

**Phil 490: *Consciousness and the Self*  
Handout [9]**

**David Rosenthal: *Thinking that One Thinks***

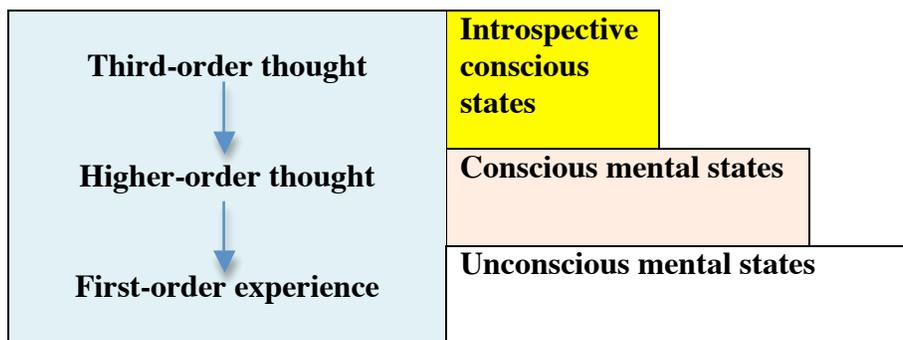
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**§ Conscious Creatures and Conscious Mental States**

<b>Creature consciousness</b> Being awake; being mentally responsive		<b>Unconscious Creatures</b>
<b>Conscious mental states</b> (thoughts, beliefs, desires, etc.)		(under global anesthesia, being in deep sleep, being brain dead, etc.)
<b>Introspectively conscious states</b>	<b>Unconscious mental states</b> (blindsight, split brain, Petite Mal Seizures, Armstrong's truck driver, etc.)	
<b>Ordinary, non-introspectively conscious states</b>		

**§ Main Theses: (HOT)**

1. Consciousness is NOT the most central feature of our existence (contra Descartes). Not all mental states are conscious states.
2. A mental state's being conscious is *our* being aware of that state in a suitably immediate way. On this account, we explain the property of a mental state's being conscious in terms of our being conscious of that state.
3. Our being conscious of something means having a thought about it or a sensation of it.
4. So a mental state's being conscious is its being accompanied by a roughly simultaneous higher-order thought (HOT) about that very mental state.
5. But not all conscious mental states are introspectively conscious — Introspective consciousness is a special case in which that second-order thought is also conscious.



## § Expressing and Reporting

For creatures with the requisite linguistic capability, reporting mental states is possible, and such a report differs in content from a verbal expression of that state.

Speech act: to express one's thought

Reporting: to report one's thought

*Q*: What is the difference?

<p><b>Expressing:</b>          ___ facial expression, gestures, choice of words, tones of voice, verbal report, etc.</p>	<p><b>Reporting:</b>          ___ verbal report</p>
<p>One's expression is <i>about</i> the object, the thing, the state of affairs, etc. that the mental state is about.</p> <p>(e.g. 'Urgh!' — that thing is disgusting!)</p>	<p>One's report of being in a mental state is never about the very thing that the mental state itself is about. Rather, <i>it is about the mental state</i>, and its propositional content is that <i>one is now, oneself, in that very mental state</i>.</p> <p>(e.g. 'I am disgusted' — I am in a disgusted state.)</p>

Saying that *P*

≠ Saying that one thinks that *P*

\_\_\_ The truth conditions differ, even though the corresponding performance conditions are the same.

\_\_\_ *P* iff *P*

\_\_\_ I think that *P* iff I think that *P*

### Moore's Paradox:

**It is raining now. But I don't believe that it is raining.**

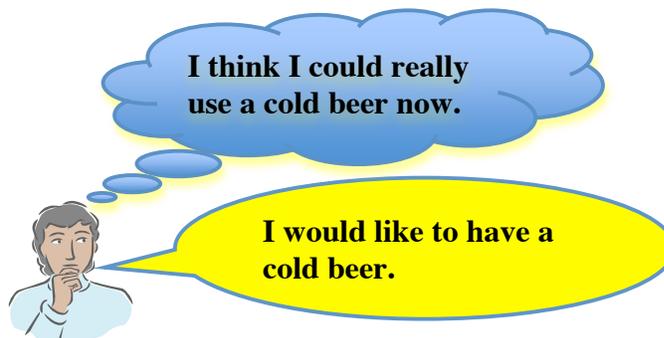


1. Expressing one's mental state is not the same as reporting one's mental state.
2. We can clearly report on our own mental states, and not just expressing them.

## § Rosenthal's Argument for HOT Theory

### [The Argument from Speech and Thought]

1. Whenever one meaningfully and sincerely reports being in some mental state, one's very *report* invariably expresses some thought that one has.
2. Speech acts that are meaningful and sincere express thoughts that have the same propositional content as the speech acts.
3. Therefore, the ability to report being in a particular mental states requires the ability to express higher-order thoughts that one is in those states.
4. If the state is not a conscious state, it will be unavailable to one as the topic of a sincere report about the current contents of one's mind; if the mental state is conscious, one will be aware of it and hence be able to report that one is in it.
5. Therefore, a creature with suitable communicative ability will be able to *report* being in a particular mental state *just in case* that state is a conscious mental state.
6. But the ability to report being in a particular mental state *is the same as* the ability to express one's thought that one is in that mental state.
7. **Therefore, a mental state's being conscious = one's having the ability to express one's higher-order thought that one is in that mental state. [HOT]**



Discussion:

1. Is being able to report a mental state = being able to express higher-order thoughts about it?
2. Is being in a conscious mental state = being able to report on it?
3. Are there other conscious mental states that the individual *could not* report on?

*Q:* Is it necessary for a creature to have something as elaborate as human linguistic ability to be able to report its mental states?

Even if reporting one's mental states did require a communicative system with the full resources of human language, that would not show that creatures that cannot report their mental states have no conscious mental states.... The ability to report mental states is important here only because we understand what it is for a mental state to be conscious by appeal to creatures who can say what mental states they are in. (Rosenthal, p. 59)

## § Actualist vs. Dispositional Approaches

**Actualist:** A higher-order thought must be *actually accompanying* a mental state for that state to be a conscious state.

**Dispositional:** A mental state's being conscious consists only in a disposition to have such a higher-order thought, and not in its actual occurrence.

\_\_\_ Kant: A mental state's being conscious is not its being actually accompanied by a suitable higher-order thought, but its *being able to* be thus accompanied.

*Q:* Does the above argument support the actualist or the dispositional theory?

Rosenthal:

1. A mental state's being conscious is our being conscious of being in that state in a suitably immediate way.
2. We are conscious of being in mental states when they are conscious states because we have higher-order thoughts about those states.
3. Merely being disposed to have such thoughts would not make us conscious of the states in questions.
4. Therefore, we must have actual, occurrent higher-order thoughts for those mental states to be conscious states. → Actualist theory

Problems with Disposition Theory:

1. Disposition theory can't account for token mental state.
2. Disposition theory can't deal with sensations — No higher-order thoughts could capture all the subtle variations of sensory quality we consciously experience. So higher-order thoughts must refer to sensory states demonstratively, perhaps as occupying this or that position in the relevant sensory field. It is unclear how a mere dispositions to have higher-order thoughts could accomplish this.
3. Only if we tacitly assume all mental states are conscious will the dispositional account be needed to explain why conscious states are introspectible. But the assumption that all mental states are conscious is plainly question begging.