

Phil 490: *Consciousness and the Self*
Handout [8]
David Rosenthal: *Two Concepts of Consciousness*

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David Rosenthal: *A Theory of Consciousness*

§ The Goal:

1. To refute this theory: Consciousness is intrinsic to being an intentional or sensory mental state; one cannot understand what it is for states to have sensory or intentional character without knowing what it is for those states to be conscious.

2. To argue: If such consciousness were intrinsic to sensory or intentional character, no theoretical understanding of what it is to be a conscious state would be possible at all.

§ Preliminary Distinctions

(i) the question of state consciousness

___ the question of what it is for a mental state to be conscious. Assuming that not all mental states are conscious, we want to know how the conscious ones differ from those which are not. And, even if all mental states are conscious, we can still ask what their being conscious consists in.

(ii) the question of creature consciousness

___ the question of what it is for a person or other creature to be conscious, that is, how conscious creatures differ from those which are not conscious.

Answer to (ii):

___ **To be conscious, a person or other creature must be awake and sentient.**

Answer to (i):

___ ??? [The point of this paper]

§ Introspective Consciousness

___ **The attentive, deliberately focused consciousness of our mental states.**

When we introspect, we are not only aware of what mental states we are in; we are aware of being thus aware.

Rosenthal's Claims:

___ **1. State consciousness presupposes creature consciousness.**

___ **2. Introspective consciousness presupposes state consciousness, but state consciousness does not presuppose introspective consciousness.**

§ A Theory of Consciousness

[HOT]:

___ We are conscious of something, when we have a thought about it. So a mental state is conscious if it is accompanied by a thought about that state.

___ The occurrence of such a higher-order thought (HOT) makes us conscious of the mental state; so the state we are conscious of is a conscious state.

___ When no such HOT occurs, we are unaware of being in the mental state in question, and the state is then not a conscious state.

[Definition of state-consciousness]:

___ A mental state is a conscious state when, and only when, it is accompanied by a suitable HOT.

___ The content of HOT must be that one is, oneself, in that very mental state.

§ Are All Mental States Conscious?

Claim:

___ **It is far from obvious that all mental states are conscious.**

[Examples]:

___ desires (We sometimes see that somebody wants something before he is aware of that desire).

___ emotion (We sometimes recognize that we are sad or angry only after somebody else has pointed it out to us).

___ subliminal perception

___ peripheral vision

___ some bodily sensation such as pain

[Question: Can we have pain that we are not conscious of?]

Rosenthal: We can have pain while not being aware of it. Having pain is not just identified to feeling pain.

___ **Argument:** When one is intermittently distracted from a relatively minor pain or headache, it is natural to speak of having had a single, persistent pain or ache during the entire period. It would be odd to say that one had had a sequence of brief, distinct, but qualitatively identical pains or aches.

Conclusion:

___ **Not all mental states are conscious.**

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§ The Relation between Consciousness and Mentality

[Two competing views]:

- (i) Consciousness is a necessary feature of all mental states.
 - (ii) Conscious states are simply mental states we are conscious of being in.
- ___ Consciousness is a feature of many mental states but it is not necessary or even central to a state's being a mental state.

§ Definitions of Mentality

- (1) If x is a mental state --> x has either intentional properties or phenomenal properties.
- (2) If x has phenomenal properties --> x is a mental state.
- (3) If x has intentional properties --> x is either a mental state itself or x is a mode (e.g. artwork) or behavior that expresses intentional mental states.

* "intentional properties" and "phenomenal properties"

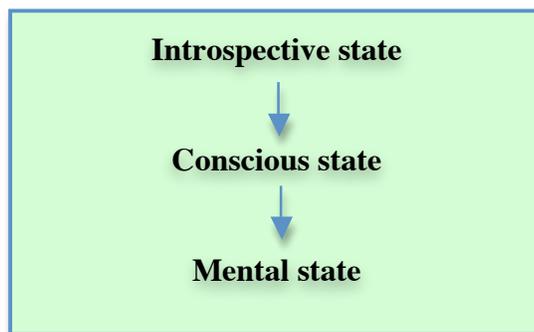
- ___ 1. intentional properties = having propositional content; being about something.
- ___ 2. phenomenal, or sensory, properties = qualia.

§ Criterion for Conscious States

- ___ 1. Not all mental states are conscious states.
- ___ 2. Conscious states are those states in which one has a suitable second-order thought.
- ___ 3. Third-order thoughts that confer consciousness on such second-order thoughts would be relatively rare.

* Consciousness vs. Introspection

___ Introspection is consciously and deliberately paying attention to mental states that are in our stream of consciousness.



___ Having a conscious mental state without introspectively focusing on it is having the second-order thought without the third-order thought.

*** Q: Can states that we are not aware of influence our conscious states or our behaviors? Are these influences on the mental level or on the mere neurological level?** (E.g. Our mental life has features that are intentional and is built on relations that are semantical, so if the influence is semantical and intentional, then it is part of our mental life. → Freud's theory of the unconscious affecting the conscious.)

*mental states vs. mental dispositions

___ Rosenthal: they should be treated as mental states, not mere dispositions.

§ Defense of the Non-Cartesian Explanation of Consciousness

I. How it analyzes the close connection between being in a conscious state and being conscious of oneself: [Being in a conscious state --> having consciousness of oneself]

___ Being in a conscious state = being conscious of a mental state M_1 = having a higher-order thought T_2 about M_1 --> having T_2 about S's having M_1 .

II. How it explains the connection between consciousness and sensory states: [Consciousness seems intrinsic to our sensory states; when we try to focus on the consciousness of a particular sensory state, we typically end up picking out only the sensory state we are conscious of.]

___ We have higher-order thought T_2 about a sensory state S_1 , but we do not have a third-order thought T_3 about T_2 .

III. How it explains the connection between consciousness and intentional states:

§ Can infants or nonhuman animals have consciousness?

Rosenthal:

___ 1. Infants and most nonhuman animals do have conscious sensations.

___ 2. The capacity for speech is hardly necessary for thinking.

___ 3. Infants and most nonhuman species lack the ability to have the more complex higher-order thoughts needed to make intentional states conscious, though they presumably can form higher-order thoughts about their sensory states.

___ 4. Being a conscious creature does not entail being in conscious mental states.

An organism x to be conscious = x is awake, and mentally responsive to sensory stimuli.

An organism x to be in a conscious mental state = x has a higher-order thought about that mental state.

§ The subjectivity of consciousness

___ What it is like to be a particular conscious individual is a matter of the sensory qualities of that individual's conscious experiences.

___ The consciousness of those experiences, by contrast, is simply that individual's being aware of having the experiences.

___ Reductionist: it seeks to explain conscious mental states ultimately in terms of mental states that are not conscious.

___ To understand how consciousness can occur in physical things, we must dissolve the intuitive force of that gulf [between physical reality and consciousness]. And we can do so only by explaining the consciousness of mental states in terms of mental states that are not conscious. For the stark discontinuity between conscious mental states and physical reality does not also rise when we consider only nonconscious mental states. And once we have explained consciousness by reference to nonconscious mental states, we may well be able to explain nonconscious mental states in terms of phenomena that are not mental at all.

§ Conclusion

We fix the extension of the mental by a range of conscious states.

___ What fixed the extension of a general term can turn out to be distinct from what is essential to the items in that extension.

___ Intentional and sensory experiences: in both cases we fix extensions by way of states to which we have noninferential and non-observational access.

