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REID ON CONSCIOUSNESS: HOP, HOT OR FOR?

BY REBECCA COPENHAVER

Thomas Reid claims to share Locke's view that consciousness is a kind of inner sense. This is puzzling, given the role the inner-sense theory plays in indirect realism and in the theory of ideas generally. I argue that Reid does not in fact hold an inner-sense theory of consciousness and that his view differs importantly from contemporary higher-order theories of consciousness. For Reid, consciousness is a first-order representational process in which a mental state with a particular content suggests the application of recognitional concepts in forming beliefs or judgements to the effect that one is currently undergoing a state with that content. I take up the question of whether Reid's theory leads to a regress, and I argue that while the regress cannot be eliminated, it is mitigated by the non-hierarchical nature of Reid's theory of mind.

I. INTRODUCTION

At the centre of Thomas Reid's work is his opposition to what he calls 'the theory of ideas', with its model of the mind as a kind of storehouse of ideas, to use one familiar metaphor, or as a theatre, with ideas and impressions as players and consciousness as audience, to use another. Reid's project was to replace this model with one in which the mind is directed in the first instance towards the world rather than our experiences of the world. Only by replacing the model employed by the theory of ideas, Reid argues, can we hope to avoid the sceptical and idealist conclusions to which it ultimately leads. He criticizes the theory of ideas for reducing memory, perception and the other mental operations to a single operation, consciousness, and he provides yet another metaphor to capture the resulting picture of the mind:

The doctrine of ideas maintains without any manifest proof that perception and memory are not primary faculties but have their origin from another faculty, namely, from the consciousness of the ideas that are present in the mind itself. The doctrine alleges, without any manifest proof, that every man shut in, as it were, in a *camera obscura* perceives nothing outside but only the images or ideas of things depicted in his own *camera*.¹

¹ Reid, *The Philosophical Orations of Thomas Reid*, ed. D.D. Todd (Southern Illinois UP, 1989), p. 61.

Strange, then, to read Reid's approval of Locke's conception of consciousness as a kind of inner sense: 'Mr Locke very properly calls consciousness an internal sense. It gives the like immediate knowledge of things in the mind, that is, of our own thoughts and feelings, as the senses give of things external.'² Granted, the inner-sense conception of consciousness is logically independent of indirect realism. However, especially in Reid's day, the notion that consciousness provides a kind of direct perceptual awareness of mental states was central to conceiving of sensory perception as in contrast indirect, and as mediated by inference from this awareness. Only consciousness provides awareness of things; perception is, at best, awareness-that. Fred Dretske describes well the relationship between Locke's notion of inner sense and our familiar model of the mind, now transformed from a *camera obscura* to a living room (in the following, *o*-awareness is non-conceptual awareness of objects, *p*-awareness is non-conceptual awareness of properties, *f*-awareness is an awareness of facts, which requires concept-possession, *e* is an experience, and *B* is a property of experience):

John Locke thought that the mind's awareness of itself was *quasi*-perceptual and, thus, direct. We become aware that a visual experience is *B* in the same way that we can (if we trust common sense) become aware that a pumpkin is *P* – by means of *o*-awareness of the experience and *p*-awareness of *B*. According to some philosophers, all fact-awareness begins here. Thus, awareness of facts about a pumpkin, that it is *P*, are reached via inference from *o*-awareness of *e* and *p*-awareness of one or more of its properties. We become fact-aware of what is going on outside the mind in something like the way we become *f*-aware of what is happening outside a room in which we watch TV. The only objects we are aware of are in the room (e.g., the television set); the only properties we are aware of are properties of those objects (patterns on the screen). *Only f*-awareness – awareness of what is happening on the playing field, concert hall, or broadcast studio – is capable of taking us outside the room.³

Though Reid repeatedly endorses Locke's view that 'though it [consciousness] be not Sense, as having nothing to do with external Objects; yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be call'd internal Sense', he is also at pains to distinguish consciousness from perception, because he recognizes the role the inner-sense view plays in the theory of ideas.⁴ Reid uses the way the theory likens consciousness to an inner sense in order to highlight those similarities between consciousness and perception which are *denied* by the theory: both perception and consciousness consist of a conception and a belief; both are direct, immediate and non-inferential; and the

² Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, hereafter *EIP*, ed. D.R. Brookes (Edinburgh UP, 2002), p. 421.

³ F. Dretske, *Perception, Knowledge and Belief: Selected Essays* (Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 166.

⁴ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford UP, 1975), p. 105 (II i 4), see also p. 115 (II i 19); Reid, *EIP*, pp. 24, 170, 189–91, 322–3.

objects of both are only presently existing things (*EIP*, pp. 24, 170, 227–8, 277, 311, 421, 470–1).

Reid distinguishes the various operations of the mind by the kinds of intentional objects they take: perception takes as its objects only presently existing material objects and their properties, memory takes as its objects only past events of which one was agent or witness, and consciousness takes as its objects only presently existing mental acts and operations. All three operations display the same structure: by each, the mind represents intentional objects by conceiving of the object and forming a judgement – Reid calls it a belief – about the object presented in conception (*EIP*, p. 227). In each case, the conception and belief are direct, a feature which the theory of ideas had hoped to confine to consciousness: objects are not represented by an intermediary, mental or otherwise, whose intrinsic character allows it to function as a representative of those objects.⁵ In each case, the conception and belief are immediate because they are not formed by inference or any other epistemic activity – rather, they are formed under circumstances governed by a law of nature that specifies the proper function of each operation.⁶

For Reid, then, consciousness is like perception, but not in the respect intended by Locke. Consciousness is not a mere form of what Reid would call ‘simple apprehension’, that is, conception without judgement; it is not what Dretske calls mere awareness-of (*EIP*, pp. 24, 296, 408). Rather, according to Reid, I am conscious *that* I am thinking, perceiving, remembering, etc. (*EIP*, pp. 137, 191, 228). In addition, what ‘passes in one’s mind’ in consciousness are not Lockean ‘ideas of sense’, understood as the sole immediate objects of touch, sight, etc., but rather mental operations such as perceiving and remembering. Furthermore, unlike Locke, Reid clearly distinguishes consciousness from *reflection* on the operations of one’s own mind. According to Reid, reflection on the operations of the mind requires voluntary attention, whereas consciousness does not.

Nevertheless, on Reid’s view, consciousness is perception-like in important respects, so long as we understand perception as Reid would have us do, as a direct, immediate, non-inferential process in which an individual forms a conception of and a corresponding judgement about a material object or property, according to a law of the human mind. Consciousness is analogous to perception in so far as it involves forming a conception of and

⁵ For an extended treatment of Reid’s direct realism and his theory of memory, see my ‘Thomas Reid’s Theory of Memory’, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 23 (2006), pp. 171–87.

⁶ For an extended treatment of Reid’s account of the mind and its operations as governed by laws of nature, see my ‘Is Reid a Mysterian?’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44 (2006), pp. 449–66.

judgement about something; but in the case of consciousness, the conception and judgement are about the operations of the individual's own mind rather than material objects and properties.

Given that Reid accepts an analogy between perception and consciousness, though not in the manner intended by Locke, one might wonder whether Reid would endorse the contemporary view with which Locke is mostly closely associated, the higher-order perception or higher-order experience theory of consciousness.⁷ Reid's view resembles higher-order views of consciousness in some respects. For example, he holds that consciousness is confined to our awareness of our own mental acts and operations, and that consciousness is an operation independent of the states and operations it takes as its objects. But Reid's view is also interestingly distinct from standard higher-order perception theories. For example, he holds that consciousness does not employ voluntary attention mechanisms. By examining the analogies and disanalogies Reid draws between consciousness and perception, and his position relative to contemporary higher-order theory, I hope to provide both a better understanding of Reid's theory of consciousness and a fresh perspective on the contemporary debate.

II. HIGHER-ORDER THEORIES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Contemporary philosophers of mind have advanced a number of now standard distinctions among different uses of the word 'conscious', many of which would have been unrecognizable to moderns such as Locke or Reid.⁸

⁷ At least one Reid scholar has argued that Reid maintains Locke's conception of consciousness as an inner sense: D. Mishori, 'The Dilemmas of the Dual Channel: Reid on Consciousness and Reflection', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 1 (2003), pp. 141–55. Contemporary proponents and critics of higher-order theories of consciousness cite Locke as the first modern expression of the view that what makes a mental state conscious is that it is the object of a higher-order experiential mental state which makes one conscious of being in that mental state. See D.M. Armstrong, *The Nature of Mind and Other Essays* (Cornell UP, 1980), pp. 14, 61; A. Byrne, 'Some Like it HOT: Consciousness and Higher-Order Thoughts', *Philosophical Studies*, 86 (1997), pp. 103–29, at p. 104; P. Carruthers, 'HOP over FOR, HOT Theory', in R.J. Gennaro (ed.), *Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness: an Anthology* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004), pp. 115–35, at p. 118; G. Güzeldere, 'Is Consciousness the Perception of What Passes in One's Own Mind?', in T. Metzinger (ed.), *Conscious Experience* (Paderborn: Imprint Academic, 1995), pp. 335–58, at p. 335; W.G. Lycan, *Consciousness and Experience* (MIT Press, 1996), p. 14.

⁸ N. Block, 'How Many Concepts of Consciousness?', *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 18 (1995), pp. 272–84, and 'On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness', *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 18 (1995), pp. 227–47; F. Dretske, 'Conscious Experience', *Mind*, 102 (1993), pp. 263–83, and *Perception, Knowledge and Belief*; D.M. Rosenthal, 'Two Concepts of Consciousness', *Philosophical Studies*, 94 (1986), pp. 329–59, and *Consciousness and Mind* (Oxford UP, 2005); Lycan, *Consciousness and Experience*.

The first distinction concerns the difference between *creature* consciousness and *state* consciousness, the respect in which a person or creature is conscious and the respect in which states of a person or creature are conscious. Additionally, a creature may be conscious in two senses, an *intransitive* sense in which a creature is conscious if it is not knocked out, in dreamless sleep, dead, etc., and a *transitive* sense in which a creature is conscious if it is *aware* of some thing or fact, e.g., by perceiving *x* or that *p*. By contrast, *state* consciousness is used by most contemporary theorists in an *intransitive* sense – the sense in which mental states are themselves conscious rather than the sense in which mental states are of or about things.

Both higher-order and first-order theories of consciousness are versions of representationalism, or as it is sometimes called, intentionalism. Standard interpretations of Reid make him an adverbialist.⁹ However, he may be interpreted as holding a version of representationalism. Given his view that the phenomenal character of experience is connected with the representational content of experience by laws of nature contingent on God's will, any possible world which is a minimal *representational* duplicate of our world and which obeys the same laws of nature is a *phenomenal* duplicate. Though Reid does not share the general physicalist thesis which drives contemporary representationalism, his account of the relationship between the phenomenal and representational features of experience is best understood as a supervenience thesis.

Contemporary theorists who agree that phenomenal consciousness, or the qualitative character of experience, is exhausted by or supervenient on the representational content of experience are nevertheless divided over whether consciousness is a first-order phenomenon or whether it requires higher-order representations of mental states. One way to regard the divide is to see it as a disagreement concerning the relationship between state consciousness and creature consciousness. First-order theorists hold that conscious mental states are those which make the creature whose states they are aware of some thing or fact.¹⁰ In other words, first-order theorists hold that what makes a state conscious is the role it plays in making its *possessor* transitively conscious of something. Higher-order theorists hold that a mental state is made conscious by being the object of some higher-order

⁹ P. de Bary, *Thomas Reid and Scepticism: His Reliabilist Response* (New York: Routledge, 2002); R. Beanblossom, 'Introduction', in R. Beanblossom and K. Lehrer (eds), *Thomas Reid's Inquiry and Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), pp. ix–lvii; G. Pappas, 'Sensation and Perception in Reid', *Noûs*, 23 (1989), pp. 155–67; E. Sosa and J. Van Cleve, 'Thomas Reid', in S.M. Emmanuel (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Modern Philosophers: from Descartes to Nietzsche* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 179–200. Todd Buras criticizes the adverbial interpretation in T. Buras, 'The Nature of Sensations in Reid', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 22 (2005), pp. 221–38.

¹⁰ For examples of first-order theories, see Dretske, *Perception, Knowledge and Belief*; M. Tye, *Consciousness, Color, and Content* (MIT Press, 2000).

representational state, and that this higher-order state need not be intransitively conscious.¹¹ It is important to notice that on neither view does the relationship between creature consciousness and state consciousness make the mental *state* conscious in a transitive sense. According to the standard terminology, it does not make sense at all to speak of a state as transitively conscious.

Higher-order theorists are themselves divided over the nature of the higher-order representations in virtue of which mental states are conscious. According to the higher-order perception (HOP) theory, the higher-order representation is, as David Armstrong writes, a 'perception-like awareness of the current states and activities in our own mind'.¹² On this view, consciousness is like perception in so far as both scan or monitor an environment – in the case of perception, an extra-mental environment, and in the case of consciousness, one's own mind. Moreover, both deliver representations of their objects – in the case of perception, of extra-mental objects and their properties, and in the case of consciousness, of mental states and their properties; these representations are *experiential* in the sense of being a kind of fine-grained and at least in part non-conceptual awareness. A principal defender of HOP, William Lycan (*Consciousness and Experience*, pp. 14, 31) describes the position as follows:

As I would put it, consciousness is the functioning of internal *attention mechanisms* directed at lower-order psychological states and events. I would also add (or make more explicit) a *souçon* of teleology: attention mechanisms are devices that have the *job* of relating and/or co-ordinating information about ongoing psychological events and processes.... The inner-sense theory has it that conscious awareness is the successful operation of an internal scanner or monitor that outputs second-order representations of first-order psychological states.

In contrast, higher-order thought (HOT) theorists hold that the higher-order representation in virtue of which mental states are rendered conscious is a thought-like cognitive state with at least some conceptual content. Unlike HOP, according to which the intentional content of the higher-order representation is of mental states and their properties, HOT holds that the content of the higher-order representation is either the content of the first-order mental state or a fact in which the first-order mental state and its content both figure. David Rosenthal describes HOT as follows:

¹¹ For examples of second-order theories, see Armstrong, *The Nature of Mind and Other Essays*; P. Carruthers, *Phenomenal Consciousness* (Cambridge UP, 2000); Lycan, *Consciousness and Experience*; Rosenthal, *Consciousness and Mind*.

¹² Armstrong *The Nature of Mind and Other Essays*, p. 61. The higher-order perception (HOP) theory is also called by other names, including the inner-sense theory, higher-order experience theory (HOE), and higher-order sensing theory.

These thoughts will represent the states they are about in respect of the informational content those states have or, in the case of sensory states, in respect of their sensory quality. They will be thoughts to the effect that one is, oneself, in a state of a particular sort, where the relevant sort of state is ordinarily characterized in terms of an attitude held towards some intentional content or a particular sensory quality. Since the thoughts in virtue of which our states are sometimes conscious are about those states, I refer to them for convenience as higher-order thoughts (HOTs).¹³

Rosenthal argues that because perception possesses a distinctively sensory quality, if a state were conscious in virtue of a perception-like awareness of the state, then the awareness would have to exhibit this quality. However, phenomenology reveals no such quality over and above whatever quality the first-order mental state may have.¹⁴ Lycan's response highlights the degree to which the HOP theorist employs the notion of perception as analogy rather than as description: 'No HOP theorist has contended that inner sense is like external-world perception in every single respect'.¹⁵ I shall examine the respects in which the HOP theorist contends consciousness *is* like external-world perception, to see whether Reid would have endorsed the analogies claimed by HOP theorists.

III. REID, HOP AND HOT

There is a straightforward yet unilluminating sense in which Reid is neither a higher-order nor a first-order theorist. Both these theories are reductive theories of consciousness aimed at providing a constitutive account of state consciousness. In the case of higher-order theories, a state's being conscious consists in its being a state of which one is conscious; in the case of first-order theories, a state's being conscious consists in its being a state that makes one conscious of some thing or fact – typically, an extra-mental thing or fact. Reid, however, confines himself to the language of creature consciousness. Moreover, he is highly suspicious of reductive explanation altogether. There is a sense, then, in which it makes no sense to ask what Reid thinks a state's being conscious consists in. For example, although he is committed to the claim that consciousness takes mental operations as its objects, this claim does not commit him to the further *constitutive* claim, definitive of higher-order theories, that a mental operation's (or state's)

¹³ D. Rosenthal, 'Consciousness, Content and Metacognitive Judgements', *Consciousness and Cognition*, 9 (2000), pp. 203–14, at p. 206.

¹⁴ Rosenthal, 'A Theory of Consciousness', in N. Block, O. Flanagan and G. Güzeldere (eds), *The Nature of Consciousness* (MIT Press, 1995), pp. 729–54.

¹⁵ Lycan, 'The Superiority of HOP to HOT', in Gennaro (ed.), *Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness*, pp. 100–10, at p. 100; see also *Consciousness and Experience*, p. 26.

being conscious *consists* in its being an object of consciousness. The notion of a mental operation's (or, if we allow Reid talk of mental states, a mental state's) *being* conscious is foreign to Reid's view. Even if this were not so, the constitutive claim would be foreign for methodological reasons. While these differences make Reid's theory distinctive, emphasizing them to such a degree as to rule him out as either a first-order or a higher-order theorist *tout court* obscures the respects in which his theory represents an illuminating alternative to contemporary neo-Lockean theories of consciousness.

Like Locke and Reid, contemporary HOP theorists such as Armstrong and Lycan present their theories by specifying the respects in which consciousness resembles perception. Among the similarities between higher-order representations of mental states and perceptual representations which Lycan emphasizes are that both are products of attention mechanisms, both are under voluntary control, and both are reliable sources of information.¹⁶ On each score, Reid claims disanalogy. First, on Reid's view, consciousness, like perception, is a kind of awareness, whereas attention is a modification of various kinds of awareness, including perception and memory. Attention is a *way* of being aware. As we might put it today, Reid holds that there is awareness outside attention. Attention to one's own mental states *presupposes* rather than constitutes consciousness, just as attention to material objects and their qualities presupposes rather than constitutes perceptual experience, and attention to the events of which we were agent or witness presupposes rather than constitutes memory. According to Reid (*EIP*, p. 58), attention allows us to reflect upon the objects of perception, memory and consciousness, making them, in his words, 'objects of thought'. Reflective attention is a function of the understanding, Reid claims, and unlike consciousness, it is not a self-standing, unified, independent operation; rather, 'it comprehends many; such as recollection, attention, distinguishing, comparing, judging' (*EIP*, pp. 58, 268–9). Moreover, reflective attention is not confined to the objects presented in consciousness, 'For surely I may reflect upon what I have seen or heard, as well as upon what I have thought' (*EIP*, p. 421). Reid (*EIP*, p. 58) singles Locke out, in particular, for having characterized consciousness as the product of attention mechanisms:

This power of the understanding to make its own operations its object, to attend to them, and examine them on all sides, is the power of reflection, by which alone we can have any distinct notion of the powers of our own or of other minds. This reflection ought to be distinguished from consciousness, with which it is too often confounded, even by Mr Locke.

Reid also denies the second feature Lycan uses to draw the analogy: consciousness, according to Reid, is not under voluntary control. 'Attention

¹⁶ Lycan, 'The Superiority of HOP to HOT', and *Consciousness and Experience*, pp. 13–43.

is a voluntary act; it requires an active exertion to begin and to continue it; and it may be continued as long as we will; but consciousness is involuntary and of no continuance, changing with every thought' (*EIP*, p. 59). Reid's view that consciousness is not under voluntary control rests on an analogy with his own theory of perception, according to which a perception of a material object or property is suggested by a sensation, which is itself occasioned by the material object or property perceived. The perceptual process is governed entirely by a law of nature, and is, as such, involuntary. However, perceptual awareness provides the possibility of being *attentively* aware of the objects of perception by an act of will. Like perception, consciousness is an involuntary form of awareness. Reflection on items presented in awareness, whether in perceptual awareness or in awareness of the operations of the mind, requires voluntary acts of attention such as examining, distinguishing, combining and comparing. It allows agents to become attentively aware of items presented in their awareness via consciousness, perception and memory.

Perhaps one may find room in Lycan's position, however, for the distinctions Reid draws. Lycan holds, for example ("The Superiority of HOP to HOT", p. 101), that 'in normal state consciousness we are not doing any active introspecting, but are only passively and usually non-consciously aware of our first-order states'. Such normal state consciousness ought to be distinguished, according to Lycan, from introspection, which is active. But here there is equivocation. HOP, like HOT, is a theory of what constitutes *consciousness* – and both hold that consciousness amounts to a state's being conscious in virtue of one's being aware of it. Lycan must decide whether to cast consciousness as perception-like in the respects he claims, in which case it is the product of attention mechanisms and under voluntary control, or to cast it as passive awareness, in which case HOP is no longer a theory of consciousness but rather a theory of introspection, or as Reid would put it, of reflective attention to our own mental acts and operations.

Lest we begin to regard such differences as merely terminological, it is important to note that according to Reid, reflection, which unlike consciousness *is* made possible by attention mechanisms, is not a free-standing operation, and is not confined to one's own mental states. This is precisely why he refuses to identify consciousness with reflective attention. According to both Reid and higher-order theory, consciousness is confined to one's own mental states. But according to Reid (*EIP*, p. 421), reflective attention ranges over both objects of consciousness and perception:

Reflection upon the operations of our minds is the same kind of operation with that by which we form distinct notions of external objects. They differ not in their nature,

but in this only, that one is employed about external objects and the other about internal ones; and both may, with equal propriety, be called reflection.

Fully developed, properly functioning adults can attend reflectively to items given in memory, perception, consciousness and any other faculty of awareness. That is, they can attend reflectively to past events, objects and properties in the environment and current states of mind. Because Reid holds, with the higher-order theorist, that consciousness is directed exclusively at present mental operations, he cannot identify consciousness with reflective attention, which can be voluntarily directed towards items given in various forms of awareness, and most of these items are extra-mental.

Indeed, Reid holds that fully developed, properly functioning human adults rarely attend to their own mental operations: 'our attention is commonly employed about that which is the object of our thought, and rarely about the thought itself' (*EIP*, p. 42). Reid holds a moderate version of the transparency thesis in its contemporary rather than the older sense: with practice we can attend to mental states and operations, but our attention is normally directed at external objects and their properties rather than the mental states that represent such objects and properties; when we try to focus our attention on the mental state itself, we fall right through to what it represents (*EIP*, p. 58–9, 61). As Moore put it, 'When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous'.¹⁷ The scope and province of what Reid calls reflective attention is both wider than and different from what the higher-order theorist claims for consciousness.

Furthermore, if we were to substitute the words 'reflective attention' for 'consciousness' in characterizing Reid's position as a higher-order view, it would have the unfortunate consequence that very few people have conscious mental states at all. In explanation of why philosophers disagree so much over the nature of mind, Reid writes

This strange phenomenon may, I think, be accounted for, if we distinguish between consciousness and reflection, which are often improperly confounded. The first is common to men at all times.... The second, to wit, attentive reflection upon those operations, making them objects of thought, surveying them attentively, and examining them on all sides, is so far from being common to all men that it is the lot of very few.

The phenomenon which HOP identifies with consciousness, reflective attention, is, according to Reid, hard-won, rare and the product of a kind of practice employed mainly by philosophers and artists. But presumably an account of *consciousness* is intended to capture a phenomenon enjoyed by the

¹⁷ G.E. Moore, 'The Refutation of Idealism', in his *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), pp. 1–30, at p. 25.

philosopher and common person alike. Even if we reject, as we probably should, Reid's claim that *attentive* awareness of the objects, operations and features presented in awareness is a rare phenomenon confined to specialists, his notion that it requires development and practice is far less controversial. At the very least, identifying consciousness with reflective attention to mental states or operations entails that consciousness is far less common than one might think.

There is a further disanalogy between perception and consciousness which Reid emphasizes, one which highlights the affinity between contemporary higher-order theories and the Cartesian theatre model of mind, and the degree to which Reid's position diverges from this model. Immediately after his claim that Locke 'very properly calls consciousness an internal sense', Reid (*EIP*, pp. 420–1) writes

There is this difference, however, that an external object may be at rest and the sense may be employed about it for some time. But the objects of consciousness are never at rest; the stream of thought flows like a river, without stopping a moment; the whole train of thought passes in succession under the eye of consciousness, which is always employed about the present. But is it consciousness that analyses complex operations, distinguishes their different ingredients, and combines them in distinct parcels under general names? This surely is not the work of consciousness, nor can it be performed without reflection, recollecting and judging of what we were conscious of, and distinctly remember.

Reid holds that both perception and consciousness are confined to the present, but that unlike the objects of perception, the objects of consciousness are fleeting: they disappear in an instant, only to be replaced by another equally fleeting state.¹⁸

Reid's account has two important consequences which are inconsistent with the analogies Lycan draws between consciousness and perception: first, consciousness cannot have the '*souçon* of teleology' underlying the metaphor of consciousness as a scanner or monitor; and secondly, consciousness alone is a radically impoverished source of information. Although Lycan embraces Dennett's critique of the Cartesian theatre, he warns 'we should not throw out the baby of integration and control with the Cartesian bathwater'.¹⁹

As Lycan describes the higher-order view, it is committed to the notion that consciousness has the specific function of 'relaying and/or co-ordinating information about ongoing psychological events and processes' – a function which Reid denies to consciousness. Consciousness is ill suited to perform this function, both because it is confined to the present and so

¹⁸ *EIP*, pp. 270, 278. Here I am especially indebted to G. Yaffe.

¹⁹ Lycan, *Consciousness and Experience*, p. 32. For Dennett's critique, see D. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991).

cannot co-ordinate information over time, and because what is present to it at any given moment is so fleeting that very little information is ever available to consciousness. Although Reid often calls consciousness a kind of knowledge or evidence, he is clear that consciousness alone provides only vague and indistinct notions of its objects (*EIP*, pp. 42, 58–9, 96, 269, 421).

Reflective attention, on the other hand, is the only means by which we have clear and distinct notions of things (*EIP*, p. 58). Reflective attention allows for what consciousness cannot – access to a stable body of information which (*EIP*, p. 269) allows us to make the distinctions and judgements necessary to form accurate notions:

When reflection is taken in this sense, which is more common, and therefore more proper than the sense which Mr Locke has put upon it, it may justly be said to be the only source of all our distinct and accurate notions of things. For although our first notions of material things are got by the external senses, and our first notions of the operations of our own minds by consciousness, these first notions are neither simple nor clear. Our senses and our consciousness are continually shifting from one object to another; their operations are transient and momentary, and leave no distinct notion of their objects, until they are recalled by memory, examined with attention, and compared with other things.

Reflective attention, rather than consciousness, is a reliable source of information about one's own mental states because of the special role that memory plays in attention (*EIP*, p. 270). Memory preserves past apprehension by allowing us to conceive of and form beliefs about the events and objects presented in past apprehension. According to Reid, memory does not present past experiences; rather, it presents as past that which was presented *in* past experiences. By attentive reflection we may recall what we have previously perceived, and in the case of consciousness we may recall the mental acts and operations that were previously and only very briefly presented in consciousness.

Again, though we may be tempted to regard the differences between Reid's and the HOP theorist's accounts as mere terminological wrangling, yielding to this temptation would obscure the crucial difference in scope between consciousness and reflective attention on which Reid insists. But, perhaps most importantly, Reid would deny that in consciousness, or indeed in perception or memory, information is monitored, co-ordinated or relayed at all. His rejection of the theory of ideas rests in part on his denial that mental activity is mediated by mental representations which are stored, recalled, co-ordinated, relayed, etc. In particular, memory is directed not at past experiences but at events and objects previously experienced, including past mental states and operations presented in previous episodes of consciousness. Because memory allows us to conceive of and form beliefs

about events and objects presented in past apprehension, the mind need not store information for the purpose of 'integration and control' – for Reid, that baby goes out with the Cartesian bathwater.

Although Reid holds that consciousness is like perception, he does not intend the analogy as the theory of ideas did, or as contemporary HOP theories do. Similarly, though he holds that consciousness consists in conception and belief, and so holds that consciousness is also thought-like in some respects, he would no more employ the analogies implicit in higher-order thought theories than he would those of higher-order perception. According to Reid, it is only by reflective attention that mental states are made objects of *thought*, and reflective attention is not a self-standing operation independent of the various operations of the understanding.

There are additional reasons for thinking that not only would Reid disagree with the theory which takes Locke as its ancestor, but that he would reject higher-order theories of consciousness altogether. Reid regards consciousness as an operation that takes one's own mental states as its intentional objects, and he holds that the operation consists in forming a partly perception-like, partly thought-like conception and belief about one's own mental states. It is tempting to regard these claims as making Reid *ipso facto* a higher-order theorist. But though the historical distance between Reid and contemporary theorists should not rule out comparative treatment, the treatment should not obscure the fact that these commitments on Reid's part do not entail that he is also committed to thinking that forming a conception and belief about one's own mental states *makes* those states conscious. It is this latter claim which is definitive of higher-order theories. The point is not merely historical. Higher-order theorists are clear that this claim is not intended as an *a priori* result of conceptual analysis of the notion of consciousness. Higher-order theorists intend their claim, that what *makes* a state conscious is one's consciousness of it, as an empirical thesis, supported by ordinary and experimental evidence. Reid's commitment to the notion that, as Armstrong would put it, consciousness consists in the awareness of one's own mental states does not by itself make him a higher-order theorist, and it leaves open the possibility that his view shares more with contemporary first-order theories than it does with higher-order theories.

Part of the ordinary and experimental evidence which higher-order theorists claim for their view is that some mental states are *unconscious*. Higher-order theory has a ready explanation of the distinction between conscious and unconscious mental states: unconscious mental states are those for which we lack a higher-order representation. In addition, the putative existence of unconscious mental states allows the higher-order theorist to avoid a potential regress by insisting that the higher-order representations

by which mental states are rendered conscious need not themselves be conscious. Reid's theory also faces a regress, though not the regress that threatens higher-order theories. Higher-order theory is threatened by a regress because of its *constitutive* claim that what *makes* a state conscious is its being the object of a higher-order representation. If higher-order representations were themselves conscious, they would be so in virtue of being objects of yet further higher-order representations, and so on.

Reid is threatened by a regress because of his *descriptive* claim that each of us is conscious of all our own mental states and operations (*EIP*, pp. 58, 191, 472). Regress threatens because, according to Reid, consciousness is itself a mental operation. As a result, each of us must be conscious of our consciousness, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The next section below examines Reid's regress. For now, Reid's claim that each of us is conscious of all our own mental states highlights a further reason for thinking that Reid would resist the central *constitutive* thesis of higher-order theories, namely, that a state's being conscious consists in one's being conscious of it. The combination of the constitutive thesis with his position that each of us is conscious of all our own mental states would entail that he could not be committed to the equally central piece of empirical evidence for higher-order theories, namely, that at least some of our mental states are unconscious.

There is no reason to hold that Reid regards consciousness as higher-order, any more than perception or memory. Though he reserves the word 'consciousness' for the awareness we have of our own current mental states and activities, this reservation is characteristic of Reid's taxonomy of mental operations, each distinguished by the kind of intentional object it takes. What is striking is the structural similarities of perception, memory and consciousness: each is a form of awareness consisting of a conception of an object and a belief about the object conceived. Each is a first-order operation yielding immediate non-inferential awareness of its objects. The higher-order theorist's notion of *introspection*, or what Reid would call reflective attention to one's current mental acts and operations, appeals to a *further* higher-order representation that takes as its object the initial higher-order representation by which one's mental state is made conscious. Like the higher-order theorist's notion of consciousness, this notion of introspection differs markedly from Reid's account, on which introspection is but one instance of a widely distributed first-order *modification* of various forms of awareness, rather than a distinct act or operation. Reid's model of the mind does not display the kind of hierarchy to which the higher-order view is committed.

IV. REID'S THEORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE REGRESS PROBLEM

Reid's theory of consciousness may have more in common with contemporary first-order theories, such as those proposed by Fred Dretske and Michael Tye, than with higher-order accounts. Given the similarities between perception and consciousness on which Reid insists, namely, that they are direct, immediate and non-inferential, and display the same conception–belief structure, it makes sense to think of both as operating in much the same manner. Reid's standard schema of perceptual experience is well known: a material object or property occasions a sensation, and this sensation suggests a conception of the material object or property and a belief about the material object or property conceived. The conception and belief are not formed by inference from sensation, which lacks any information from which one would be able to infer to the objects that occasion it. Rather, material objects and properties occasion particular sensations, and sensations suggest particular conceptions of and beliefs about material objects and properties, by a law of nature contingent on God's will: both spectrum inversion and massive inter-modal inversion are metaphysical possibilities. Sensations intervene, but do not mediate, between material objects and our perception of them. Sensations provide the phenomenal character of perceptual experience, but this phenomenal character is, under normal circumstances, unattended to. Though we may attend to sensations, we need not do so in the normal course of perceiving material objects and their properties.²⁰

Extending this account to Reid's view of consciousness explains in what sense Reid regards consciousness as direct, immediate and non-inferential. In essay 6 of *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Reid presents twelve principles of contingent truths, the first of which (*EIP*, p. 470) is 'the existence of every thing of which I am conscious'. The principles are contingent because they specify contingent laws of nature that govern the intellectual powers of the human mind. The laws themselves cannot be explained, but they can be used to explain particular instances of the phenomena over which they range.²¹ As in the case of perceptual experience, the particular conceptions and beliefs about mental states we form by consciousness are a function of a contingent law of nature: we might have been made to form

²⁰ For a detailed account of Reid's direct realist theory of perception, see my 'A Realism for Reid: Mediated but Direct', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 12 (2004), pp. 61–74.

²¹ For more on this, see my 'Is Reid a Mysterian?'.

different conceptions and beliefs when presented with any particular mental state, or we might have been made to remain unaware of mental states altogether.

Unlike in perception, no sensation intervenes between mental states and the conception and belief which constitute consciousness. This accords with the phenomenology, which discovers no sensory qualitative character in conscious experience of mental states other than whatever quality may be present in the state of which one is conscious. But it is not the lack of an intervening sensation that makes consciousness direct, immediate and non-inferential. Rather, consciousness is direct because, like perception and memory, it is primitive as a mental and epistemic operation: it depends on no other epistemic operations for its function. Its operation is secured solely by a law of nature governing the intellectual powers of the human mind.

We can fill in the details of Reid's account of consciousness by further extending his analysis of perception. Just as material objects and properties occasion sensations, which suggest a conception of and belief about those objects and properties, mental states occasion or suggest a conception of and belief about those mental states. From the immediate, direct and non-inferential character of consciousness we should not conclude that it is a kind of referentially transparent, non-conceptual 'awareness-of'. Reid is clear that being conscious of one's present mental acts and operations consists in a kind of fact-awareness: 'No man can perceive an object without being conscious that he perceives it. No man can think, without being conscious that he thinks' (*EIP*, p. 191). According to Reid, though consciousness is not the product of inference or reasoning, it is a kind of judgement; this is why he insists that belief is an ingredient in consciousness (*EIP*, pp. 227–8, 471). Invoking beliefs sounds strange to contemporary ears, but Reid intends only that in consciousness one is not merely aware *of* one's own mental states: one is, in addition, aware *that* one's own mental states are thus and such. As we might put it today, consciousness requires the deployment of concepts. The immediate, direct and non-inferential character of consciousness suggests that the concepts deployed are what we might now call recognitional concepts, concepts which, as David Chalmers puts it, are 'deployed when we recognize objects as being one of those, without relying on theoretical knowledge or other background knowledge'.²² The role of recognitional concepts in consciousness explains why Reid would regard

²² D. Chalmers, 'Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap', in T. Alter and S. Walter (eds), *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism* (Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 167–94. The role of recognitional concepts in consciousness was proposed in B. Loar, 'Phenomenal States', in J. Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives*, 4 (Northridge: Ridgeview, 1990), pp. 81–108.

consciousness as supplying the kind of information that experts can use in attentive reflection so as to become increasingly more adept at examining and distinguishing the various operations of the mind. 'The vulgar seek no theory to account for the operations of their minds; they know that they see, and hear, and remember, and imagine; and those who think distinctly will express these operations distinctly, as their consciousness represents them to the mind' (*EIP*, p. 137). It would also explain why Reid insists that consciousness, though impoverished as a source of knowledge concerning ongoing psychological phenomena, nevertheless provides certainty concerning the particular fleeting mental state present in consciousness at any given time (*EIP*, p. 470). In order to recognize our own mental states as being 'one of those', however, we must represent more than the state itself, more than the vehicle, as it were. We must represent the contents of the mental states, because, according to Reid, reflective attention to our mental states reveals differences at the level of individuation by intentional contents. The foregoing suggests a picture much like that described by Michael Tye (*Consciousness, Color, and Content*, p. 53):

If I think that water is wet and I introspect – I become aware *that* I am thinking that water is wet. This awareness is not based upon an inference from other propositional states. Nor is it the result of attention to an internal auditory image of myself saying that water is wet, though such an image may accompany my thought. Intuitively, my introspective access to what I am thinking is direct. It seems plausible to suppose that introspection of thought contents is a reliable process that takes as input the content of the thought and delivers as output a belief or judgement that one is undergoing a state with that content. On this view of introspective knowledge of thought contents, the concept of a thought that *p* is, in the first-person present-tense application, a *recognitional* concept. Those who have mastered the concept can introspectively recognize that an occurrent thought that *p* is present without going through any process of reasoning.

Although Tye's description calls this process 'introspection' and uses it as the central example of recognition of thought contents, the general picture is remarkably Reidean. Using contemporary language, we can describe Reid's view as one that regards consciousness as a reliable process in which a mental state with a particular content triggers, suggests or occasions a conception of the mental state and the application of recognitional concepts in forming beliefs or judgements to the effect that one is currently undergoing a state with that content.

There is, however, a potential problem for Reid's view, as noted in the previous section. According to Reid, each of us is conscious of all of our own mental acts and operations, and consciousness itself, unlike reflective attention, is a full-blooded, freestanding mental operation. This appears to

lead to a regress: if we are conscious of all our operations, and consciousness itself is an operation, then we must be conscious that we are conscious that we are thinking (or perceiving or remembering) that *p*. For each pair of conception and belief to the effect that one is currently undergoing a state with that content, an additional pair of conception and belief would be triggered to the effect that one is currently undergoing a state with the content that one is undergoing a state with the content borne by the original state, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

Keith Lehrer, who first raised this problem for Reid's theory, argues that Reid did not notice the regress because 'he simply thought that consciousness supplied us with a conception of the *other* operations of the mind'.²³ If Reid holds that we are conscious of all our own mental operations except consciousness itself, this would save him from the regress by making consciousness blind to itself. By consciousness one could acquire, develop and deploy recognitional concepts that allow one to identify one's thoughts, memories, perceptions and imaginings immediately, but one would not be able to form recognitional concepts of one's own *awareness* of those states. Lehrer (p. 52) recognizes the consequences of this solution to the regress problem:

... consciousness does not provide me with a conception of the mental operations of consciousness. That is not to say that we cannot learn to reflect upon the operations of consciousness and, as a result, know that we are conscious and that consciousness provides us with a conception of our other mental operations. But this knowledge concerning consciousness is not automatic. It is the result of reflecting attentively upon it, something that we do not ordinarily do.

Lehrer and Reid are right to insist on the empirical point that we do not typically *attend to our awareness* of our mental states, but this does not preclude our ability to attend to it. Lehrer is, in addition, correct to emphasize that were we to attend to *the awareness* of our mental states, the attention would not itself be an instance of consciousness, but rather of reflective attention. However, reflective attention to one's *awareness of one's* mental states, like all attentive awareness, *presupposes* awareness – in this case, awareness of one's awareness of one's mental states. Reflective attention is a modification of forms of awareness rather than an independent operation. In other words, we cannot attend reflectively to the operations of consciousness without having had awareness of the operation of consciousness itself, nor without being equipped by this previous awareness with at least the possibility of forming a recognitional concept on the basis of the awareness.

²³ K. Lehrer, 'Metamind: Belief, Consciousness, and Intentionality', in R. Bogdan (ed.), *Belief: Form, Content and Function* (Oxford UP, 1986), pp. 37–59, at p. 51.

Alternatively, among the acts and operations of which one may be conscious is the operation of consciousness itself. This would explain how, according to Reid, philosophers and other experts are able to attend reflectively to their own consciousness and thereby distinguish this form of awareness from perception and memory. There are ways of reflecting about the operations of consciousness without having had previous awareness of the operations themselves: one could attend reflectively to having heard that people are conscious of their mental states, or one could attend reflectively to having thought that people are conscious of their mental states, etc. Reflection is widely distributed, after all. But these are not the sort of first-person present-tense applications of concepts of consciousness as are presumably deployed in attending reflectively to one's awareness of one's mental states, however rare reflective attention may be.

More recently, Lehrer argues that we can extend Reid's theory of sensations as self-signifying so far as analysing consciousness as mental self-signification.²⁴ This first-order view has affinities with Brentano and contemporary theorists such as Brian Loar and Uriah Kriegel.²⁵ According to Reid, sensations *signify* or are *signs* of material objects or properties in virtue of their *suggesting* a conception and belief about the material object or property. Lehrer argues that on Reid's view, in *some* cases, in perception of secondary qualities in particular, sensations also signify themselves. In such cases, they would do so in virtue of suggesting a conception of and belief about themselves in addition to suggesting a conception of and belief about the object or property that occasions them.

As a proposal for how to understand Reid's view of consciousness, Lehrer extends this analysis of how sensations signify to all acts and operations of the mind. Just as some sensations suggest a conception of and belief about themselves in addition to suggesting a conception of and belief about the material object or property that occasions them, so all mental acts suggest a conception and belief about themselves. Finally, according to Lehrer, the self-referential character of sensation entails that the sensation is a *part* of the conception and belief pair to which it gives rise. He argues that this account avoids the regress, because mental states signify themselves and are a part of the conception and belief by which they signify themselves.

²⁴ Lehrer, 'Consciousness and the Regress', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, forthcoming.

²⁵ F. Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, tr. A.C. Rancurello et al. (London: Routledge, 1973). For a piece on Brentano's first-order theory, see A.L. Thomasson, 'After Brentano: a One-Level Theory of Consciousness', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 8 (2000), pp. 190–209; U. Kriegel, 'Epiphenomenal Qualities', *Erkenntnis*, 57 (1998), pp. 175–98, and 'The Same-Order Monitoring Theory of Consciousness', in U. Kriegel and K. Williford (eds), *Self-Referential Approaches to Consciousness* (MIT Press, 2006); B. Loar, 'Phenomenal States', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 4 (1990), pp. 81–108.

According to Reid, a sensation is a sign in virtue of *suggesting* conception and belief. Intentional mental states such as consciousness, memory and perception, on the other hand, *consist* in a conception and belief. If a mental state signifies itself along the lines suggested by extension from sensation, it must do so in virtue of suggesting a conception and belief. This is the crucial difference between a state *signifying* something and one that is *about* something. If a conception c_1 is not merely about something but also signifies itself in the manner of self-signifying sensations, there must be some conception c_2 whose suggestion warrants calling conception c_1 a *sign*. The question, then, is whether c_1 and c_2 are numerically identical. If c_1 and c_2 are not numerically identical then the regress looms even if mental states are self-signifying. If mental acts signify themselves by suggesting numerically distinct mental acts in the way sensations signify themselves, then these distinct mental acts will themselves be self-signifying, which requires yet further distinct mental acts, *ad infinitum*. But if c_1 and c_2 are numerically identical, then it is difficult to see how c_1 can be a part of the conception c_2 by which c_1 signifies itself.

The problem of the regress cannot be avoided by holding that mental states signify themselves. Nor can it be avoided by holding that mental states are themselves a part of the conception and belief by which they signify themselves, since this suggests that mental states are numerically distinct from the states of which they are a part, which invites the regress. If we drop the notion of self-signification altogether, the claim that mental states are themselves parts of the conceptions by which they are represented in consciousness has by itself no bearing on the regress problem. Finally, though the notion of consciousness as self-signification is represented among contemporary first-order theorists, using it to understand Reid obscures the analogies between consciousness and perception on which he insists. Reid's analogy is intended to place consciousness among and alongside other mental acts of awareness such as perception and memory, rather than sensation.

The regress cannot be avoided outright on the present alternative, but its viciousness is mitigated. Consciousness is a reliable process that takes as input a mental state and its content and yields as output a conception and belief to the effect that one is undergoing a state with that content. The process of consciousness itself is something of which one is aware, but to which very few reflectively attend. One of the functions of consciousness is to yield a conception and belief to the effect that one is undergoing a state with the content 'I am aware that I am ϕ ing that p ', where any mental operation can be substituted for ϕ , including consciousness. Because of the non-hierarchical nature of consciousness, however, it is not as though there is some additional, independent, higher-order operation 'consciousness of

consciousness' by which one arrives at a conception of and belief about the operations of consciousness. It is the same operation, consciousness, by which one is aware of all of one's mental states and operations, including consciousness itself.

V. CONCLUSION

In *The Nature of Mind*, David Armstrong first presented and defended the higher-order perception or inner-sense theory of consciousness, and illustrated it by giving a now famous example of a familiar experience in which, though conscious in the sense of being awake (*intransitive* creature consciousness), and conscious in the sense of being perceptually aware (*transitive* creature consciousness), one nevertheless lacks consciousness of one's own mental states, thus making one's experiences unconscious.

After driving for long periods of time, particularly at night, it is possible to 'come to' and realize that for some time past one has been driving without being aware of what one has been doing. The coming-to is an alarming experience. It is natural to describe what went on before one came to by saying that during that time one lacked consciousness. Yet it seems clear that in the two senses of the word that I have so far isolated, consciousness was present. There was mental activity, and as part of that mental activity, there was perception.... What is it that the long-distance truck-driver lacks? I think it is an additional form of perception, or, to put it a little more cautiously, it is something that resembles perception. But unlike *sense*-perception, it is not directed towards our current environment and/or our current bodily state. It is perception of the mental.²⁶

On this view, when one comes to and notices where one is – in the cab of a truck, behind the wheel – and notices the road, the embankment, the traffic signals and the other features of the environment through which one has been successfully navigating for some time, attentive awareness of all these external features is provided by, as it were, looking inside. No matter how strongly higher-order theorists insist that they have abandoned the Cartesian baggage left over from the theory of ideas, it is clear that they remain committed to the view that in the course of normal non-truck-driving experience we are given the world, with all its richness, detail and nuance, by turning inwards.

Reid had no experience with trucks, but doubtless he was as familiar with the phenomenon as the rest of us. He would have agreed with Armstrong that drivers in this situation are perceptually aware all along. How else, as Armstrong asks, would we be able to drive? Against Armstrong, however,

²⁶ Armstrong, *The Nature of Mind and Other Essays*, p. 60.

Reid would have insisted that drivers are additionally conscious of their own mental states at the time of having them. What is it, then, that on Reid's view the truck-drivers may lack? If the difference between Reid and the higher-order theorist were merely terminological, then Reid would say that the drivers might lack reflective attention to their own mental states. But this would not have been his view. If it had been, then for him the truck-driving experience would be the normal course of experience, since reflective attention to experience of the world rather than to the world itself is the exception rather than the norm. Reid would agree that the drivers are not paying attention. They are not paying attention to what they are seeing *out there*, in the world. It is simply a contingent fact about us that mere awareness is sufficient for engaging in certain, often rote, activities. 'Coming to' after periods of mere awareness is coming to the world, not to one's experience of it.²⁷

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