

Apperception, Sensation, and Dissociability

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Recent writing on consciousness has increasingly stressed ways in which the terms ‘conscious’ and ‘consciousness’ apply to more than one phenomenon. And it is often urged that failing to observe distinctions between these different phenomena results in fallacious argument and theoretical confusion.

Perhaps the most widely discussed current example is Ned Block’s (1990, 1992, 1993, 1995) distinction between phenomenal and access consciousness, and his claim that discussions of consciousness frequently confound the two phenomena. And elsewhere I have urged the importance of distinguishing a mental state’s being conscious from a person’s being conscious, and also of distinguishing a mental state’s being conscious from one’s being conscious of something.¹

Norton Nelkin’s dissociability thesis about consciousness, developed in his impressive *Consciousness and the Origins of Thought*² and in many articles, is in part a highly useful contribution to this prizing apart of the distinct phenomena to which we apply the terms ‘conscious’ and ‘consciousness’. In particular, he argues that, because certain conscious phenomena sometimes occur in the absence of others, the various phenomena are distinct and independent from one another. Here Nelkin is less cautious than Block, who concedes that phenomenal consciousness and access consciousness might ‘amount to much the same thing empirically’, though he argues they still ‘differ conceptually’ (1995, p. 242).

In section 1, I discuss the various phenomena Nelkin distinguishes, focusing on the kind of consciousness he calls apperception but also raising certain questions about the taxonomy of kinds of consciousness that underlies Nelkin’s distinctions. In section 2, then, I take up certain issues having to do with the consciousness of sensations. In closing, section 3 examines apperception in connection with certain issues about the content and causal

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¹ For example, in Rosenthal, 1986, pp. 351, 329, 335, but more explicitly in Rosenthal, 1993, pp. 197–9; 1997, pp. 729–30, 737.

² Unless otherwise indicated, parenthesized references are to this book. Throughout, emphasis within quotations is in the original.

history of apperceptive awareness. I conclude by urging that the one dissociation between kinds of consciousness that Nelkin denies is possible may well, in fact, frequently occur.

1. Apperception and Conscious States

Nelkin distinguishes three 'states of human beings, each of which is labeled "consciousness"' (p. 147). The first he simply calls awareness or, sometimes, propositional-attitude awareness; for short, he labels it *C1*. This kind of consciousness occurs in virtue of our being in some intentional state or other.

Nelkin notes that, although we are often conscious of our *C1* states, those states also occur without our being at all conscious of them, a situation he calls 'unconscious awareness'. Nelkin describes our being conscious of our *C1* states by saying that we have apperceptive awareness of those states. Such apperceptive, or '*C2*', awareness is the second of the phenomena Nelkin describes as a kind of consciousness. Apperceptive awareness is that kind of consciousness in virtue of which we are conscious of our own mental states.

The third type of consciousness Nelkin distinguishes has to do with sensing. Sensations resemble *C1* states in having representational properties. And, according to Nelkin, sensations, like *C1* states, can occur without our being at all apperceptively aware of them. Though the idea of sensations of which we are not apperceptively aware will strike many as unintuitive, I believe Nelkin is entirely correct about this.³

Nelkin argues that apperceptive states are in effect special cases of *C1* states, since apperceptive awareness is a kind of judging or 'cognitive awareness' (p. 205n.14). And he convincingly rehearses a number of the reasons why apperceptive awareness is not perceptual or sensory in nature.⁴ We apperceive that we are in a certain mental state by making 'a noninferential judgment that we are in' that state (p. 164). Moreover, being apperceptively aware of a state 'does not require paying attention to' that state (p. 82; cf. p. 149n.7).

It is undeniable that we use the words 'conscious' and 'consciousness' in describing all three of the phenomena Nelkin discusses. Nelkin explains this by appeal to the idea that consciousness is what 'distinguishes us from' 'objects like rocks or roses—or even present-day computers' (p. 184):

Since each [kind of state] characterizes an important way in which things like human beings differ from things like rocks, no one state has any more priority in being considered as what consciousness

³ I have argued for that view in, e.g. Rosenthal 1991, 1995, forthcoming a, forthcoming c.

⁴ Some of his reasons, which hinge on a special view about what perceiving consists in, are somewhat less convincing. I say more about apperceptive awareness and perceiving in section 3.

really is than the others . . . [The term] “consciousness” actually is systematically ambiguous. (p. 148; cf. p. 162)

There is, however, another reason why all three sorts of state count as kinds of consciousness. Being in an intentional state about something is one way of being conscious *of* that thing, as is having a sensation of something. And, as apperceptive awareness is about the mental states one is in, all three of the states Nelkin distinguishes are instances of being conscious *of* something. They are all cases of what I have elsewhere called *transitive consciousness*.⁵

But all mental states are cases of transitive consciousness. To count as mental, a state must have representational character. So to be in that state is to be conscious of whatever it is the state represents. All mental states are, in this sense, states of consciousness.

Though Nelkin usually describes C1 states, sensations, and apperceptive states as kinds of consciousness, he also sometimes describes these states as conscious states. They are ‘the various states called ‘conscious’ (p. 182). More specifically, he says that in apperception ‘the higher-order [apperceptive] state is itself conscious, because it is the sort of state it *is*—an *apperceptive one*’ (p. 130). Indeed, ‘every state of awareness [that is, every C1 state, apperceptive state, and sensation] *is* in some sense or other a conscious state’ (p. 126).

It is important to note, however, that in the sense in which all three kinds of state count as conscious states, no contrast can obtain between a particular state’s being conscious and its not being conscious. And that is at variance with the way we ordinarily characterize mental states as being conscious. Although many mental states are conscious, it is widely recognized that many are not. If we describe C1 states, apperceptive, and sensations all as conscious states, we cannot characterize some tokens of these types as being conscious, in contrast to others that are not.

Nelkin points out that distinguishing among three types of consciousness does allow us to describe any mental state token as both conscious and not, in suitably different senses of the term ‘conscious’. Thus, as noted earlier, he describes C1 states of which one isn’t apperceptively aware as cases of ‘unconscious awareness’. We can do that because by ‘conscious’ here we ‘have in mind one of the *other* states of consciousness’ (p. 162; cf. pp. 124–5), namely, apperceptive consciousness. The state is conscious in the characteristic way C1 states are, but not in the way apperceptive states are. Similarly for sensations; although automatically conscious in the sense proper to such states, they aren’t conscious in the sense that’s characteristic of states of apperceptive awareness (p. 170).

⁵ ‘Transitive’ because the adjective ‘conscious’ requires a direct object. More precisely, as it’s creatures, not states, that are conscious of things, it is in virtue of being in such states that a creature is conscious of something.

But this differentiation of senses does not restore the commonsense contrast between a state's being conscious or not conscious. Take the C1 state of which one isn't apperceptively aware. We can describe this state in two ways: as being conscious in the way C1 states are and as being not conscious in the way states of apperceptive awareness are. But that is equally true of every C1 state. Similarly for sensations. Our commonsense contrast between mental states that are conscious and those which are not operates differently. On that contrast, a token of any particular type of mental state might be conscious and, in the same sense of 'conscious', other tokens of that type might not be.

There is another way to see this point. It is generally recognized that intentional states, such as thoughts, desires, and the like, occur both consciously and not consciously. And most would accept that this holds as well for affective states, such as anger and fear. There is disagreement, however, about whether this is also true of bodily sensations, such as pains, and visual and other perceptual sensations. What is controversial is whether sensations can occur nonconsciously in the way in which both cognitive and affective states can. A single sense of 'conscious state', which applies to mental states of all sorts, is at issue.

As characterizing a mental state as conscious in this commonsense way contrasts with saying of that state that it isn't conscious, we can usefully approach this commonsense notion by asking what it would be for a state not to be conscious. It is plain that when a mental state is not conscious, we are in no way conscious, however minimally, of being in that state. So conscious mental states are those of which we are, in some suitable way, conscious. We need not, of course, be conscious of these states attentively, nor in the reflective, self-conscious way involved in introspecting what states we are in. But unless we are in some way conscious of being in a mental state, that state will not be a conscious state, at least on the commonsense notion just described.

When we are conscious of those mental states which are conscious, the way we are transitively conscious of them seems, from a first-person point of view, to be unmediated and direct. But however robust this intuition of immediacy appears, it may well not be veridical. It's pretheoretically inviting to suppose that the way we perceive external objects is direct and unmediated, though in actuality there is of course much that mediates between those objects and our perceptual states. The intuitive idea that nothing mediates between our conscious states and our being transitively conscious of them may be no more trustworthy.⁶

Whether or not the intuition of immediacy is veridical, however, we must explain why we have that intuition and why it is so compelling. We can do

⁶ Nelkin accepts that this immediacy is illusory in the case of perceiving, but insists that the 'representation apperceived *directly causes* the apperceptive representation' (p. 207). I return to this question in section 3.

that by supposing that, when mental states are conscious, we are conscious of them in a way that relies on no conscious inferential process—no inferential process, that is, of which we are conscious. If so, the way we are conscious of our conscious states will, from a first-person point of view, seem spontaneous and unmediated. An inference may well figure in our being conscious of such states, but if we are unaware of it the intuition of immediacy will be preserved.

These considerations recall Nelkin's notion of apperceptive awareness. As already noted, apperception according to Nelkin is noninferential and it need not be at all attentive. If we construe being noninferential to mean that our apperceptive awareness is based on no inference that's conscious, the mental states we intuitively regard as conscious states are just those of which we are, in Nelkin's sense, apperceptively aware. And, as apperceptive awareness consists in the making of a judgement that one is in a particular mental state, this amounts to the higher-order-thought (HOT) hypothesis I have defended elsewhere about what it is for mental states to be conscious states (see notes 1 and 3).

Nelkin resists this view of what it is for a mental state to be conscious, urging that it's one thing for a state to be conscious and another for one to be conscious of it (e.g. p. 130). He therefore takes issue with my claim that 'a lower-order state is *made conscious* by being the object of a higher-order state' (p. 130; cf. p. 128n.8). As we saw, a C1 state of which one isn't apperceptively conscious is conscious in the way special to C1 states but not conscious in the way characteristic of apperceptive states. But on Nelkin's view exactly the same is true of a C1 state of which *is* apperceptively conscious, because a state's being the object of an apperceptive awareness does not result in that state's being conscious. Similarly for sensations; those which are apperceived are conscious in only the sense in which sensations that aren't apperceived are conscious. Nelkin's approach to the notion of a conscious state, by allowing no contrast between a state's being conscious or not, is only a way of talking about the various kinds of mental state.

Nelkin's construing all C1 states, apperceptive states, and sensations as conscious amounts to saying that a state's being conscious consists in its being a state in virtue of which we are transitively conscious *of* something. In this, he joins Fred Dretske, who urges that a state's being conscious consists in its being a state in virtue of being in which one is conscious of something, or conscious that something is the case. 'Conscious mental states', Dretske maintains, 'are states that we are conscious *with*, not states we are conscious *of*'.⁷

Dretske supports this claim by an ingenious argument for the conclusion that mental states can be conscious even when one fails in any way to be conscious of them.⁸ Indeed, he maintains, more ambitiously, that we are never conscious, properly speaking, *of* our mental states.⁹ And, if a mental

⁷ Dretske, 1995, pp. 100–1; cf. Dretske, 1993, pp. 280–1.

state's being conscious cannot consist in one's being conscious of it, there seems no way to capture that notion except by appeal to the idea that conscious states are states in virtue of which we are conscious of something.

There is another reason one might object to my claim that, in Nelkin's words, 'a lower-order state is *made conscious* by being the object of a higher-order state' (p. 130). One might doubt that a higher-order state could effect in a lower-order state a change from not being conscious to being conscious. This begs the question at hand. On the HOT hypothesis, being conscious is a relational property of a mental state, consisting in one's being conscious of that state in a suitable way. The suitable way, in turn, consists in one's having a non-dispositional, assertoric HOT based on no conscious inference to the effect that one is in that very state.¹⁰ And if a state's being conscious is a relational property of this sort, the presence or absence of the relevant relatum will make the difference between a state's being conscious or not.

As Nelkin uses the phrase, 'conscious state', a conscious state is any mental state with representational properties, among which he distinguishes three main types. I have urged that mental states of any of these sorts occur both consciously and not, and that we can best understand this by identifying conscious states with the states Nelkin describes as being objects of apperceptive awareness. For convenience, I'll refer to consciousness in this sense as *state consciousness*. Is the difference between us, then, merely terminological, or is there also a substantive disagreement?

Apart from several fine points, which I'll discuss in section 3, it seems that the difference is merely terminological. Unlike Dretske, Nelkin presents no argument for denying that a mental state's being conscious consists in one's being conscious of it in some suitable way. Nor does he offer reason to think that mental states cannot fail to be conscious states, except in failing to be

⁸ I have argued elsewhere that Dretske's argument does not succeed. In brief, although Dretske shows that there are conscious experiences we aren't conscious of in respect of one particular aspect, he doesn't show that we aren't conscious of them in respect of some other aspect. (Rosenthal, forthcoming c, MS pp. 5–10; forthcoming d, MS pp. 18–20.)

⁹ Not even, he argues, in introspection. Dretske sees introspection as resembling what he calls displaced perception. Just as we come to know how full the gas tank is by looking at the gauge, so we come to know what mental state we're in by noticing what physical object we're seeing. Although we come thereby to be conscious *that* we're in some particular mental state, we're not conscious *of* that state (Dretske, 1994/5 and 1995, ch. 2).

If Dretske is right about introspection, introspecting a mental state in effect means having a thought that one is that state. Dretske regards all thoughts as conscious; so this amounts to the claim that introspecting is having a *conscious* thought about one's mental states. This is exactly the account of introspection I have offered elsewhere (e.g. Rosenthal, 1986, pp. 336–7; 1997, pp. 745–46). Dretske's view differs from mine only in his presupposition that all mental states are conscious states.

¹⁰ A relatively minimal concept of the self, strong enough only to serve to distinguish oneself from everything else, suffices for these purposes. And one needn't have any concept of a state's being a *mental* state; it's enough simply to have the thought that one is in the state in question.

conscious in the way characteristic of some other type of mental state.¹¹ In the absence of any such substantive divergence, it is reasonable to conclude that there are simply two senses of 'conscious state' in play.¹²

2. *Qualities and Consciousness*

Nelkin describes his book as a defence of Cartesian rationalism. Central to such rationalism is the denial of the traditional Aristotelian thesis that, because thinking is at bottom an abstract form of sensing, sensory content is inherent in all thinking.¹³ Nelkin is, accordingly, concerned to establish not only that thinking is distinct from sensing but also that it is largely independent of it.

Nelkin recognizes that sensory states—what he calls phenomena—often accompany our occurrent thoughts, and may even cause those thoughts. But he maintains that there is no uniformity of type among the sensory states that accompany a particular type of thought. Moreover, he urges that, in respect of representational character, 'the phenomena often appear to be totally irrelevant to the thought' (p. 159). Perhaps so. But Nelkin relies here on our introspective access to the relevant thoughts and sensations. And that matters only if what's at issue is whether our thoughts are independent of our *conscious* sensory states—sensory states of which, in Nelkin's terms, we are apperceptively aware. Given that many sensory states occur of which we are not apperceptively aware, it could be that thoughts are generally accompanied by nonconscious sensory states whose representational character is relevant to that of the thought.

Nelkin is aware that introspection is a very limited source of information about mental states and processes. He notes, for example, that 'introspection cannot reasonably be the means by which we decide whether all phenomenal states are apperceived' (p. 170; cf. p. 174). Why, then, rely on only those phenomenal states which are apperceived to determine the connection between thinking and sensation?

Nelkin develops an intriguing and suggestive view of concept formation, on which the concepts we deploy in intentional states derive from the prior

¹¹ Again unlike Dretske, who seeks to show that putative cases of nonconscious mental states are unconvincing. Thus he urges that the well-known case of a person's driving without seeming to be in any conscious states pertaining to the road is actually a case of inattentive perceiving, rather than perceiving that isn't conscious (Dretske, 1993, p. 271). The driver example, cited by Nelkin, pp. 126–7, is perhaps best known from Armstrong, 1980, p. 59.

¹² A number (though not all) of Nelkin's criticisms of my view seem to be based on this terminological divergence, e.g. p. 128n.8, p. 130.

¹³ Thus, although Aristotle recognizes that images are distinct from thoughts (1907, Γ8, 432a12–4), he insists that thinking requires images (e.g. 1907, A1, 403a9–10, Γ7, 431a16, Γ8, 432a9, 14 and 1972, 1, 449b31) and, indeed, that one 'thinks in images' (1907, Γ7, 431b2; cf. Γ8, 432a5).

apperception of sensory states. But even that connection between thinking and sensation cannot warrant restricting attention to apperceived sensations, because Nelkin is unequivocal that unapperceived sensations do occur.

Let me turn to the kind of consciousness characteristic of sensations. There is, according to Nelkin, 'no *one* state that consciousness is' (p. 170). Consciousness is something different, depending on whether the state under consideration is a C1 state, an apperceptive state, or a sensation. And each type of consciousness can occur in the absence of each of the others.¹⁴ Because of that, we cannot hope to explain one kind of consciousness by appeal to another. In particular, apperceptive consciousness cannot help explain the kind of consciousness that is proper to sensations. And, since apperceiving a mental state is having a HOT about it, HOTs will not enable us to explain the kind of consciousness that sensations exemplify. As Nelkin puts it, the HOT hypothesis 'omits the fact that consciousness [of that type] seems to *feel* some way or another' (p. 146; cf. p. 128n.8).

But it is not immediately obvious just what Nelkin thinks is omitted. On Nelkin's use of the phrase 'conscious state', all sensations are conscious states, even those of which we are in no way apperceptively aware. And the same is true of what it is for sensations 'to *feel* some way or another'. Apperceived sensations all have some distinctive feel, but so do sensations that are not apperceived. The way it feels to experience a sensation that is not apperceived is '*[e]xactly* what it 'feels like' to experience one that is apperceived' (p. 174).¹⁵ '[P]henomenality can dissociate from apperception' (p. 172).

It arguably stretches the terms 'feel' and 'experience' to apply them to states of which we are not apperceptively aware. But Nelkin's substantive point is sound. Not only do sensations occur without being apperceived; unapperceived sensations have the very same sorts of distinguishing qualitative property as apperceived sensations. All sensations resemble and differ

¹⁴ Apperceptive consciousness occurs, according to Nelkin, p. 150, without C1 consciousness and it occurs without sensations, but 'cannot occur apart from both of the others'. I return to this issue in section 3.

¹⁵ Nelkin's quotation marks around 'feel' serve only to signal that his remark applies to qualitative properties of every sensory modality, and not just to qualities associated with touch. See, e.g. p. 148n. 5. He is not introducing an extended sense of the term.

Nelkin's view that unapperceived sensations feel just the way apperceived sensations feel may recall Block's insistence that there is something it's like to be in sensory states even when those states lack what he calls access consciousness—intuitively, even when we have no conscious access to those states.

It is important to distinguish apperceptive consciousness from what Block calls monitoring consciousness (1995, p. 235). Monitoring consciousness is, rather, that special case of having conscious access to our mental states in which we are explicitly conscious that we have such access; we are apperceptively aware that we apperceive. Block regards the ability to report our mental states as 'often the best practical guide' to the presence of access consciousness (p. 231), which echoes the connection Nelkin sees between apperceptive consciousness and verbalization. (For an account of that connection, see Rosenthal, 1993.) So Nelkin's apperceptive consciousness more likely corresponds to Block's access consciousness.

from one another in virtue of their distinguishing mental properties. When we are apperceptively aware of sensations, we are conscious of those properties as sensory qualities. But unapperceived sensations must have the very distinguishing properties we become conscious of when we apperceive the sensations. Otherwise, there would be no mental properties in virtue of which the unapperceived sensations resemble and differ from one another.

Apperceived sensations are conscious in the sense of state consciousness. By contrast, the special kind of consciousness that is proper to sensations is present whether we are apperceptively aware of them or not. So that special kind of consciousness must consist simply in sensations having distinguishing mental properties.

Nelkin sees the HOT hypothesis as failing to explain the consciousness of sensations because it 'omits the fact that consciousness [of that type] seems to *feel* some way or another' (p. 146). Since, on Nelkin's usage, sensations feel a certain way whether or not they are apperceived, the fact allegedly omitted covers sensations that aren't apperceived as well as those which are. So what the HOT hypothesis omits, according to Nelkin, is not the way conscious sensations differ from those which are not—in his terminology, the way apperceived sensations differ from those which are not apperceived. Rather, the hypothesis omits any account of what it is for sensations, whether apperceived or not, to have their distinctive sensory qualities.

This is correct, as far as it goes. The HOT hypothesis is an account of how conscious states of any particular type differ from states of that type which are not conscious. It is not also intended as an explanation of what it is for sensations to have their distinguishing mental properties. But there is more to be said. For one thing, we want to know whether there is any account of those properties that fits with the HOT hypothesis. And, more important, can the HOT hypothesis do justice to the way in which conscious sensations, unlike those which are not conscious, have conscious qualitative character? Can HOTs enable us to explain how it is that, when our sensations are conscious, there is something it is like to have those sensations?

Intuitively, the mystery about qualitative properties has to do with how they feel and what it's like to experience them. It is notoriously difficult to give any informative account for what it's like to consciously experience these properties. So the mystery is unlikely to yield unless we can give an account of those properties independently of what it's like to have conscious, apperceived sensations that have them. On Nelkin's terminology, however, we experience and feel these properties even when the relevant sensations are not apperceived. That conceals the need to account for the qualitative properties of sensations independently of their state consciousness, independently, that is, of how conscious, apperceived sensations differ from those which are not apperceived.

I have argued elsewhere that we can understand the sensory qualities of our perceptual sensations in terms of homomorphisms these properties have with the perceptible properties of physical objects and processes.¹⁶ In briefest

¹⁶ See Rosenthal, forthcoming a and 1991, section II.

outline, the qualitative properties special to each sensory modality resemble and differ from one another in ways that reflect the similarities and differences among the corresponding perceptible properties of physical objects. These homomorphisms between families of qualitative properties of sensations and families of perceptible properties of physical objects enable the qualitative properties of sensations to represent the corresponding perceptible properties.¹⁷ These homomorphisms permit an account of the qualitative properties of sensations that makes no reference to what it's like to have conscious, apperceived sensations. Because the account is independent of whether or not sensations are apperceived, it doesn't commit us to any particular account of what it is for sensations to be conscious or apperceived. In particular, it fits comfortably with the HOT explanation of state consciousness.

But there is a deeper problem for the HOT hypothesis, and equally for Nelkin's account of apperception. When a sensation is conscious, or apperceived, there is something it's like to have that sensation. But when we are in no way conscious of having a sensation, there is, from a first-person point of view, nothing it's like to have it.¹⁸ How can we explain this difference? How can being transitively conscious of a sensation result in there being something it's like to have it?

It might seem here that Nelkin's speaking of unapperceived sensations feeling a certain way has an advantage. If there is something it's like to have unapperceived sensations, no problem arises about how apperceiving can result in there being something it's like to have sensations. But, whatever one's terminology, there is an important distinction to be marked here. Unless sensations are conscious, we are unaware of their distinguishing properties. But there is a mystery about the qualitative character of those properties only when we are aware of them.¹⁹ Unapperceived sensations present no intuitive mystery. The apparent intransigence of this problem is part of what has encouraged many to insist that it's essential to something's

¹⁷ *Pace* Nelkin, who holds that the representational properties of sensations are independent of their qualitative properties, citing Rosenthal, 1991 in support of his view (p. 115n.29; p. 168).

¹⁸ This is why it's odd to speak, with Nelkin, of unapperceived sensations' feeling a certain way and, with Block, of there being something it's like to have sensations to which we have no conscious access.

¹⁹ Nelkin seems to agree. He sensibly regards the kind of consciousness Thomas Nagel has focused on in (1974) and elsewhere as a compound state, consisting of sensations along with one's apperception of them (cf. Rosenthal, 1986, p. 352). And, in the sense of such 'Nagel consciousness' (p. 124), he writes: 'When we distinguish a conscious state from an unconscious one, we are distinguishing the first as possessing [certain] ineffable qualities and the second as lacking them' (p. 136). It is presumably these ineffable qualities that many see as recalcitrant to informative treatment.

Seeing Nagel-conscious states as such compounds doesn't by itself dissolve the problem, however, since we must still explain why apperceived sensations seem to have ineffable qualities.

being a sensation that there is something it's like to have it and that sensations cannot, therefore, occur without being apperceived.²⁰

Apperceptive awareness, according to Nelkin, consists in our making judgements about the mental states we are in—in effect, in our having HOTs about those states. It may seem that such a theory makes it particularly puzzling that there is something it's like to have conscious, apperceived sensations but not sensations that aren't apperceived. How could having a HOT or making an apperceptive judgement about a sensation result in there being something it's like to have that sensation? How can being in an intentional state, of whatever sort, result in sensory qualities' being consciously experienced? Perhaps it is this difficulty which leads Nelkin to concede that, even on his own view, '[q]ualitative properties may still be unexplained' (p. 169).

It may not be obvious just what could satisfy this demand for explanation. On the HOT hypothesis, the HOTs in virtue of which we are transitively conscious of our conscious mental states are rarely themselves conscious thoughts. A HOT is conscious only when one has a yet higher-order thought about it. Similarly on Nelkin's view; we seldom apperceive that we are apperceiving. So, even if HOTs are responsible for there being something it's like to have sensations, because we are seldom introspectively aware of our HOTs, we would not have introspective access to that connection. Even if HOTs result in there being something it's like to have conscious sensations, we cannot expect it to seem that way from a first-person point of view. So we cannot insist that it be part of showing that HOTs are responsible for qualitative subjectivity that it seems from a first-person point of view that they are. Theory, not intuition, will settle the question here.²¹

²⁰ Nelkin's being unimpressed with this problem may be responsible for his concluding that 'there are *no arguments at all*, so far as I am aware, that [sensations and apperceptive consciousness] are not dissociable' (p. 173).

In addition to the argument cited in the text, there is also a more subtle consideration. It is inviting to think of the qualities of sensory states as relocated versions of various commonsense qualities of physical objects. Because the qualitative character of those commonsense physical qualities resists mathematical treatment, it's often denied that physical objects have any such qualities. We can, it's urged, do justice to those qualities only by reconstruing them as qualities of sensory states.

But commonsense physical qualities cause difficulty only insofar as we are perceptually conscious of them. So what gets reconstrued are the physical qualities *together with our perceptual consciousness of them*. Conceiving of the qualities of sensory states as relocated versions of physical qualities, therefore, actually implies that those mental qualities are intrinsically conscious. It is that relocation picture which is responsible for the stubborn resilience of the intuition that sensory qualities cannot occur without being conscious—in Nelkin's terminology, without being apperceived. But the relocation picture is dispensable if we conceive of sensory qualities instead in terms of homomorphisms with the commonsense perceptible properties of physical objects.

²¹ Though Nelkin would agree with the appeal to theory, he also urges that we should judge theories against 'theories of similar scope' (p. 182). But a theory sometimes wins out precisely because a theory of just that scope works better than one whose scope is broader or narrower.

These considerations will recall Joseph Levine's argument that there is an explanatory gap, consisting in 'our inability to explain qualitative character in terms of the physical

And, first-person appearances aside, there are sound theoretical reasons to think that HOTs do result in there being something it's like to have the sensations that the HOTs are about. Enlarging our conceptual repertoire for a particular range of sensory experiences sometimes seems actually to result in our having conscious sensory experiences that we hadn't before seemed to have. Think of wine tasting. Often we become conscious of new gustatory and olfactory sensations involved in the tasting of wines only once we have learned concepts to differentiate those experiences.

How can this be? It is unreasonable to suppose that the new concepts actually produce or make possible gustatory and olfactory sensations that hadn't previously occurred. Far more sensible is the hypothesis that those sensations had resulted from earlier tastings, but in the absence of suitable discriminatory concepts, those sensations were not *conscious* sensations. But how can our acquiring concepts for particular sensory qualities result in sensations with those qualities coming to be conscious sensations? Concepts have their effect by being deployed in intentional states; so the new concepts must produce this result by their occurrence in the thoughts that use them. And, since the new concepts are concepts of the relevant sensory experiences, it must be that the sensations become conscious by being accompanied by thoughts about those very sensory experiences: by higher-order, apperceptive thoughts. Whatever our intuitive sense that no such connection obtains, there is sound theoretical reason to think that it does.²²

3. Apperception, Content and Causation

An important feature of Nelkin's rationalist program involves his challenging treatment of concept formation, mentioned earlier. On the view of concept formation he wants to combat, the intentionality of C1 states has its origin in the representational character of sensations. Nelkin's own view puts an interesting twist on that traditional Aristotelian theory. The concepts that provide content to intentional states derive not from the representational character of sensory states, but instead from our apperceptive awareness of those states.

As Nelkin notes, this proposal would help explain the function of apperceptive consciousness. It's often thought that apperceptive awareness functions to enable rational planning and inference that would be impossible without it. This is unlikely. The rationality of planning and inference is a function of the content of the component intentional states, and that content is unaffected by whether those states are conscious, that is, by whether they are apperceived. Perhaps higher-order apperceptive thoughts are needed for

properties of sensory states', Levine, 1993, p. 121 (see also Levine, 1983). In that connection, too, we must not be guided by whether such an explanation fits with how things seem from a first-person point of view.

²² I elaborate on these considerations in Rosenthal, forthcoming c, section III.

self-critical rationality. But even then it may be that such higher-order apperceptive thoughts do no more than represent the rational processes that connect the relevant lower-order intentional states. If Nelkin's proposal about concept formation is correct, therefore, it would very likely provide the best available account of why apperceptive consciousness is useful.

To determine whether concepts derive from sensing or instead from the apperceptive awareness of sensations, we must have a clear demarcation between intentional and sensory states. Nelkin invokes John Searle's (1990) notion of aspect to differentiate the image-like representation characteristic of sensations from the proposition-like representation distinctive of C1 awareness. The content of C1 states is aspectual, whereas the information contained in sensations is not. Nelkin construes that difference in terms of the way representational states contain information. A thought about Abraham Lincoln is about Lincoln only in respect of some particular aspect; a sensation, by contrast, resembles a picture of Lincoln in representing him in many different, nonequivalent ways.

But thoughts and sensations do not differ in this way. Both represent things in respect of variable numbers of aspects, and neither represents anything in respect of all its aspects. No matter how a thought or sensation represents Lincoln, moreover, that thought or sensation is *of* Lincoln in all his aspects. There is no doubt that the representational character of intentional states differs importantly from that of sensory states. But a clearer account of exactly what that difference consists in is needed to determine whether or not intentional content derives from the representational character of sensations.²³

Nelkin's account of concept formation raises important questions about the nature of apperceptive awareness. If the concepts that figure in the intentional content of C1 states derives from our apperceptive awareness of phenomenal states, it must be that '[p]henomenal states are apperceived prior to there being any C1 states' (p. 256). But how is that possible, given that apperceptive awareness is itself a kind of propositional awareness?

Nelkin's solution is that the content of apperceptive awareness is minimal:

All apperception, whether in these primitive cases or in more sophisticated ones, is primarily a kind of demonstrative, existential judgment of the form similar to 'That is occurring'. (p. 254)

Moreover, Nelkin holds that there are also several primitive innate concepts, which enable one to apperceive sensations. But construing apperceptive judgements as so conceptually sparse may make it even less plausible that apperceiving sensations could lead, by whatever mechanism, to the full-

²³ Nelkin recognizes that his account leaves it unclear exactly what aspectuality consists in, arguing that he can rely on the distinction at an intuitive level, 'leaving it to future research to unpack the notion' (p. 112). I am urging that, without explication, the intuitive notion begs too many relevant questions.

fledged intentionality of C1 states, even with the aid of a few well-chosen primitive innate concepts.

There is another concern as well. Concept formation doubtless involves some sort of bootstrapping operation. But why suppose it more likely that such bootstrapping rests on primitive apperceptive judgements about sensations than on primitive, noncompositional intentional states that aren't apperceptive? Nelkin believes that concept formation begins with the infant's being aware that some of its experiences are within its control and others are not.²⁴ But it could equally well be that the infant is, instead, aware that some of the occurrences it senses are within its control and others aren't. It is not all that plausible that infants' categorization of their own experiences actually leads to their forming concepts of things other than those experiences.

Nelkin sees apperceiving as tied closely to the states that are apperceived. The apperceived state 'directly causes the apperceptive representation' (p. 206). Nelkin describes the causal tie as direct to distinguish it from a situation in which a higher-order awareness resulted from a weighting of a number of lower-order states.²⁵ On his view, 'only *one* representation is 'scanned' in the process leading to apperception' (p. 207).

There is good reason, however, to think that apperceptive judgements do result from a weighting of various lower-order states. Which lower-order states one apperceives is plainly determined by a variety of mental factors, including one's focus of attention, present interests, and other current mental occurrences. As many mental factors actively influence which states of apperceptive awareness occur, it is likely that each apperceptive state is responsive to a range of lower-order states.

Consideration of the neural pathways that presumably subserve apperception makes this conclusion all the more probable. When we apperceive a visual sensation, for example, that sensation occurs in the occipital cortex, whereas the apperceptive awareness occurs is located in some area dedicated to the forming of judgements. The pathways connecting these areas are doubtless subject to many intervening mental influences along the way.

Apperceptive awareness is traditionally thought of as direct, however, not because of some view about the nature of the scanning process subserving such awareness, but because nothing seems intuitively to mediate between the states we are aware of and our apperceptive awareness of them. Such apperceptive awareness seems to us to be spontaneous, giving rise to the intuitive sense that it may even be intrinsic to the states apperceived. And, as argued in section 1, directness of this sort implies nothing about the relevant

²⁴ Being within one's control is, according to Nelkin, one of our several innate primitive concepts.

²⁵ Nelkin believes that such vectoring of information, in which 'many representations are 'scanned'' (p. 207) and weighted, does occur in perception, which he sees as the result of "scanning" various unaspecialized representational states' (p. 205).

scanning process, but only that we are unaware of any factors mediating between apperception and what is apperceived.

But a more radical conclusion is warranted. Not only have we no reason to think that the apperceptive awareness of our mental states is *directly* caused by those states; there is no reason to think that it is caused by them at all. What is crucial for apperceptive awareness is its content; such awareness must be an assertoric intentional state whose content is that one is in some particular state. And we must be aware of nothing that mediates between that state and the thought that one is in it. That much suffices for one to be aware of the state in the way characteristic of a state's being a conscious state—conscious in the sense of state consciousness described above. We need not also assume anything about the causal origins of such HOTs.

It's natural enough to suppose that the state apperceived is typically implicated in the causal process leading to our apperceptive awareness of it; why else would such apperceptive awareness occur? But mental states of any particular type are sometimes apperceived and sometimes not. So there must be causal factors other than the state itself which explain why apperception sometimes results and sometimes doesn't. Many factors, ranging from attention and alertness to concurrent mental processes, doubtless play a non-trivial role.

Consider, then, two situations. In both a visual sensation occurs and becomes the object of an apperceptive awareness. But in one situation the visual sensation causes the apperception and in the other it does not. Would the two situations differ subjectively? Would one be able to tell from a first-person point of view which of the two situations obtained? There is no reason to think one would.

Nelkin thoroughly and convincingly reviews many reasons for thinking that the kinds of consciousness special to C1 states, apperceptive states, sensations dissociate from one another. But he claims that there is one exception. Apperceptive awareness occurs without C1 states and it occurs without sensations. But according to Nelkin, apperception 'cannot occur apart from both of the others' (p. 150). This may strike one as simple common sense. How can apperception take place if the state one apperceives doesn't exist?

The requirement that apperceived states occur doubtless stems in part from the natural tendency to construe 'conscious of' and 'aware of' as factive, so that *a* cannot be conscious or aware of *b* unless *b* exists. This carries over to apperceiving, which is after all a way of being aware of something. But one is conscious or aware of something in virtue of being in some mental state that represents that thing. And that mental state can of course occur in the absence of the relevant object. So even if these phrases are factive, it is arbitrary not to apply them to cases in which the relevant object doesn't exist. Any case in which the mental situation is exactly like paradigm cases of one's being conscious of something should itself count as a case of being conscious of something, whether or not that thing exists.

A mental state's being conscious in the sense of state consciousness con-

sists in one's being conscious of that state in some suitable way. There need be no direct causal connection between the state and our being conscious of it, and indeed no causal connection at all. What matters is only whether one is in some higher-order mental state in virtue of which one is conscious in a suitable way of the target state. Why, then, couldn't that higher-order state occur in the absence of the target state? If all that matters is one's being in a suitable higher-order state, why can't the occurrence of the target state be optional?

A situation in which target and apperceptive awareness are connected causally is subjectively indistinguishable from a situation in which target and apperceptive state both occur but the target doesn't cause the apperception. One cannot, from just a first-person point of view, tell which situation obtains.

It is likely that something similar holds with respect to whether the target state occurs at all. When the target actually occurs and is conscious, one is apperceptively aware of it. Consider, then, a case in which that very higher-order apperceptive state occurs but the target is absent. It is not credible that one could tell, from just a first-person point of view, which situation obtains. Having a thought about something is subjectively the same whether or not that thing exists.

We cannot truly describe somebody as being in a mental state unless that state exists. Why are things different with conscious mental states? How can we truly describe somebody as being in a conscious state where the state that's allegedly conscious doesn't even exist? A mental state's being conscious consists in one's taking oneself to be in that state. So even when the state itself doesn't exist, it is the intentional object of one's higher-order apperceptive awareness. Since one cannot distinguish subjectively cases in which the target exists from those in which it doesn't, it's natural to describe that intentional object as a conscious state. Whatever the correct theoretical explanation, consciousness is a matter of subjective appearances. So, if two cases are indistinguishable from just a first-person point of view, the difference between them cannot make any difference for consciousness.

Apperception in the absence of the state apperceived is not a mere theoretical possibility; there is good reason to think it actually occurs. Dental patients, for example, sometimes seem from a first-person point of view to be in pain when the relevant neural pathways are anaesthetized or even nonexistent. The usual explanation is that the dental procedure has caused fear and anxiety, and the patient misconstrues that state as one of pain. Similar misconstruals doubtless occur in other unusual, extreme situations, such as injury in battle. In the dental case, learning the explanation generally results in the patient's coming to experience new sensations correctly, as fear and tension. But the patient's subjective sense of having earlier experienced intense pain remains. The earlier experience remains subjectively indistinguishable from an actual experience of pain.²⁶

²⁶ For other examples of confabulatory apperceptive states, see Nisbett and Wilson, 1977 and the extensive literature based on that work.

The question of whether apperceptive states can occur in the absence of the relevant lower-order states connects with the issue about directness as Nelkin conceives of it. If apperceptive awareness results from the weighting of a number of lower-order states, there is no reason to suppose that the particular lower-order state that an apperceptive awareness purports to be about must be among the weighted lower-order states. Nelkin acknowledges that '[w]e can be mistaken about our internal states' (p. 210). But he regards such error as due solely to the way we categorize the states apperceived.²⁷ In addition to such error in interpretation, however, it is overwhelmingly likely that substantive apperceptive error also occurs, including the apparent apperceptive awareness of non-existent lower-order states. Apperceptive consciousness does dissociate from both C1 states and sensations.

Because it has focused on Nelkin's treatment of consciousness, this discussion of necessity has not conveyed adequately the provocative richness of Nelkin's work, especially in connection with perceiving and concept formation. This is an admirable and valuable book, which will reward careful study.

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²⁷ Earlier, in considering situations in which the verbal responses of experimental subjects are untrustworthy, he assumes that these 'self-reporting errors are errors in verbalisation, rather than substantive errors in apperceptive access' (p. 133).

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