* The issue is: how to distinguish conscious mental states from unconscious mental states — what are the “extra” ingredients?

[Three classes of higher-order theories of phenomenal consciousness]

1. inner-sense theory: (Armstrong, Lycan)
2. actualist higher-order thought theory: (Rosenthal)
3. dispositionalist higher-order thought theory (or dual-content theory): (Carruthers)

All three of these higher-order theories purport to offer reductive explanations of phenomenal consciousness — they claim to give us an understanding, in naturally acceptable terms, of what phenomenal consciousness is.

§ Higher-Order Theories vs. First-Order Theories

Higher-order theories

1. The causal role of phenomenal consciousness is either that of giving rise to higher-order percepts or higher-order conceptual thoughts.
2. Conscious mental states are representational states of which subjects are aware.

First-order theories (Dretske)

1. The causal role of phenomenal consciousness is that of impacting the subject’s first-order conceptual belief-forming and decision-making mechanisms.
2. Conscious mental states are states in virtue of which subjects are aware of properties of the world (or of their own bodies).
§ Inner-Sense Theory (Locke, Armstrong)

Main Theses:
1. The higher-order awareness in question is perceptual. In addition to our regular senses, we also have a set of inner (higher-order) senses, charged with scanning the outputs of the first-order senses and generating percepts (nonconceptual representations) of them.
2. It is by virtue of perceiving our own percepts that the latter become phenomenally conscious. (By perceiving redness, I am aware of it; by perceiving my percept of redness, I am aware of the percept.)

Advantages:
(i) It can explain how phenomenally conscious states come to have a subjective aspect — what it is like — by appealing to an organ of inner sense much like our other senses.
(ii) It can advance a nice explanation of our capacity for purely recognitional concepts (phenomenal concepts) of experience (such as this redness again). This explanation could possibly avoid the explanatory gap problem.

Problems:
(i) If there is such an inner sense, then it should be possible to malfunction as our senses do. But it seems incoherent that someone could have a veridical first-order perception while having a erroneous higher-order percept.
(ii) It is hard to believe in the existence of the relevant inner sense organ.

§ Actualist Higher-order theories (Rosenthal)

Mind reading?
Main Theses:
1. The awareness of our mental states is of a conceptual/propositional sort. It is by coming to believe that I am undergoing an experience of red that the experience becomes phenomenally conscious.
2. The higher-order thought accompanies the experience itself — it has to be *occurrent* thought, actually occurring at the time — in order for that experience to count as phenomenally conscious.

Advantages:
(i) No special organs or mechanisms need to be postulated.
(ii) All that is needed is for people to apply “mind-reading” or “theory of mind (interpretation, etc.)” to themselves.
(iii) There is little concern for the problem of misalignments between first-order and higher-order states. All that the higher-order system needs to do is attach “I am experiencing...” to the first-order thought or perception. There is little room for error here. [But very few people claim *infallibility*.]

Problems:
(i) It is not clear why we need to have a further discriminatory system, this higher-order cognitive activity, in the process of evolution.
(ii) It fails to capture the subjective feel, the “what-it-is-likeness” aspect of our experience.
(iii) It fails to explain our purely recognitional concepts of experience of the form “This again,” since the higher-order mental state is a thought, not an experience itself.

§ Dispositionalist Higher-order Theories (Carruthers)

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Higher-order thought  experience of red

First-order perception (nonconceptual)  redness
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Main Theses:
1. The awareness of our mental states is of a conceptual/propositional sort. It is by coming to believe that I am undergoing an experience of red that the experience becomes phenomenally conscious.
2. But the higher-order thought does not have to be *occurrent*. As long as the phenomenally conscious states are ones that are immediately and non-inferentially *available* to higher-order thought, they are conscious states.
3. Dual-content: One and the same perceptual state has both first-order and higher-order analog nonconceptual content. (A phenomenally conscious percept of red will be a state with the analog content of red that also has the higher-order analog content seeming red or experience of red in virtue of its availability to a faculty of the higher-order thought.)

4. Conscious experiences present themselves to us, via their higher-order analog contents, at the same time as presenting properties of the world or of our own bodies.

Advantages:
(i) This theory can explain phenomenal consciousness because the subjective aspect of a phenomenally conscious experience (its feel) can be identified with its higher-order analog content, in virtue of which that experience is presented to us, analog-fashion, in something like the way that its first-order content presents us with fine-grained properties of external objects or the body.
(ii) We can explain the existence of purely recognitional concepts (this again), since the higher-order system shares the same content with the first-order perception of the world.
(iii) It has all the advantages of the inner-sense theory, without its problem: it does not propose any inner scanners or organs of higher-order perception. All is needed is some mind-reading faculty which we already use on others’ minds.

Problems:
(i) A further story needs to be told:
   ___ consumer semantics
   ___ inferential-role semantics
(ii) One cost of accepting this theory is that one has to embrace some kind of consumer semantics, and dismiss any pure informational/input-side semantics, of the sort espoused by Fodor.
(iii) It needs to show how the dual-content can be explained in a naturalistic way.