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Action and Reaction: The Two Voices of Inner Speech

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RESUMEN

¿Es el habla interna una acción intencionada, algo que hacemos, o una reacción, algo que nos sucede? Este artículo argumentará que puede ser ambas cosas (aunque no al mismo tiempo). Algunas expresiones del habla interna son reactivas: son espontáneas, no requieren esfuerzo y no tenemos el control de que ocurran. Estas expresiones del habla interna no cumplen los criterios tradicionales para calificarlas como acciones intencionales. Pero algunas expresiones del habla interna son acciones intencionales, realizadas deliberadamente, con esfuerzo y con tanto control como cualquier otra acción intencional. Cuando, por ejemplo, deliberamos, las emisiones del habla interna son las acciones básicas mediante las cuales llevamos a cabo la acción no básica de deliberar.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *habla interna, deliberación, acción intencional, acción básica, acción no básica.*

ABSTRACT

Is inner speech an intentional action, something we do, or a reaction, something that happens to us? This paper will argue that it can be both, (although not at the same time). Some inner speech utterances are reactive: they are spontaneous, they require no effort, and we are not in control of their occurring. These inner speech utterances fail to meet the traditional criteria for qualifying as intentional actions. But some inner speech utterances are intentional actions, performed deliberately, effortfully and with as much control as any other intentional action. When we deliberate, for example, inner speech utterances are the basic actions by which we bring about the non-basic action of deliberating.

KEYWORDS: *Inner Speech, Deliberation, Intentional Action, Basic Action, Non-Basic Action.*

Gregory (2020) argues that inner speech is ‘reactive’, meaning, roughly, that it occurs as an automatic, spontaneous and uncontrolled response to the context a subject finds herself in. For example, on seeing new leaves on the trees in the park the words “Spring has arrived!” just pop into a subject’s head. He argues that inner speech utterances like this fail to meet the three criteria which leading action theories demand an event must meet if it is to qualify as an action. Specifically, and unlike

genuine actions, inner speech utterances like this are not performed for a reason (1), they are not under the control of the subject (2), and they don't involve any effort (3). I agree with Gregory that some inner speech utterances are reactive in this sense, but not that all of them are (section I).¹

I use the term 'episode of deliberation' to cover a broad range of conscious mental activities that a subject can perform silently, such as deliberating, reflecting, reasoning, considering, evaluating, and so on.² The characteristic of an episode of deliberation as I am using the term is that it has a purpose: to come to a conclusion, to reach a decision, to solve a problem, etc. Episodes of deliberation, I suggest (section II), typically involve inner speech utterances, the function of which is to help the subject bring about the purpose of the episode. For example, if I am in a restaurant, handed a menu and invited to choose a starter and a main course, I am likely to conduct a little dialogue in my head: "What is in season now?" "Is fish likely to be good here, so far from the sea?" "Does that starter go with that main course?" And so on. I will likely have to break off from conversation with my companions in order to concentrate on the task of 'trying to choose'. These inner speech utterances, I argue, are a kind of action.

Following Mele (2009), pp. 18-37, I emphasise the distinction between 'trying to x ' and 'trying to bring it about that I x '.³ Some kinds of 'trying to x ' are not, strictly speaking, actions; 'trying to fall asleep', for example, isn't an action, because falling asleep is something that happens to me. By contrast, 'trying to bring it about that I fall asleep' *is* an action, since there are things I can do to bring it about – counting sheep, for example, or taking a sleeping pill. So, the action of 'trying to bring it about that I x ' is not a *basic* action (such as the action 'raising my arm'), because it requires the subject to perform other actions to execute it. I argue that episodes of deliberation satisfy two of the three criteria for being actions, albeit non-basic actions (section III).

Where x is the purpose of an episode of deliberation, I suggest, one of the basic actions I typically make to execute the (non-basic) action of 'trying to bring it about that I x ', is to perform an utterance in inner speech. For example, to perform the action of 'trying to bring it about that I choose what to order from the menu' I might make the kind of inner speech utterances in the 'menu dialogue' above. In section IV I argue, first, that speaking *overtly* is very often a basic action, and second, that there is no reason to think that inner speech is not also a basic action, just because it is speech which is not vocalised. In section V I ad-

dress the third criterion for qualifying as an action, the question of control, before concluding in section VI.

I. REACTIVE INNER SPEECH

Gregory (2020) argues that inner speech utterances are not actions and therefore not speech acts. (I will address his own exception to this generalisation at the end of this section.) His argument involves considering three leading theories of action and then showing how our inner speech utterances fail to qualify as actions on any of them. The different action theories claim, very roughly: 1) actions are things we do which can be explained by our reasons for doing them [Davidson (1963)]; or 2) actions are things we do which are under our guidance or control [Frankfurt (1978)]; or 3) actions are things we can try to do (and also fail to do, despite trying) [O’Shaughnessy (1973), and Hornsby (1980)].

I.1 *Actions are things we do which can be explained by our reasons for doing them*

We can’t, Gregory claims, provide *reasons* for why an inner speech utterance takes place. He argues that our attempts to do so are invariably confabulations, and he does it with the help of the following illustration.

Suppose you are walking through a park one day towards the end of winter. Noticing some green leaves, you produce the inner speech utterance, ‘Spring’s starting’, without having consciously decided to do so. You then find yourself wondering why you produced the utterance. It seems like there are two things which you might say:

1. ‘I wanted to make the propositional content that spring is starting salient in my consciousness and I believed that producing the inner speech utterance would achieve this.’
2. ‘I don’t know. I just did.’ [Gregory 2020] p. 64].

If 1) was true, then you would be describing an action, because you would be providing a reason, in terms of your beliefs and desires, for why you uttered what you did. But 1) is very implausible, a confabulation in fact. The only plausible account is given by 2). Note that in this example you might well *rationalise* what you said, and *guess*, after the event, that the sight of green leaves was in some way responsible for your utterance. But this is not the same thing as explaining your reasons for saying it; an explanation in terms of reasons would involve describing the beliefs and

desires which caused you to say it. Another way of putting the same point is to say that the inner speech utterance in this example was not intentional.

I.2 *Actions are things we do which are under our guidance, or control*

According to Frankfurt (1978), for something to be an action it must be possible for the subject to adjust what they are doing while they are doing it. To qualify, such adjustments must be attributable to the subject, and not to some automatic mechanism possessed by the subject. For example, if I get up from my chair to get a beer from the fridge and notice the dog is in my way, I will take steps to go around the dog in order to fulfil my intention. Compare this with what happens if I get up and accidentally trip over the dog and have to make rapid adjustments to prevent myself falling on my face. The former behaviour demonstrates control by me, the subject. The latter behaviour demonstrates control by my automatic reflexes; what guides my movements is a reflex which kicks in automatically in order to prevent injury. *Speech acts* are under our guidance in the required sense; they are adjusted by the subject over the course of the speech episode, both in response to hearing our own words and to the reactions, as we perceive them, of the listeners to those words. (I will say more about overt speech in section 2.) Inner speech utterances, by comparison, do not involve the bodily movements involved in speech acts, according to Gregory, but only “the generation of phonological representations” (p. 68). Since we have no control of the processes involved in forming phonological representations, we have no control over inner speech utterances. So according to this theory of action, inner speech utterances are not actions.

In fact, there is very good evidence that some of the bodily *processes* (if not the bodily movements) involved in externalised speech acts are also involved in inner speech. Most parties agree that the ‘motor planning system’ which coordinates the execution of bodily movements (such as raising your arm) is also in play in coordinating the bodily movements involved in overt speaking – the movements of the larynx, tongue, throat, mouth, breathing, etc. (Very briefly, the motor planning system is a self-monitoring sub-system which involves, among other things, generating a ‘copy’ of the relevant motor commands required for the movements involved in a particular action, and then using that copy to generate a ‘prediction’ of the outcome of executing those motor commands. If the prediction doesn’t match the intention which guided the generation of the original motor commands, the system can make an ad-

justment to them *even before they are executed*.) It is widely accepted among scientists of speech [e.g. Loevenbruck *et al.* (2018)] that the same motor planning system is in play during episodes of *inner* speech, but that just before vocalisation takes place the instruction to execute the movements required is aborted. Disorders of this system are thought to be responsible for episodes of auditory verbal hallucination (AVH) [e.g., Jones & Fernyhough (2007)]. On this account, the activity of inner speech is in important ways continuous with the activity of overt speech. However, this need not be a point against Gregory. He could perfectly well agree with all this and still maintain that since no feature of the motor planning system is under the subject's control his point about lack of control still stands.

I.3 *Actions are things we can try (and fail) to do*

In opposition to this theory of action, Gregory's claim is that our inner speech utterances do not require any effort; we don't try to produce our inner monologue, it just happens. In fact, it is hard to imagine how we could *prevent* it from happening. Furthermore, we never have the experience of failing to make an inner speech utterance we wanted to make, or of failing to make one the way we actually made it. The best explanation for why we never have the experience of failing, he argues, is that we never have the experience of trying.

To recap this section so far, Gregory offers arguments for why inner speech utterances fail to meet the criteria for being an action as stipulated by three leading theories of actions: being done for a reason, being under the subject's control, and being something the subject tries to do. So, what are inner speech episodes if they are not actions? Gregory's proposal is that these kinds of utterances are neither actions nor mere reflexes but rather, "more like automatic *reactions*". What we are reacting to is the context which we find ourselves in at the time of the inner speech utterance, where context includes both the external environment (as in the "Spring's starting" example above) and our other mental states:

[T]he automatic process that produces them is to a significant extent sensitive to context. In this way, the utterances of our ordinary internal monologues are like unbidden imaginings and unbidden memories: events which take place in the mind, which we would not consider actions, but which are closely related to our other standing and occurrent mental states [Gregory (2020), p.71].

Following Gregory, I will call this kind of inner speech "reactive inner speech". He goes on to argue that although inner speech utteranc-

es are not actions, nevertheless we *treat* them as speech acts. His argument for this is that unless we *treated* them as speech acts we would not experience them as meaningful, but merely as “auditory images”, sounds without meanings. He draws an analogy with overt speech acts.

If someone produces an audible utterance but does not take themselves to be performing a speech act – if they believe that they do not have intentions of the appropriate kind – then they must believe that they are just producing sounds... In parallel, if someone produces an inner speech utterance but does not take themselves to be acting on intentions of the relevant kind, then they must believe that they are just producing auditory imagery, not a linguistically meaningful utterance [Gregory (2020) pp. 60-61].

I have two reservations about this argument. First, while it is true that we experience inner speech utterances as meaningful, and not as meaningless sounds, it is not obvious that the only explanation for this is that we treat them as intentional. No further argument is offered by Gregory for the claim that we do. Maybe inner speech utterances are meaningful for some other reason. Isn't it possible that the cognitive processes involved in speech production, whether silent or voiced, *guarantee* that inner speech utterances are experienced as meaningful, without that experience of meaningfulness having to be underwritten by the additional psychological mechanism of treating the words as intentional? For example, Vicente & Jorba (2019) argue that when the motor planning system is involved in speech production it not only produces a prediction of the *sounds* that executing the motor plan will produce, but it also produces a prediction of the *meaning* of those sounds. Since there is very good evidence that the motor planning system *is* also involved in the production of inner speech (see section I.2 above for details) this would explain why we experience inner speech utterances as meaningful, without the additional step of our having to treat them as intentional.

Second, the claim that we treat reactive inner speech utterances as intentional is puzzling on its face. In practice, it seems to me, the defining characteristic of *reactive* inner speech utterances is not only that they are not intentional, but that we don't, *in fact*, treat them as intentional either. Rather, we treat them exactly as Gregory describes our experience of them – spontaneous, automatic, “unbidden”, and as utterances “we do not consciously plan to produce” (p. 1).

A more significant worry is the following. I said earlier that I would address Gregory's claim that there are exceptions to the general rule that inner speech utterances are not actions, and that's what I will do now.

He allows that “you can consciously decide to produce an inner speech utterance and then do so; the resulting utterance is an action” (p. 57). For example, a subject might consciously decide to say to herself in inner speech, ‘Grass is green’, and then do it. We can all agree with Gregory that in this case the inner speech utterance ‘Grass is green’ is an action. But I want to draw attention to what would have to occur before that action is performed. By hypothesis, this is a conscious decision to perform an inner speech utterance, but how did that decision come to be conscious? Presumably it took the form of an inner speech utterance, such as: “I am now going to say to myself in inner speech ‘Grass is green’”. (For convenience, let’s shorten this inner speech utterance to “I’m now going to say ‘S’”). But now we can ask about *that* inner speech utterance: was it merely reactive?

There seem to be two possibilities. The first is that the utterance “I’m now going to say ‘S’” arose spontaneously as an episode of reactive inner speech. I don’t want to deny this possibility, and in a moment, I will illustrate how that could, in principle, happen. A second possibility is that the decision was the result of thinking about a problem and coming to a conclusion, the result of which was the decision to say, “I’m now going to say ‘S’”. The worry is that the second possibility is not only much more likely but is not accommodated by Gregory’s analysis of inner speech as reactive.

I will expand on the second possibility shortly. For now, let me provide an example of how a conscious decision (including, by implication, the decision to say something to oneself in inner speech) could, in principle, be the result of nothing more than a series of reactive inner speech utterances. Let’s take Gregory’s own example from earlier, of the subject who notices signs of Spring and says to herself “Spring’s starting”. It seems to me possible that this reactive inner speech utterance might trigger a series of other inner speech utterances which result in the formation of an intention. For example:

- a) Spring’s starting
- b) Spring bulbs will be coming up about now
- c) I planted some Spring bulbs last Autumn
- d) I wonder if they are coming up now
- e) I must remember to check my garden to see if they are coming up now

In this case the inner speech monologue resulted in the formation of the intention to remember to check the garden to see if the bulbs are coming up. In the light of this example, we should allow for the possibility that a series of purely reactive inner speech utterances *could* result in the formation of an intention to say “I’m now going to say ‘S’” in inner speech. (Perhaps this would only happen to a philosopher with speech acts on his mind, but that’s beside the point. In principle, it could happen.)

Now let’s turn to the second possibility – the possibility that the formation of an intention was the result of setting out to solve a problem and coming to a conclusion. In this example the subject makes the following series of utterances in inner speech, one after another:

- i. If it’s likely to rain I had better take an umbrella
- ii. Does it look like rain?
- iii. It looks like it might rain
- iv. I will take my umbrella

In this case, not only did the series of inner speech utterances *result* in the formation of an intention, but the whole series was intentional *from the start*. The intention formed at the end of the episode was not an incidental feature of the episode, as in the first case we considered, but rather *its very purpose*. The utterances which comprise this episode of inner speech are all connected and guided by the same intention – the intention to decide whether to take an umbrella. The intention motivates and guides the succession of utterances in a way that is absent in the case of episodes of reactive inner speech, where the succession is merely experienced as the result of spontaneous association. While I conceded, above, that in principle the inner speech utterance “I’m now going to say ‘S’” *might* have occurred purely reactively, I suggest that it is much more likely to have occurred as a result of a conscious intention. In the next section I will have more to say about episodes of inner speech that have this characteristic, and the way in which they are intentional.

Gregory’s account has it that most inner speech, with the exception already discussed, is reactive. If, as I argue, some inner speech utterances qualify as intentional actions, then that account is at best incomplete. But not only does his account leave out a whole class of inner speech utterances, it leaves out what are surely the ones we care most about. Intentional inner speech is the kind we value most because the decisions we make based on our purposeful silent reflection are some of the most im-

portant decisions we make, decisions which shape our lives and sustain our sense of agency. It's because so much of what I do is based on what I have decided, based on my reflection, that I feel such a strong sense of ownership and authorship for my actions – my agency, in other words. So, the criticism of Gregory's account of inner speech is twofold: first, it ignores a large class of inner speech utterances which are intentional actions; second, these are the inner speech utterances that underpin our sense of ourselves as rational agents.

II. EPISODES OF DELIBERATION AND INNER SPEECH

In this section I argue that when we engage in what I am calling 'episodes of deliberation', inner speech is often, perhaps typically, involved. As previously mentioned, I am using the term 'episode of deliberation' to cover a broad range of silent, conscious, mental activities including, for example: deliberating, reflecting, considering, working something out. The following scenarios illustrate what I have in mind when I use the term 'episode of deliberation':

- a) You are seated in a restaurant and are handed a menu. Over the next 5 minutes you peruse the menu and come to a decision about what to order.
- b) You have job offers from three organisations, each offering different opportunities and benefits. You have a few days to mull them over and decide which one to accept.
- c) Your partner has received an exceptional job offer in another country and she is determined to accept it. You don't want to leave your own job to live in another country, but you don't want to separate from your partner either. What do you do?

If I try and imagine myself in these scenarios, I find it inconceivable that I would *not* engage in inner speech as I deliberated about what to do. In fact, I find it hard to understand what it could mean to *consciously* deliberate in these situations *without* engaging in inner speech; what would I be conscious *of* as I deliberated, if not sentences, or at least words, in my natural language? But maybe the claim that inner speech is *necessarily* involved in *all* episodes of conscious deliberation is too strong. After all, some people claim they don't experience inner speech at all; others claim they experience so-called Unsymbolized Thinking – thinking without

words. So, I will restrict my claim to a more modest one: for at least for some people, episodes of deliberation of the kinds illustrated above just do, as a matter of empirical fact, typically involve the production of inner speech. The only argument I am offering for this claim is that I am one of them, and that it seems very unlikely I am the only one.

IV. EPISODES OF DELIBERATION AS NON-BASIC ACTIONS

In this section I argue that episodes of deliberation are a kind of action, and that they satisfy two of the criteria for qualifying as actions as described in section 1: they are performed for a reason, and they involve trying (and sometimes failing). The first of these criteria – being performed for a reason – is the easiest to argue for. The idea that we engage in episodes of deliberation for a reason – to come to a decision or a conclusion, to make a choice, to solve a problem, to find an answer – is arguably a conceptual truth. There might be some close cousins of deliberation – such as pondering, wondering, speculating – which do not include in their essential nature the goal of coming to a conclusion. But we can exclude them from consideration for now and concern ourselves solely with episodes of deliberation which *by definition* have the goal of coming to a conclusion. In all three of the scenarios above, for example, the deliberation is purposeful – the subject intends to make a choice or come to a decision. The intention to choose, or make a decision, is what motivates and guides the entire episode, and like any other intention it can be explained by reference to a subject's beliefs and desires.

The other two criteria for qualifying as an action – being under the control of the subject and being something the subject can try (and fail) to do – are more challenging. I will address the issue of trying first, and address the issue of control in section 5. Mele (2009), pp. 18-37, makes an important distinction between 'trying to x ' and 'trying to bring it about that I x '. In the introduction I illustrated this idea with 'falling asleep', but this might be thought irrelevant to the subject of deliberation, since falling asleep is not a mental activity. What about the purely mental activity of trying to remember something? The example Mele uses is 'trying to think of seven animals beginning with 'g''. Suppose, in response to this challenge, a subject (I will follow Mele in calling her Gail) thinks 'goat'. There is nothing more to Gail's thinking 'goat' than Gail becoming conscious of the word "goat". Becoming conscious of the word "goat" is something that happens to Gail, not something she does. And if that's true of 'goat' then it's true of all the other six animals starting with 'g' that Gail thinks of. So,

if thinking of seven animals starting with ‘g’ involves seven events which happen to Gail, one for each animal remembered, none of which is an action, then one might conclude that the entire episode of ‘trying to think of seven animals starting with ‘g’ is an event which happens to Gail and is not an action. Indeed, that is what Mele *does* conclude.

1. Gail’s thinking of ‘goat’ (for example) is not an action.
2. Gail’s thinking of seven animal names starting with ‘g’ (her 7-ing) is not an action [Mele (2009), p. 29].

However, there are two actions Gail does perform, according to Mele.

3. Gail’s trying to bring it about that she 7-s is an intentional action.
4. Gail’s bringing it about that she 7-s (her B7-ing) is an intentional action [Mele (2009), p. 29].

Gail can try to bring it about that she 7-s by doing various things. To begin with, she might not have to do anything at all – ‘goat’, ‘gorilla’ and ‘giraffe’ just come to mind, effortlessly. Then she gets stuck. It might occur to her that she has only been thinking of mammals, and she has not thought about fish. She starts to focus on fish, and this gives her ‘goldfish’, ‘guppy’ and ‘grouper’. Then she changes tack and focuses on insects and comes up with ‘gnat’. The idea is that Gail doesn’t just wait for more ‘animals beginning with ‘g’ to occur to her – she takes actions, mental actions, to ‘try to bring it about that animals beginning with ‘g’ occur to her, and that fact makes ‘trying to bring it about that she 7-s’ an intentional action.

Because Gail’s action of ‘trying to bring it about that she 7-s’ is achieved by performing other actions, it does not count as a basic action. A basic action, such as ‘raising my right arm’, is an action that is not achieved by performing another action. I will expand on this idea in the next section. Before that, I want to offer a second example from Mele, where he describes his strategy for trying to remember what he had for dinner three nights ago.

I have various memory-priming strategies for doing this. One is to ask myself (silently) what I had for dinner on that day and to keep my attention focused on that question. Normally, the answer does not come to mind straightaway, and I pursue the memory-priming strategy further by asking myself (silently) what other things I did on that day. An alternative strategy is to ask myself (silently) what I had for dinner last night and, if

the answer comes to mind, work backward—which requires keeping my attention focused on my task [Mele (2009), p. 19].

Notice that in this example Mele uses the expression “ask myself (silently)” three times. My suggestion is that Mele brings about the non-basic action of trying to remember what he had for dinner three nights ago by performing the basic actions of asking himself questions in inner speech. In what sense are these inner speech utterances basic? Well, for one thing, they cannot form any part of a conscious prior intention, on pain of incoherence. The argument for that is as follows:

- i. Every inner speech utterance is individuated by its content.
- ii. A particular utterance’s content can’t figure in a prior intention to make the inner speech utterance, because if the content was part of the intention, it would already be there, “available for consideration and adoption for intentional production” [Strawson (2003), p. 235].
- iii. If the content was “already there” the subject obviously didn’t choose it, and it can’t have been part of an intention to make the inner speech utterance.⁴

In other words, it makes no sense to say that when we say something to ourselves, we had a prior conscious intention to say exactly what we said before we said it, since then we need to explain how the content of that intention became part of the intention, and a regress beckons. Other reasons for thinking these inner speech utterances are basic will be offered below. For now, I only want to note that, despite trying to remember what he had for dinner three nights ago by performing these basic actions, Mele might fail. (Consider the times you have tried to remember the name of someone and, despite your best efforts, you fail.) If Mele succeeds, however, we can say that his ‘bringing it about that he remembered’ was an intentional action. (This is equivalent to his claim 4. above, that ‘Gail’s bringing it about that she 7-s (her B7-ing) is an intentional action’.)

To recap: this section has argued that episodes of deliberation qualify as actions on two major theories of action: because they are intentional by definition, and because they meet the criterion of being something a subject tries, and might fail, to do. The third possible criterion for being an action – being under the control of the subject – will be addressed in section 5, once I have clarified what it means for an inner speech utterance to be a basic action.

IV. INNER SPEECH UTTERANCES AS BASIC ACTIONS

My claim is that episodes of deliberation, as I have defined them, should be understood in the same way as Mele's remembering what he had for dinner three nights ago. That is, they are non-basic actions which are brought about by performing basic actions. In this section I argue that inner speech utterances produced as part of an episode of deliberation are basic actions. To argue for this involves two further claims. First, that speaking *overtly* is very often a basic action. Second, that there is no reason to think that inner speech is not also a basic action, just because it is speech which is not vocalised.

In arguing for my first claim – that speaking overtly is often a basic action – I am borrowing from Hornsby (2005).⁵ When a subject does something for a reason, she typically draws on knowledge of how to do it. For example, suppose what I do is travel to the university; I might do it *by* taking the bus; I take the bus *by* waiting at the bus stop, and I get to the bus stop *by* walking to it. Hornsby calls such knowledge “procedural”; we do one thing *by* doing another thing which we know how to do. There might be different buses I could catch to the university, and different routes by which I could walk to different bus stops; I might need to know a whole series of procedural facts to get something done. But the number of things a subject must know to get something done ultimately comes to an end; eventually there are things the subject just does ‘directly’. We would not say, for example (except as some kind of joke) that the subject walked to the bus stop by (following the procedure of) putting one foot in front of the other. We would say, rather, that walking is something she is able *simply to do*.

As with walking, so with talking. Once we have learned a language, speaking is an action we are simply able to do. We have no more knowledge about the muscle movements involved in producing the words we utter when we speak them, than we have about the muscle movements involved in moving our bodies when we walk. And the idea of *basicness* that's involved here is not confined to the *physical* things we do when we speak. We also have no procedural knowledge about the grammatical and syntactical principles which we put into practice when we speak – or if we do, we learn that knowledge *after* we have learned the language. Knowledge of it is certainly not a prerequisite to being a competent language user.

Speakers can rely on the fact that producing meaningful things [i.e., external utterances] is something that they are able to simply do. When a

speaker says that *p*, there need be nothing such that she intentionally does it and says that *p* by doing it.... This elicits the force of the idea that we voice our thoughts directly [Hornsby (2005) p. 118].

What it means to say that we “voice our thoughts directly”, I suggest, is that we should not think that two actions are involved, the action of forming thoughts and the action of voicing them. Rather, we are performing one action under two descriptions: uttering the words and thinking the thought.

It might be objected that, at least sometimes, we *choose* our words. I agree. But I suggest that on those occasions we are making the choice of our words the subject of deliberation. If this occurs during an overt episode of deliberation it should be understood as a silent deliberation within a vocalised one – and as such it counts as another non-basic action in its own right. It is the non-basic action of trying to bring it about that the most appropriate word in the circumstances is selected. The basic action by which this non-basic action is performed is the action of saying the word that comes to mind. If a subject silently deliberates on which word to use in the circumstances, she can’t *decide to select* a particular word to use, any more than she can *decide to remember* a particular animal beginning with ‘g’, for all the same reasons. A better word will either present itself to her or it won’t. If she is successful in ‘trying to bring it about that she chooses the most appropriate word in the circumstances’, then she will simply utter the word that comes to her in the circumstances and her uttering that word is the basic action by which she performs the non-basic one.

So much for my first claim - that speaking overtly is a basic action. What about the second – that there is no reason to think that inner speech, unlike overt speech, is not a basic action, just because it is speech which is not vocalised? In the case of overt speech, the reason a speaker has for speaking is usually to communicate or express something to someone else. But as I have already argued, when a subject is engaged in an episode of silent deliberation she too has a reason for speaking (albeit to herself) – her reason is to try to bring it about that she *x*-s, where *x* is to reach a conclusion, solve a problem, come to a decision, and so on. In the case of overt speech, the subject has an intention to achieve a goal (or goals) and fulfils that goal by (performing the basic action of) speaking out loud; in the case of inner speech the subject also has an intention and fulfils that goal by (performing the basic action of) speaking silently. Once again, the fact that the motor planning system is engaged in both

kinds of utterance (see section I.2) further undermines any reason for thinking that the cases are not comparable.

V. CONTROL

I still need to offer an argument for how an episode of deliberation meets the criterion of being an action, albeit a non-basic action, by being under the control of the subject; I will do that in this section. Recall how, in section I.2 above, I characterised Frankfurt's (1978) definition of control as follows: 'for something to be an action it must be possible for the subject to adjust what they are doing while they are doing it. To qualify, such adjustments must be attributable to the subject, and not to some automatic mechanism possessed by the subject'. If control is characterised this way, then episodes of deliberation are clearly under the subject's control. As the action unfolds – as the subject continues to try to bring it about that she *x*-es – she can adjust the way she performs it. For example, as we saw in the example of a subject 'trying to bring it about that she thinks of animals beginning with 'g'', she can focus first on mammals, then change to focusing on fish, then to insects, and so on.

Of course, the basic actions by which the subject performs her non-basic actions are attributable to automatic systems – whatever systems are responsible for selecting and organising into meaningful utterances the words which comprise her inner speech. But they still qualify as under the control of the subject, precisely because they are performed in the service of the non-basic action. To demand a more stringent criterion of control would be to fail to appreciate that the execution of *any* intentional action rests, ultimately, on the subject being able to simply do something, because she knows how. We should not insist that every constituent of an intended action is itself intended, on pain of a regress – as noted in section III above. So, we should not insist that every basic action, when it is a constituent of a non-basic action, is itself intended.⁶ My raising my arm because I intend to attract the waiter counts as an action under my control even though I don't first form an intention to raise it, i.e., an action distinct from my intention to attract the waiter. (Were my arm to rise in the same way in the absence of an intention to attract the waiter – in a spasm, say – my arm rising would not count as a genuine action.) Similarly, if I produce an inner speech utterance because I intend to try to bring it about that I decide something, the utterance counts as an action under my control even though I don't first form an intention to make the utterance, i.e., an action distinct from my intention

to try to bring it about that I decide something. On my account, the production of an inner speech utterance stands in the same relation to an intentional *mental* non-basic action (such as trying to decide something) as raising my arm stands to the intentional *bodily* non-basic action of, say, trying to attract the waiter.

Of course, there are important differences too. The production of an inner speech utterance involves cognitive resources, events, and processes, which are not involved in the action of raising an arm. But that doesn't make any difference to the question of control, since all these cognitive resources, events and processes are managed by sub-systems; they are as much, and as little, under a subject's control as the bodily systems involved in raising an arm. There is another important difference, related to the first. When a subject raises her arm with the intention of attracting the attention of the waiter, whether she succeeds or fails depends on something *external* to her person - the waiter: will he notice her, or not? By contrast, when a subject utters something in inner speech with the intention of trying to bring it about that she comes to a decision, whether she succeeds or fails depends on something *internal* to her person - her sub-personal cognitive resources: will they generate an utterance that gets her closer to achieving her intention, or not? Despite this difference, the two cases have something in common: success or failure is dependent on a response from something not under the subject's control.

Before concluding, I want to dispel any impression I may have given that *deliberation* is the only use we make of active inner speech. Numerous other functions of inner speech have been proposed; I will briefly mention two. Carruthers (2009) argues that we typically don't know our communicative intentions before we hear our own words. On his view, since we don't have direct introspective access to our mental states, we must hear and interpret our own speech in order to understand what our communicative intentions are. This is inner speech as "communicative": the speech *communicates* to the subject her own communicative intentions. Deamer (2021), by contrast, argues that while this might be true of some instances of inner speech (she prefers the term "self-talk"), a great deal of self-talk is not communicative but rather "expressive", in the sense that it *reveals*, rather than describes, the state of mind the subject is in.

Saying "Ouch!" reveals that I am in pain, it doesn't describe me as in pain (unlike saying "I'm in pain" does). Similarly, saying "To hell with you!" reveals that I am unhappy with what you've done, it doesn't describe my unhappiness (unlike saying "I'm unhappy with what you've done"). Simi-

larly saying to yourself “Come on!”, or “I’m such an idiot!”, or whatever, reveals something about you [Deamer (2021) p. 431].

Deamer makes the point that as skilled language users we *learn* to be expressive in this way, we gain intentional control over our ability to use inner speech to reveal to ourselves our own state of mind. Lack of space prevents me from developing these ideas here. The point for now is that *all* these active kinds of inner speech – communicative, expressive and deliberative – play an important epistemic role in agentive self-knowledge. Even *reactive* inner speech plays this role: my disposition to spontaneously utter something in inner speech can reveal to me – if I attend to it - something about my interests, attitudes, and plans.⁷

VI. CONCLUSION

Some inner speech utterances are reactive: they are spontaneous, they require no effort, and we are not in control of their occurring. These inner speech utterances fail to meet the leading criteria for qualifying as intentional actions. But some inner speech utterances are genuine actions, performed deliberately, effortfully and with as much control as any other intentional action. For example, when we engage in an episode of deliberation, we are performing the non-basic action of trying to bring it about that we achieve some cognitive goal – coming to a decision, reaching a conclusion, solving a problem, etc. The action of trying to bring this goal about is achieved by performing basic actions - making inner speech utterances. An inner speech utterance, when made in this context, stands in the same relation to the intentional action of trying to reach a decision as raising an arm has to the intentional action of trying to, say, attract a waiter. That is, it stands in the relation of a basic action to a non-basic action.

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NOTES

¹ Gregory writes, “My focus is on the inner speech utterances which form parts of the ordinary inner monologue; the ones which accompany our everyday activities; the ones we produce without seeming to think about it” [Gregory (2020), p. 57]. Strictly speaking, this leaves open the possibility that he thinks there are other kinds of inner speech which might not be ‘reactive’. He is not explicit about this.

² Henceforth, all references to ‘deliberation’ should be taken to mean ‘silent conscious deliberation’, unless otherwise stated.

³ Mele’s use of the phrase “bringing something about” can also be found in Kent Bach, who writes that “actions are not events but instances of a certain relation, the relation of bringing about (or making happen), whose terms are agents and events” [Bach (1980), p. 114].

⁴ There seems to be widespread agreement that we can’t choose the content of our thoughts. O’Shaughnessy, for example, describes the idea as “at once omnipotent, barren, self-refuting and logically impossible” [O’Shaughnessy (2000), p. 89].

⁵ Which is not to imply that she endorses any of the arguments in this paper.

⁶ Jenkins (2021) makes a related argument for the claim that even *reasoning* is a kind of action. If we insist that each “sub-action” involved in a chain of reasoning, such as its constituent judgments and inferences, must be under the agent’s control, we generate a dilemma. Either the agent controls each sub-action by performing a distinct prior action, in which case we are off on a regress, or the agent controls each sub-action *without doing anything else*, in which case action is just mysterious. “The mistake is to think that extended actions [such as chains of reasoning] must always be made up of constituent sub-actions which can be seen as such *independently from their place in more extended action*” [Jenkins (2021), p. 16, emphasis in the original].

⁷ I am grateful for the comments of two anonymous referees who both encouraged me to say something about the epistemic self-knowledge aspect of inner speech utterances.

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