred deflationary picture of agent’s awareness to provide a similar account of *doxastic* agent’s awareness.

# 1 Knowing our beliefs: A puzzle

In what way do we learn of our beliefs? In this section I set out the question, what I take to be the most promising rough strategy, and several desiderata for a precise answer. I then introduce my picture of doxastic agent’s awareness in §2 as way of providing a concrete account, and suggest that in deliberating and judging we have a prior awareness of our belief which warrants us in self-ascribing it. As such, this detour into self-knowledge highlights the broader significance of doxastic agent’s awareness. Further, this section partly functions as an argument to the best explanation, although it cannot be complete since eliminating all the possibilities would take too much time given the lively nature of this debate.

Let’s start by saying something about the nature of belief. Belief is a standing state. For example, I believe that *Barcelona is in Catalonia* even when not considering the matter at all. The belief can be manifested in various ways: e.g., I provide it as an answer if someone queries Barcelona’s location and I will visit Catalan websites when researching local traditions. But believing that *Barcelona is in Catalonia* is not itself something I do, or at least not in any straightforward sense.[[1]](#footnote-1) On the other hand, judgement is something like the event of sincerely endorsing a proposition, and is arguably also a (mental) action. Suppose I judge that *Barcelona is in Catalonia*. This is an occurrence which happens and then passes. And it is something I do.

That said, belief and judgement do importantly relate (see e.g., Peacocke 1998: 90). Paradigmatically, judging that *p is true* is a way of coming to believe that *p* – I can deliberate on some issue, judge in conclusion that *p is true* and, standardly, come to believe that *p*. And I can change my beliefs by forming a different judgement on the issue. E.g., perhaps I initially judge that *Barcelona is in Galicia* and believe accordingly, before actually viewing a map and later concluding that *Barcelona is in Catalonia* and updating my belief in line with this. And judging that *p* can manifest one’s standing belief that *p.* For the most part, if subjects believe that *p*, they will be disposed to judge that *p*. But I can also allow for cases where subjects aren’t – instances of so-called ‘epistemic akrasia’. E.g., suppose Sally explicitly concludes that a friend likes her, but ever suspicious due to low self-esteem, she fails to act accordingly: she doesn’t trust her friend with secrets, she seeks reassurance, and engages in suspicious questioning when her friend says they’re busy etc. In this case, I am happy to say that Sally believes that her friend dislikes her despite the mismatch with what she judges to be true.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Regarding the way in which we come to know our beliefs, an influential and plausible first pass is that we can use the so-called ‘transparency method’ (TM) first attributed to Evans (1982). Suppose you ask me whether I believe that *it will rain*. The thought is that I don’t turn my attention inward via a detection mechanism that monitors my mental states or by considering evidence about myself such as my behaviour.[[3]](#footnote-3) Rather, I look outside and/or check the weather forecast. Suppose on this basis I conclude that *it will rain*. I can thereby tell you that I believe *that it will rain.* The question about what I believe is ‘transparent’to a question about the outside world.

This raises the question of how in fact self-ascriptions formed using TM are rational and knowledgeable. After all, employing TM involves transitioning from a proposition about one subject matter to a conclusion about something entirely different (namely, from the outside world to my own mental states). In the rest of this section, I note several non-exhaustive desiderata for our answer to this question.

1. *TM is not inferential*. A belief-forming process can be described as inferential in two ways (see Cassam 2014: 138-9). One concerns the psychological transitions involved.We don’t deliberate thusly: ‘*p*, I have thereby judged that *p*, my beliefs and judgements normally match up, therefore I believe that *p*’. Belief formation could also be inferential in an epistemic sense. This would be to say that any justification for one belief would be transmitted to the second (e.g., from my belief that *p*, or my belief that I judge that *p*, as well as my beliefs in relevant supporting propositions).[[4]](#footnote-4) But this isn’t the case with transparency either (pace Cassam (2014)**.** Ifasked for the grounds of our self-ascription, we wouldn’t straightforwardly rattle off these considerations.

2. *Nevertheless, the transition from ‘p’ to ‘I believe that p’ is one which seems rational to the subject herself*. It is not simply reliable and one which results in warranted and knowledgeable self-ascriptions. After all, one’s conclusion might be epistemically valuable in various sorts of ways without one being at all aware of this. Yet upon using TM, the resulting belief that *I believe that p* seems rational by the individual’s own lights. For example, TM isn’t simply on par from one’s own perspective with transitions from ‘it will rain’ to ‘penguins exist’ or even ‘my friend believes that it will rain’. Employing TM is such that the conclusion makes sense to the subject, and she recognises that the resulting belief has ‘something going for it’ epistemically speaking.

Reliablist accounts of TM, such as Byrne (2018, 2011, 2005) and Fernández (2013, 2003), fail to capture this. Roughly, they claim that one’s resulting self-ascription is warranted in virtue of TM’s reliability – after all, when we judge that *p*, at the very least normally we believe that *p* as well. Yet this isn’t to say that the subject herself grasps this reliable connection.

This also holds for accounts that rely on transcendental entitlements without appealing to anything the subject can herself grasp. We can see something like this in Moran (2003, 2001). Moran builds on the natural thought that employing TM and considering whether *p* is true is a way of making up our minds on the subject of *p*. In making up our minds like this, ‘it is only because I assume that what I actually believe about X can be determined, made true by, my reflection on X itself, that I have the right to answer a question about my belief in a way that respects the Transparency Condition’ (2003: 406). And we are entitled to this assumption because it is a precondition on engaging in deliberation in the first place.[[5]](#footnote-5) There is something germane about appealing to prior assumptions about our capacity to determine what we think, and my eventual account will be in some way sympathetic. But it’s not clear what an ‘assumption’ in this context amounts to (which itself is a reason to doubt this proposal).The standard way of cashing out this intuition makes it seem like whatever the warrant is, it falls outside my grasp – it is not a reason per se. Just because the subject happens to have this entitlement isn’t to say that she is at all aware of this (O’Brien 2005).

3. *TM forms part of a broader phenomenon: as a general rule, reasoning, deliberation and judging all seem to put us in a position to self-ascribe our beliefs, even when we haven’t set out to do so.*

If we engage in a piece of reasoning and form a conclusion, and *then* someone asks us what we believe on the matter, this reasoning presumably puts us in a position to cite our conclusion as what we believe. And it does so just as much as if someone asked us the question beforehand and not after. Or perhaps no one actually has to ask me this question, but I make this observation spontaneously (‘huh, I believe *that*!’). Suppose that I happen to consider the weather and conclude that it will rain. I seem just as well-placed to then self-ascribe the belief that *it will rain* if I so wishas if I was setting out from the start to answer a question about my mental life.

As such, I find Antonia Peacocke’s (2017) account of TM insufficient. She writes that judging that *p* when employing TM is an ‘embedded mental action’ as part of the broader intentional mental action of self-ascribing one’s belief. As such, ‘you already self-attribute a belief with the same content just in making this judgment’ (2017: 365). The transition from ‘*p*’ to ‘I believe that *p*’ isn’t really a substantial ‘move’ at all. The self-ascription is warranted by a combination of agential awareness in performing this intentional mental action and the conceptual grasp of belief required to use the method appropriately. Again, I have sympathies with this approach. But whatever underpins the epistemology of TM will also plausibly operate in cases like the above where we haven’t intentionally set out to learn of our beliefs.

**2 Sketching an answer**

So far I have introduced an epistemological question: in what way does answering the question ‘whether *p*?’ put one in the position to learn whether they believe that *p*? Primarily we might wonder how judging that *p* puts one in this position, but the broader process of reasoning and deliberating prior to the judgementmay well also play a role. I’ll now introduce doxastic agent’s awareness as a way of providing an answer. I first introduce the agent’s awareness framework (§2.1). I then set out doxastic agent’s awareness and how it might in fact be possible given that beliefs are states, not actions (§2.2). I end by answering the initial question thus illustrating the view’s importance (§2.3), before presenting further arguments in §3.

## 2.1 Agent’s awareness

Agent’s awareness is a pervasive phenomenon but, I will discuss, standardly assumed to have certain limits. Recall the opening scenario in which Sally is aware of opening the jar. This constitutes just one of many examples. When I dance, when I eat, when I walk, when I jump…. for the most part, I seem to be aware of what I am doing (or at least, trying to do). Contrast these with occasions in which I act without being aware, such as tapping my foot absentmindedly until someone tells me to stop, or unlocking my front door on automatic pilot.

Let me note several things about this awareness. That we sometimes have ‘agent’s awareness’ of what we are doing is a claim at the level of experience and phenomenology. It isn’t simply that we form beliefs about what we are doing, i.e., that we are aware of this in a purely epistemic sense. This is like how I can be said to be ‘aware’ of my laptop both in virtue of believing that my laptop is in front of me, and also in having a perceptual experience. Indeed, the latter often grounds the former. Likewise, we might think that our awareness of acting and of what we are doing can serve as the grounds for self-ascribing these actions. And as with perception, I will take it that the experiential awareness could be non-veridicial. You can (arguably) have an experience as if a laptop is in front of you when it isn’t. Likewise, I allow that you can have an experience as of doing something but where you fail to do anything at all, e.g., in the case of phantom limbs, or where you fail in performing that particular action type.

Agent’s awareness consists in two core elements. First, it involves an experience that you are doing *something.* Subjects experience this both when, say, opening jars and turning on lights. There is something it is like to do something and to exercise agency. We can contrast this with merely being acted on or when things happen to a subject, such as spasming or having someone else move their hand like a puppet.[[6]](#footnote-6) This is a first-personal phenomenon – it is an awareness that *you* are doing something. We can call this experience of acting the *sense of agency*.

Second, we should also appeal to an experience of doing *one thing in particular* (Marcel 2003, O’Brien 2007, Peacocke 2007, 2003, Pickard 2004). This would be a form of representational appearance with the content not just that you are doing something, but specifically, what it is that you are doing. Or rather, it is a representation that you are doing something under a particular mode of description - e.g. you might just be aware of *flicking a light switch* and not *short circuiting the house*. Positing an agent’s awareness of this sort is more demanding than simply the sense of agency, but I can note several points in support: (1) As Christopher Peacocke (2007) discusses, agent’s awareness of this sort enables us to demonstratively refer to a given action. I canrefer toa climbing move as ‘that move’ which seems to require an awareness of the move itself, and not just that I am doing *something* (to clarify, this is awareness *de re* not *de dicto*). (2) We seem to be aware of what precisely we are up to in any given moment. Think, for example, about performing many sub-actions as part of cooking: turning on the kitchen lights, opening the jar, and chopping aubergine in a precise way (not to thick and not too thin). We grasp what we are up to at each stage in the process. But even though we are acting intentionally, we are not explicitly reflecting on those intentions and neither do we have explicit beliefs about what we are doing. We do a great many things when cooking and it would require too much cognitive clutter to entertain conscious beliefs at every stage.

Agent’s awareness also arguably extends to *mental* actions. This topic warrants some time because it will help me when developing my positive proposal and also allow me to highlight the standard limit points of the agent’s awareness framework. Mental actions include thinking, deliberating, calculating, reasoning, and judging. These are things we do (and some fall under our intentional control). If we have agent’s awareness at all, it seems highly plausible it would extend in this direction. For example, compare calculating on paper with doing so in your head, or writing a syllogism down with figuring it out mentally. The mental actions seem similar in certain relevant respects to their physical counterparts from our own perspective.

The mental actions of thinking and judgement in particular have been discussed in this regard. For example, Campbell (1999) proposed that thought has a sense of agency. And Doyle (2020, 2019) argues that we have an agent’s awareness more broadly of thinking which grounds our knowledge that we are thinking one thought in particular. O’Brien (2007, 2005) and Christopher Peacocke (2009, 2007) have both argued that we have an agent’s awareness of judgement. They argue that we can have experiential seemings that represent us as making a particular judgement. Importantly, though, despite the tight relation between judgement and belief, these accounts still only posit an agent’s awareness of *judgement*. The closest to blurring this gap between agent’s awareness of mental action and related mental states is Antonia Peacocke’s (2017) account. As discussed earlier, she writes that when judging that *p* while employing TM, we therein self-ascribe the belief that *p* and are aware of this. But this is only to build in a richer content to our agent’s awareness in very specific situations. And it is to be aware of *self-ascribing* one’s belief, where this is a mental action of self-ascription. It is not to be aware of one’s beliefs in a way that stems from one’s agency over them in themselves.

It should be obvious why we wouldn’t initially think to extend the agent’s awareness framework to belief. Beliefs are standing *states*: believing is not an action we can perform or something we can be straightforwardly said to do. Tying our shoelace is something we do, as is judging. But believing is not something we do, or at least not in the same way.

Before continuing, it is worth noting that my claim is that we have an agent’s awareness of what we are doing, but I don’t want to make a stand here on whether it ultimately involves proprietary agentive phenomenology. This would be to say that agentive phenomenology is a distinct form of phenomenology which is irreducible to other elements of experience. Following Christopher Peacocke (2007) and O’Brien (2007), I think that we have an agent’s awareness that represents what we are doing and which also includes a proprietary sense of agency. But one might deny this. Perhaps we just have an awareness of what we are doing which ultimately reduces to visual, proprioceptive, and/or sensory experience. For example, Doyle (2020, 2019) is keen to avoid appealing to proprietary phenomenology in his account of agent’s awareness of thought, and argues that it is enough that one’s intentions infuse the many common-or-garden sensory experiences we enjoy when performing inner speech. This is important to note, since I can add qualifications to my own claim and one could cash out this paper’s broad message without appealing to proprietary phenomenology. And it is for this reason that I have talked about ‘appearances’ as opposed to ‘seemings’ which would imply a more committal position of this sort (although I do think that doxastic agents awareness consists in representational *seemings*).

## 2.2 Introducing doxastic agent’s awareness

In face of the above, I propose that we do in fact sometimes possess an agent’s awareness concerning our beliefs. In particular, we have an agent’s awareness of our beliefs in forming and sustaining them, or more colloquially, in making our mind and keeping it made up. Indeed, this is to be aware of our beliefs *as beliefs*, and not simply judged content which we also happen to believe.

How does it make sense to extend the agent’s awareness framework in such a literal way from an awareness of action to also encompass mental states?

The first step is to say that we can have an agent’s awareness of performing mental actions. As I suggested earlier, it is plausible to extend the framework in this way. The second is to say that such actions play an important agentive role regarding our beliefs, and that they help bring about the beliefs and/or keep them as they are. Regarding the nature of this agency, for the purposes of this paper I just want to claim that we have some sort of say over our beliefs via performing the relevant mental actions.

The third step is to say that experiential awareness can be more or less rich. We are often aware of one thing *as* another. For example, we can be aware of an apple *as* a Royal Gala apple. And this includes dispositional states and things that haven’t happened yet – e.g., we can be aware of a glass *as* fragile. This also applies to action – we can be aware of flicking a switch *as* turning on the lights.[[7]](#footnote-7) And in being aware of our action in a richer way, this could be to also be aware of thereby bringing about and sustaining a certain state of affairs. Examples could include: being aware of the light being on in virtue of turning on the light switch and keeping it pressed down; being aware of your arm being raised in virtue of raising it and keeping it raised; being aware of being in a squat position in virtue of holding and maintaining the squat. And, most relevantly for our purposes, this point about awareness being more or less richalso extends to *mental* action. For example, we can be aware of performing mental arithmetic *as* dividing the dinner bill.[[8]](#footnote-8) I propose that in reasoning and judging that *p*, we are aware of these mental actions in a richer sense: that of forming and sustaining our beliefs (i.e., making up our mind and keeping it made up). I understand this awareness in terms of some kind of representational appearance. On my account, the appearances associated with making up one’s mind are richer so as to already make reference to the resulting beliefs.

As such, doxastic agent’s awareness rests on mental action, yet I have claimed that we have an agentive awareness of belief *states* and I have emphasised the significance of this. This might seem like a ‘cop out’ and that the phenomenon on the table is not really an agent’s awareness of belief after all, but just of mental actions involved in making up our minds. There is a sense in which this is true. And yet, performing these actions is to exercise agency over our beliefs, and so the awareness is still grounded in our agentive relation to these states.

Indeed, I can still make this claim even while accepting a ‘process’ account of epistemic agency (which I do). According to process accounts, judging that *p* *causes* one to have the belief that *p*, as opposed to, say, directly constituting that belief. We might accordingly worry whether one could have agent’s awareness of a causal outcome of an action. After all, even if I have agent’s awareness of turning on the light, I still need to use visual perception like everyone else to see if the room is in fact illuminated. And so similarly, perhaps all I have is agent’s awareness of reasoning and judging, and not my resultant belief per se.[[9]](#footnote-9)

But we can be aware of our actions under modes of descriptions that make reference to what would be a causal outcome. I can be aware of flicking a switch as *turning on the light* even though many causal processes are at work between my pressing the switch and the light turning on. I can be aware of writing the letter ‘a’ even though my hand moving causes the graphene to be deposited on the page. In this way, I can be aware of causing certain results – the illuminated room and the letter on the page – in so causing them. It is not that I have to then also reflect on the resulting state of affairs separately. And similarly, I think that we can be aware of reasoning and judging *as forming and maintaining our beliefs*, even though this is a causal process. We are in this way aware of our beliefs, in virtue of so causing them to come about and endure.

I should note two points concerning the scope and limits of my proposal.

One, when we do have agent’s awareness of our beliefs, it will be when we engage in conscious reasoning, deliberation, and judgement, or at least this will be the case paradigmatically.[[10]](#footnote-10) I don’t want to say that we are aware in this way of our beliefs all the time. I can therefore allow that beliefs can be formed automatically, that reasoning can be unconscious, and even that we can engage in reasoning without experiencing it in this richer sense (though this isn’t to say that I myself endorse these claims – I reject the last two). This is important to emphasise. Gertler (2021b), for example, objects to Moran’s claim that we can’t coherently engage in deliberation at all unless we see ourselves as thereby directly forming our beliefs. Gertler responds that sometimes we can deliberate about whether *p* is true knowing that this won’t directly determine our beliefs and that we might need to engage in roundabout methods to bring them about. I can accept this, but maintain that there will be a difference at the phenomenological level between such cases and the normal ones. They constitute exceptions which illustrate the general course of events.

Two, we can be aware as of exercising agency and making up our mind without actually doing so, i.e., the proposed awareness can be non-factive. In this way, I allow that we can judge that *p* without believing that *p*, and might even mistakenly think that we believe that *p* on this basis. In these cases, using TM leads us astray, and our resulting self-ascription is warranted but not knowledgeable. This is like how a subject might think that they are switching on a light, and have an awareness *as if* they were doing so, when in fact faulty wiring means that the room remains dim.

## 2.3 Revisiting TM

Recall the puzzle regarding TM: how does answering a question about the external world put us in a position to knowledgeably answer a question about our own mental states? Indeed, our use of TM forms part of a broader phenomenon, whereby theoretical reasoning in general seem to put us in a position to self-ascribe the resulting beliefs.

Here I can appeal to doxastic agent’s awareness. In deliberating and judging we are aware of forming and sustaining beliefs*,* i.e., making up our mind and keeping it made up with regards to our *beliefs*. We have this awareness when employing TM, and also other occasions.

So in a paradigm case, for example:

Suppose that Sally wants to know whether she believes that it’s raining outside. She deliberates, considers the ominous forecast and impending clouds, and concludes that *it will rain*. From this she can then tell the questioner that she believes that *it will rain*. In deliberating and judging that *it will rain*, she is aware of making up her mind about whether it will rain. In judging that *it will rain*, she is thereby aware of forming a belief with that specific content. This awareness warrants her in self-ascribing the resulting belief.

The thought is that we are aware of making up our minds with regards to our *beliefs* right from the get go, and that this awareness serves as the rational grounds for self-ascribing these beliefs. We are aware of making up our mind in general (i.e., forming *a* belief) when reasoning. And then when we judge that *p*, we are aware of making up our mind and forming a belief with that specific content.

What about non-paradigm cases? First, sometimes we might employ TM and in that process form a belief for the first time, but without deliberating per se. E.g., suppose you ask Sally whether she believes that *it will rain* when she’s currently observing the grey clouds outside. In this case, she doesn’t need to deliberate about the matter, and can simply conclude that ‘it will rain; I believe that *it will rain*’. In this case, I would say that in judging that *p*, Sally is aware of thereby making up her mind and forming the belief that *p*.

Second, what about when we use TM to ascribe beliefs we formed a while ago? E.g., suppose you ask Sally whether she believes that *Smith is a good politician* and she happens to have believed that it is the case for years. Sally judges that *Smith is a good politician*, and does so without deliberating or forming the belief anew. She can nevertheless self-ascribe the belief. My gloss: in judging that *Smith is a good politician,* Sally is aware of keeping her mind made up with regards to *p*. She can revise the belief if needs be (i.e., in light of the evidence), like how I can be aware of holding a squat as something which I am doing and continue to have control over – I can stand up if necessary.

Let’s now return to the desiderata, to note my account’s advantages:

*1. TM is non-inferential.* We don’t reason from our doxastic agent’s awareness or use it as a premise from which we deliberate. And neither is TM inferential epistemically speaking on this account. Doxastic agent’s awareness warrants our self-ascription, and indeed, constitutes a reason for it. But this awareness does not constitute a premise that might itself be justified.

*2. The transition from ‘p’ to ‘I believe that p’ is rational by the subject’s own lights.* This is because in deliberating and concluding that *p*, subjects are aware of making up their minds on the matter, i.e., forming and sustaining a belief. This awareness serves as the rational grounds for the belief.

*3. TM forms part of a broader phenomenon.* The thought is that we often have doxastic agent’s awareness in virtue of deliberating and judging. Sally is aware of making up her mind even if she’s just normally deliberating about the weather and hasn’t set out to self-ascribe a belief using TM. This awareness explains how she’s nevertheless in a position to self-ascribe her belief and not simply a judgement. And we can develop this point in the following way (here I adapt Kriegel’s point(2009: 305-6) which he makes in the context of self-representation in cognition). It’s not even that we need prompting to self-ascribe our beliefs and that we’re making up our mind – something which could be explained by saying that we have tacit beliefs about what we are doing that would require prompting to bring to light. We can report that we are making up our minds *spontaneously*, even when we are not reflecting or setting out to learn of our mental states. As such, we seem to have a prior awareness of forming beliefs even when we aren’t employing the transparency method.

**3** Further argument: Agent’s awareness when deliberating

The following arguments are aimed at further supporting the two parts of my claim: that our awareness is rich enough to concern *making up our minds with regards to our beliefs* and also that this awareness is agentive in character. In contrast to the second claim, for example, one might appeal to other forms of experience and in particular, forms of cognitive phenomenology rather than anything agentive per se. For example, Valaris (2013) develops an account of TM whereby belief has a phenomenal character which we experience when judging that *p* and which warrants us in self-ascribing the belief that *p*. Also, Dorsch (2016, 2009) and Kriegel (2015: 67-8) argue that judging for a reason possesses a distinctive phenomenology. But they understand this phenomenology as having a wholly passive character. I have instead appealed to the agent’s awareness framework, and need to persuade the reader of this move.

1. We can contrast the normal case with one in which we clearly aren’t aware of reasoning under the richer description of making up our mind.[[11]](#footnote-11) One such instance might be that of epistemic akrasia, whereby the subject judges that *p* but nevertheless believes that not-*p*. Another is amnesia – even if the subject can form a belief, it wouldn’t be a normal standing belief that endures and plays the familiar roles in long-term action guidance. If subjects are aware of being in these conditions, they would presumably engage in reasoning with a very different outlook to normal, i.e., without any hope that the state would stick as a standing belief. In both cases, the whole exercise would have a sense of futility. This suggests that there is something distinctive about our experience in the normal case, namely, the sense that we are in fact exerting agency over our beliefs.

2. Another argument stems from the way in which subjects’ actions can seem rational from their perspective and the role that action awareness plays in this. Take the normal case in which I flick a light switch in a dark room or add paprika to bland food. To borrow Quinn’s (1993) language, it ‘makes sense’ to do these things, and they seem like ‘sensible’ things to do. Indeed, they make sense from my own perspective.

Contrast this with a case whereby Ido something intentionally but which nevertheless seemed nonsensical to me, like if kept adding salt to very salty food out of compulsion. Importantly, for my action to seem rational or irrational to me in that moment, I must be aware of what I am doing. And I seem to be aware in a way that does not necessarily require explicit reflection. This is because these actions feel nonsensical to me in that moment, or at least they can do. It’s not that I always need to explicitly reflect on them in order to figure out what I am doing and that there is in fact no reason to do it. Importantly, this awareness would have to be rich to a relevant degree and to concern what I am doing under a particular description. After all, flicking switches in and of itself isn’t what seems rational from my perspective, but rather, only in so far as in doing so, I am also *turning on the light*.

We can apply this observation to consider the mental actions involved in reasoning. Reasoning generally seems like a sensible thing to do, even in the moment and from our own perspective. It’s worth emphasising that reasoning is *practically* speaking a sensible thing to do. It is not just that our conclusions are (hopefully) epistemically rational and have something going for them as far as we are concerned in virtue of having evidence in their favour. And for reasoning to seem sensible in this way requires action awareness under the relevant mode of description. It wouldn’t seem that way if instead of seeing ourselves as forming a belief we only saw ourselves as forming a judgement on the matter. This is because beliefs, unlike judgements, are standing states with behavioural dispositions. Figuring out whether *p* is true is only significant if it leads to behavioural change. This is especially the case for deliberating about future states of affairs, such as if my favourite band are playing tomorrow - there’s little point to just deliberating for the sake of it if our answer won’t inform our plans and behaviour come the next day. Especially in cases such as these, simply forming a judgement on the matter wouldn’t be a sensible thing to do. So, another reason for thinking that we have doxastic agent’s awareness is that it’s required for deliberation to seem sensible to us.

3. As far as we are concerned, we don’t have to do anything further upon recognising evidence in order to acquire a belief, apart from in unusual cases. As such, reasoning about *p* and making up our mind at least normally seems to be *one and the same activity* for us. For example, suppose I read that a concert is tomorrow in a reliable newspaper and judge that the concert is tomorrow – I will thereby believe that it is tomorrow without further ado and without having to do anything else. And importantly, neither does it seem like a multi-step process as far as I am concerned. This isn’t to deny, though, that multiple other causal processes are involved at other levels of explanation. And neither is it to say that the process will be completed in anyone session – it might take some time to decide whether *p* is true. But, in reasoning we are in the process of making up our mind which we complete when we form our conclusion, and which we seem to be aware of.[[12]](#footnote-12) As further support, note that this is even the case in instances where it’s surely important that we form a belief and not a judgement, such as if we’re thinking about the concert *tomorrow*. If there was any question in normal cases, we would need extra reassurance in these situations. So, to sum up, the claim is that reasoning about *p* and making up our mind at least normally seem to be the same activity from our perspective, something which, in the absence of explicit beliefs, would be to have what I’m calling doxastic agent’s awareness.

**4 Conclusion**

I’ve argued that we have an agent’s awareness and sense of agency concerning our beliefs: a *doxastic agent’s awareness*. This is an awareness of forming and sustaining our beliefs in performing relevant mental actions, i.e., of making up our mind and keeping it made up. One upshot is epistemic, and I suggested that doxastic agent’s awareness warrants self-ascriptions made using the Transparency Method. This paper also bears significance for understanding agent’s awareness more broadly, such as if we are trying to understand the underlying mechanisms. This will also relate to our preferred account of doxastic agency itself, which I have remained neutral on this paper.[[13]](#footnote-13)

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1. Though see e.g., Hieronymi (2009, 2006) and Boyle (2011, 2009) who argue that believing is an activity or an active state. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See e.g. Christopher Peacocke’s (1998) oft-cited university administrator example. One might deny that such cases show that belief and judgement can disassociate, but if anything, accepting this makes my present task harder. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See respectively the ‘inner sense’ model of self-knowledge, e.g., Armstrong (2001) and McDonald (2014, 1998), and Ryle’s (2009 [1949]) inferentialism. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. While Byrne (2018) calls his account of TM an inferential, the justification isn’t transmitted in this normal way. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ‘An assumption of this sort would provide the right sort of link between the two questions. And now, let’s ask, don’t I make just this assumption, whenever I’m in the process of thinking my way to a conclusion about some matter? I don’t normally think that my assessment of the reasons in favor of P might have nothing to do with what my actual belief about P is, and it’s hard to imagine what my thinking would be like if I did normally take this to be an open question. And if I did think that my actual belief about the rain might be left quite untouched by my reflections on the weather-related reasons, what do I imagine could possibly close this gap for me?’ (Moran 2003: 405-6). For helpful exegesis, see Gertler (2021, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. There may well be multiple facets to this phenomenology such as a sense of agentive causation, freewill, or initiation. See e.g., Mylopoulos and Shepherd (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See the discussion in Pickard, though she just extends this to experiencing bodily movements as performing basic actions (2004: 220-2). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Antonia Peacocke (2017), although it’s not clear how committed she is to an *experiential* agent’s awareness. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Thank-you to Casey Doyle for pressing this. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. There might also be other ways of bringing about a belief in oneself that are sufficiently reliable to ground this awareness. For example, perhaps we can imagine a special button that implants beliefs in ourselves when we press it. I wouldn’t call this doxastic agency *proper* though, but rather, I would say that this is a case of indirectly bringing it about that you have a belief in yourself. At any rate, it’s not clear if there are any such methods currently available to us without further scientific advancement. Thank-you to an anonymous reviewer for this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For a parallel argument regarding thought insertion and the sense of agency for thought, see Campbell (1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This is also not to say that the judgement is itself the belief that *p*. I want to allow for the possibility that judging that *p* in this context just causesthe formation of the belief that *p*. But still, it is not that the subject herself has to do anything further for this to occur. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
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