

The Nature of Consciousness
Handout [5]
David Rosenthal: *A Theory of Consciousness*

JeeLoo Liu

§ 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.**

<p>creature consciousness<-- state consciousness<-- introspective consciousness</p>
--

§ 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.**

[Notes]

§ 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

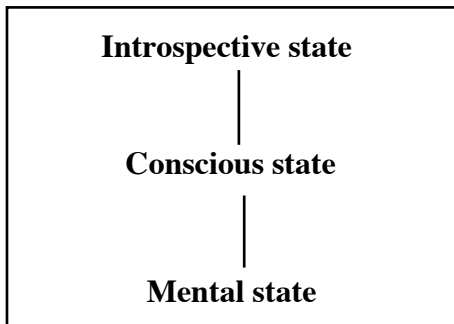
___ 1. Not all mental states are conscious states.

___ 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.

§ Is being conscious an intrinsic property? Can consciousness be explained?

"intrinsic property"

___ A property is intrinsic if something's having it does not consist, even in part, in that thing's bearing some relation to something else.

The opponent's view:

- (i) A first-person perspective is essential to mental states.
- (ii) It is impossible to grasp the nature of those states from a third-person point of view.
- (iii) Therefore, it is impossible to give a naturalistic explanation of consciousness.
- (iv) Therefore, there is a gap between mental reality and nonmental (physical) reality.

Rosenthal's claims:

___ 1. Not all mental states are conscious, and being conscious is not an intrinsic property.

___ 2. We can explain what it is for mental states to be conscious by appeal to mental states that are not, themselves, conscious states.

___ 3. We can then explain those nonconscious mental states in nonmental terms.

___ 4. In this way we can bridge the gap; the explanatory chain would reach nonmental reality by way of some nonconscious but mental intermediate.

§ Transitive and Intransitive Consciousness

Two uses of the word 'conscious':

- (i) transitive use -- being conscious of something (having direct object)

(ii) intransitive use -- being conscious mental states (the lack of direct object)

I. Mental states are intransitively conscious just in case we are transitively conscious of them.

II. Transitive consciousness can occur without intransitive state consciousness.

III. Transitive consciousness will not even presuppose creature consciousness.(For example, it could happen during sleep.)

[conscious state --> transitive conscious state]:

___[First attempt]: A state is a conscious state when we are transitively conscious of it.

[NOT: transitive conscious of state M --> M is a conscious state]

But: One can be (transitively) conscious of being in a mental state even when we would not count that state as being a conscious state.

[Example]: Suppose I am angry, but unaware of it, and suppose that you see this from my behavior, and tell me. I trust your judgment, but still consciously experience no anger.

In this case I am conscious that I am angry even though my anger is not a conscious state.

___ [Revised statement]: A state is a conscious state (= intransitive consciousness) just in case we are noninferentially and nonobservationally conscious of it.

==> Conscious states are directly experienced by the subjects.

[Question: What is the point of this distinction?]

Answer: Armstrong uses this distinction for the following argument:

- ___ 1. A conscious mental state is a compound of two things: the mental state which by itself is not conscious, and one's being transitively conscious of it.
- ___ 2. Being in the state and being transitively conscious of it are thus distinct.
- ___ 3. Therefore, being conscious is not intrinsic to the state itself.

§ 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.

[Note]:

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 .

§ Two Supporting Arguments:

I. The Argument from Introspection

II. The Argument from Reporting and Expressing