

CHAPTER EIGHT

ORDERS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND FORMS OF REFLEXIVITY IN DESCARTES

VILI LÄHTEENMÄKI
University of Jyväskylä

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Descartes affords several notions of consciousness as he explains the characteristics of the diverse features of human thought from infancy to adulthood and from dreaming to attentive wakefulness. I will argue that Descartes provides the resources for a rich and coherent view of conscious mentality from rudimentary consciousness through reflexive consciousness to consciousness achieved by deliberate, attentive reflection. I shall begin by making two general yet important remarks concerning the conceptual starting points of my investigation.

First, in interpreting early modern notions of consciousness, it is important to notice that conscious thought is often deemed as self-relational involving reflexivity understood as a more or less attentive relation to *self*.¹ I will deploy the terms ‘conscious’ and ‘consciousness’ in reference to a wider array of experiential phenomena than that of *self*-consciousness,

¹ The self-relative aspect of consciousness is often emphasized in passages which are closest to being definitions of consciousness or in which the significance or larger theoretical role of it is addressed. Consider the following. Ralph Cudworth (*True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678), 159) says that “*Consciousness* [. . .] makes a Being to be Present with it self, Attentive to its own Actions, or Animadversive of them, to perceive it self to Do or Suffer, and to have a *Fruition* or *Enjoyment* of it self”. John Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1690), II, 27, 9) maintains that “consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things”. The author of *An Essay on Consciousness (Two Dissertations Concerning Sense, and the Imagination with an Essay of Consciousness)* (London, 1728), 144–145) gives a definition according to

since I believe it is mandated by Descartes. Sensory perceptions of external and internal senses, imagining, doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, willing are examples of conscious phenomena (See *Second Meditation* AT VII, 28; CSM II, 19; *Third Replies* AT VII, 176; CSM II, 124; *Sixth Meditation* AT VII, 76–77; CSM II, 53).² This list includes very simple sensations as well as highly rational operations of the mind – only through them can we establish a relation to the self. Common to all these various phenomena is that they are experiences or appearances in the first person-perspective. Descartes says that “these [phenomena] all fall under the common concept of thought or perception or consciousness, and we call the substance in which they inhere a ‘thinking thing’ or a ‘mind’” (*Third Replies* AT VII, 176; CSM II, 124). Considering himself as a thinking thing Descartes finds it certain “that there can be nothing within me of which I am not *in some way* aware” (*First Replies* AT VII, 107; CSM II, 77).³ As is well known, on the one hand, Descartes narrows the notion of soul or mind to what has traditionally been called rational soul and maintains that those functions of organisms which used to be referred to vegetative and sensitive souls can be explained solely on mechanical principles. On the other hand, he widens the scope of what belongs to (rational) soul’s realm to include also (passive) sensations in so far as they are regarded as appearances to mind, not merely as bodily events.

According to Descartes, animals do not have souls, and because thought and consciousness can inhere only in ensouled beings, animals are deprived of thought and consciousness. It has been argued, however, that Descartes does not maintain that animals do not have feelings and sensory perceptions

which “*Consciousness* [. . .] is that inward sense and Knowledge which the mind hath of its own being and Existence, and of whatever passes within itself, in the use and Exercise of any of its Faculties or Powers [and] knows that it is *it self* (*i.e.* its own actual Being) which *Thinks, Perceives, & c*”. However, it is clear from their texts that none of the mentioned authors subscribe exclusively to a concept of consciousness involving the *self* as an object.

² References to Descartes’ work are to *Œuvres de Descartes*, 12 vols., edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1964–1976) (cited as AT). Translations from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols. Vols. 1–2 edited and translated by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (cited as CSM I and CSM II), Vol. 3 with A. Kenny (cited as CSMK) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–1991).

³ My emphasis. Descartes’ formulation ‘in some way’ is noteworthy in allowing different ways of being conscious.

at all.⁴ There is textual evidence that supports this conception. For instance in his letter to Henry More, Descartes says that “I do not [. . .] deny sensation [to animals], in so far as it depends on a bodily organ” (AT V, 278; CSMK, 366),⁵ and even more explicitly in his letter to the Marquess of Newcastle: “Since the organs of their [i.e. animals]’ bodies are not very different from ours, it may be conjectured that there is attached to these organs some thought such as we experience in ourselves, but of a very much less perfect kind” (AT IV, 576; CSMK, 304), and to Fromondus: “Animals do not see as we do when we are aware that we see, but only as we do when our mind is elsewhere” (AT I, 413; CSMK, 61). In this chapter, I refrain from taking a pronounced position in the dispute whether Descartes – especially in light of his conception of matter and mechanism – could viably attribute feelings and sensations to animals in any non-metaphorical sense of subjective experiences.⁶

It is sufficient for the current topic that, in light of the earlier quotations, we can see that Descartes is at least not a straightforward eliminativist on animal sentience. It should be thus clear that through his agnosticism on animal experientiality, he recognises an attenuated sense of awareness that

⁴ Gaukroger, Stephen, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 288; Alanen, Lilli, *Descartes’s Concept of Mind* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 101. See also Morris, Katherine, “Bêtes-machines”, in S. Gaukroger et al. (eds.), *Descartes’ Natural Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 401–419. Morris holds that on Descartes’ view animals can feel but not think. However, she holds also that Descartes’ concept of sentience is very different from ours. See note 7.

⁵ The qualification “in so far as it depends on a bodily organ” seems to suggest a reading that animals do not, after all, have sensations as experiences in the first-personal mode. Namely, given Descartes’ dualism and his conception of matter and mechanism it is far from evident whether there could be anything it is like for animals to have sensations when sensations depend solely on bodily organs. However, see note 6.

⁶ I am sympathetic to Stephen Gaukroger’s view, according to which Descartes does attribute sensations to animals and that thus it is misleading to say that, on Descartes’ account, animals have no experiences whatsoever. According to Gaukroger, animal automata are unlike such mechanical constructions as clocks even though also animals’ functioning, including genuine perceptual cognition, “can be described wholly in mechanical terms; in particular, no separate mental substance need be invoked, and nothing other than completely inert matter need be invoked”. This is because, Gaukroger explains, on Descartes’ account “addition of degrees of complexity brings with it significant qualitative differences – emergent properties” (Gaukroger 1995, 288).

does not presuppose a direct conceptual link to the characteristics of the “traditional rational soul” nor to conscience which ties the idea of moral responsibility together with one’s awareness of one’s mental states.⁷ When pressed by his critics, I shall argue, Descartes attributes such an attenuated sense of consciousness to infant thought. As acknowledged, given the materiality of animals it is disputable whether Descartes can ultimately grant any kind of awareness to animals. But we do not have a similar question about infants since, as opposed to brutes, infants have souls. The essential ingredient is thus lacking for the dispute over the possibility of infant awareness to even rise. Moreover, everyday experience testifies that infants have the potentiality to later gain more refined ways of becoming conscious.

The second remark concerns a slight but noteworthy distinction between two ways of understanding *reflexivity*. According to a metaphor, consciousness is like a light which, in addition to illuminating its object, illuminates itself. The idea of “illuminating an object”, i.e. to be conscious *of* x, is

⁷ Cf. Baker, Gordon and Morris, Katherine, *Descartes’ Dualism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 99–100. Baker and Morris’ interpretation includes a claim that for instance the idea of pain merely as something that hurts is non-sensical since, according to them, for Descartes human beings are “‘geometrically excluded’ from having a ‘What’s it like?’. There is in [Descartes’] framework no such thing as (nothing *counts* as) an inexpressible form of *thinking*”. Morris (2000, 403) further holds that in general the “seventeenth-century concept of sentience” is such that in it “‘what’s it like?’ had no part whatsoever [. . .]. Rather the conception was linked to responsiveness to stimuli”. So according to Morris (2000, 404), Descartes’ quest was to dispel his contemporaries’ resistance by explaining animals’ subtle responsiveness to their environment by bringing out the details of anatomy and mechanics: “against neo-Aristotelians, Descartes argued that sentience (as they understood it, *not* as we understand it) could be fully explained mechanistically, with no need for a sensitive soul”.

Gaukroger says that even though humans have sensory experiences (such as sensations of pain, hunger and thirst) “the fact that we are capable of reflection and judgement completely transforms the nature of our experience, even when we are not reflecting and making judgements about it” (1995, 351). I agree with Gaukroger that capability to reflect and judge is distinctive of human thought and the nature of our experience is transformed in the sense that for Descartes the ‘I’ who has these experiences can only hardly avoid experiencing hunger *as* hunger or pain *as* pain. Feelings of hunger and pain would be quite different for a creature capable only of direct sensory experiences and powerless in coming to regard those feelings *as* something. This means, however, that there are two different types of experience which, I will show, are recognized by Descartes.

intelligible only in so far as x is illumined *for* somebody. In other words, consciousness is always given to itself, or reveals itself to itself, besides being about something else. In this experiential sense of reflexivity, consciousness can be regarded as essentially reflexive. I take reflexivity, so understood, to be a minimal condition of what it means to have conscious thoughts.⁸

From this use of ‘reflexivity’, I distinguish another. The same terminology can be used in what we may call a structural sense, i.e. in analysing the intentional structure of consciousness. Structural reflexivity does not refer to the phenomenal givenness of consciousness but to such relations pertaining to consciousness which are not, as such, revealed in the occurrent experience. In such case, a phenomenally unified experience is underlain by a relation. This means that a description given in terms of such a relation, i.e. a relation which is within or between mental operations and which is not readily revealed in the occurrent experience, is a theoretical description of how a thought comes to be conscious, or what goes on behind the scenes, as it were, when we are immediately conscious of something.

This contrast between how a conscious thought is experientially given to the subject and the intentional structure of a conscious thought is endorsed by Descartes himself. Descartes claims that a single thought, for instance a thought with a content “an astonishing machine” can involve in fact two perceptions: perception of the machine and perception of the initial perception. The latter, which he calls “intellectual perception”, is responsible for the feeling of amazement intertwined with the perceptual experience of the machine. Even though there is a relation between two distinct perceptions, the thought is experientially unified. Namely, according to Descartes, these perceptions “occur together and appear to be indistinguishable from each other” (*Letter to Arnauld, 29 July 1648* AT V, 221; CSMK, 357). The thought “an astonishing machine” thus *appears* to the subject of experience as internally unified, and it fails to reveal to her the fact that it involves two distinct mental operations. Due to his conceptual distinction, Descartes is able to analyse such a unified appearance as in fact being constituted by two

⁸ As Gaukroger rightly notes (1995, 288) there are general difficulties in characterising experiential states which are different from ours. It will be shown later that Descartes regards the awareness associated with infants’ thoughts differently generated than that of adults’ thoughts. This difference, according to my interpretation, amounts to infants’ being incapable of coming to regard the objects of their perceptual states *as* perceptual states, or the object of such a state *as* the certain object (or the certain kind of object) it is. But this does not have to mean that infants’ perceptual states would not be given in the mode *for-somebody*.

separate operations of the mind. This means that philosophical scrutiny can provide us knowledge about the intentional structure of consciousness, even though the structure remains concealed from the subject at the time of undergoing the experience. We thus have two approaches to one phenomenon: the perspective of the thinking subject undergoing an experience and the perspective of a philosopher who is able to reveal the intentional structure of experience by examining the nature of thought. To be clear, I do not claim that the latter perspective is radically separated from the former. Rather, it seems that the latter is founded on the former. Descartes' point is simply that for us humans it is difficult to see what sort of mental operations (and their mutual relations) are involved in our everyday thinking.

As concerns the terminology of reflexivity, there is also the notion of reflectivity proper, in which the person is the active agent that does the reflecting deliberately. The result of such deliberate, attentive, personal-level reflection is the third type of Cartesian consciousness. The second type I call 'reflexive consciousness' in which reflexivity is automatic, as described earlier, and which is characteristic of adult thinking. The first, most elementary, type will be called 'rudimentary consciousness' which includes reflexivity understood as the givenness of the occurrent experience. It is the characteristic thinking mode of infants, the sick and the tired, and often pertains to dreaming during sleep. Through recognition of these types, I hope to contribute to a more resolute and comprehensive understanding of Descartes' conception of consciousness.

These distinctions are tenable on their own, I believe, but they are also partly motivated by the technical problem of infinite regress which threatens a theory that regards consciousness exclusively as a result of a relation between two separate mental operations. In his objections, Hobbes intimates that the threat rises with Descartes' account,⁹ for Descartes explicitly maintains that "we cannot have any thought of which we are not aware at the very moment when it is in us" (*Fourth Replies* AT VII, 246; CSM II, 171). If consciousness is itself taken as one mode of thinking, i.e. as a separate act of thought, Descartes is committed to infinite regress because, as a thought, consciousness would have to be an object of yet a further consciousness, and so on infinitely.

In Section 8.2, I compare Richard Aquila's and Udo Thiel's illuminating readings of Descartes and show that they provide two seemingly incompatible views concerning Descartes' conception of consciousness. To prepare the resolution of these seemingly conflicting positions, I introduce Descartes'

⁹ See the second objection of the third set of objections AT VII, 173; CSM II, 122.

view of deliberate attentive reflection. I will show that consciousness as thinking of thinking is not his only notion of consciousness. In Section 8.3, I examine the central passages that provide the textual evidence for my explication of the three types of consciousness in Descartes and argue that my explication incorporates the central ideas of Aquila's and Thiel's. In Section 8.4, by making use of the conclusions from the Section 8.3, I present the problem of infinite regress and show how it resolves in light of the distinction into three different types of consciousness. In Section 8.5, I compare my interpretation with Daisy Radner and Michael Radner's view with the purpose of showing that my interpretation of Descartes' conception of consciousness is compatible with theirs, but supplements it in an important way. In Section 8.6, I discuss the relation of reflexive consciousness to attentive reflection.

8.2 CONSCIOUSNESS AS THINKING OF THINKING

Let us take a look at some views held by recent commentators and some passages from Descartes himself in order to see that his discussion of consciousness inspires a wide diversity of interpretations. Udo Thiel claims that Descartes draws no distinction between the meaning of 'consciousness' and 'individual reflection'.¹⁰ By 'individual reflection' Thiel means the process of observing or considering one's own mental states.¹¹ His reading emphasises that Descartes maintains a view of consciousness as achieved through thinking of thinking. As a result, his view winds up suggesting that for Descartes there are no other ways of acquiring experiential mental states, multifarious as they come. Even the simplest state of consciousness would then be achieved by *considering* one's previous or simultaneous thoughts.

Richard Aquila maintains a different view. He claims that Descartes' notion of consciousness comes down to an idea of a single operation which is at once directed at itself and at an external object.¹² Aquila argues that even if it would be correct that Descartes believes that we are conscious of external things by virtue of some second-order perception of the initial

¹⁰ Udo Thiel ("Hume's notions of consciousness and reflection in context", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 2, 2 (1994), 91) uses the term 'individual' in order to distinguish it from what he calls 'philosophical reflection' which is a yet higher-order notion. For instance, individual reflection can be a means to carry out a project of philosophical reflection.

¹¹ Thiel 1994, 85.

¹² Aquila, Richard E., "The Cartesian and a certain 'poetic' notion of consciousness", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49, 4 (1988), 544.

perception of the external object, this second perception must, nonetheless, be “somehow one with the first”.¹³ He sees Descartes going as far as to propose an identification of “inner-directed consciousness and a [. . .] cognition or perception of which it is a consciousness”.¹⁴ Aquila does not pursue the question of how we should understand this kind of identity, namely how we should understand that these two seemingly different things somehow collapse together and constitute one conscious thought.

In other words, Thiel maintains that consciousness results from the subject’s explicit consideration of her thoughts, where the act of reflecting is clearly a distinct thought from the thought reflected on. But Aquila claims that although in some sense there were two mental operations that together constituted consciousness, these are not really distinguished from each other by Descartes but rather identified as one. Later I will reconcile between these two views for I intend to show that Descartes’ conception of consciousness is wide enough to envelop the insights of both of these views.

Robert McRae distinguishes between three interrelated notions: thought, consciousness, and reflecting or attending to one’s thoughts. He argues that in Descartes’ theory, thought is not identical or synonymous with consciousness, simply because “being conscious of whatever exists in us is not the same as thinking of what exists in us”.¹⁵ Thinking and consciousness must be distinguished from each other because Descartes explicitly maintains that consciousness is something that always accompanies all presently occurring thinking. Hence the thought by which one reflects and the thought which is reflected on, must already be conscious. Therefore, there must be at least one sense of consciousness which does not result from attending to one’s thoughts, and consciousness identified with the act of reflection proper must thus be distinguished at least from this sense of consciousness. On the face of it, a passage from Descartes’ conversation with Burman seems to question this interpretation:

It is correct that to be aware is both to think and to reflect on one’s thought. But it is false that this reflection cannot occur while the previous thought is still there. This is because [. . .] the soul is capable of thinking of more than one thing at the same time, and of continuing with the particular thought which it has. It has the power to reflect on its thoughts as often as it likes, and to be aware of its thought in this way. . . (AT V, 149; CSMK, 335)

¹³ Aquila 1988, 546.

¹⁴ Aquila 1988, 547.

¹⁵ McRae, Robert, “Descartes’ definition of thought”, in R.J. Butler (ed.), *Cartesian Studies* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 57.

As McRae rightly notes, in this passage ‘to think’ is used differently from what Descartes takes thinking to be when he states that we cannot have any thought of which we are not aware at the very moment when we have it. It seems that here thought is not treated as something of which we are always conscious, for what is stated suggests that being conscious presupposes not only thinking but reflecting on one’s thinking. This is not what Descartes maintains, however. It is important for us to see that Descartes replies here to Burman’s concern about the temporality of relating to one’s thoughts by other thoughts: Burman asks whether it follows from Descartes’ characterisation of thought that one cannot be aware that one *is* thinking but only that one *was* thinking. Burman’s question concerns *thinking of thinking* rather than nature of consciousness in all its manifestations (ibid.). Descartes’ reply is simply that one can have the original thought and simultaneously reflect on that thought and thus be aware that one is presently having the thought. It is crucial that he claims that this is because mind has the “power to reflect [. . .] as often as it *likes*”. He treats reflection here as a higher-level mental operation, as a separate act invoked by the subject and based on her power to do so which enables her to be conscious of her thought “in this way”. Interpreting the passage thus does not at first sight align with Descartes’ commitment to automatic accompaniment of consciousness to thought. But as mentioned already, the tension disappears when we understand the passage as not being about the more pervasive types of consciousness at all but about our reflective capabilities as persons, about deliberate attentive reflection in particular.

Descartes’ reply to another objection, one presented by Bourdin, helps further to see that consciousness acquired through deliberate attentive reflection is not his only notion of consciousness. Bourdin challenges Descartes by claiming that to establish the superiority of the incorporeal substance, it is not sufficient to contend that thinking makes it superior to matter. He claims that the superiority of the incorporeal is due to occurrence of explicit reflective acts, i.e. thinking of thinking. Descartes denies that this is the case:

The initial thought by means of which we become aware (advertimus) of something does not differ from the second thought by means of which we become aware that we were aware of it, any more than the second thought differs from the third thought by means of which we become aware that we were aware that we were aware. (AT VII, 559; CSM II, 382; my emphasis)

The importance of this explication for our present purposes is that we become aware of something already by the initial thought. Descartes stresses that all the successive thoughts are similar in kind. The fact that the object of my thought happens to be another thought, as opposed to an external object, does not make this second thought special as a thought since it has no relevant property that the first thought would lack. For conscious

thought, it is not necessary that one thought is rendered conscious by another thought. We are conscious already by having one thought.

In his question, Bourdin also voices the suspicion that perhaps Descartes himself really maintains the reflection-view which has been maintained by many through ages, namely “I think, I am conscious of thinking, therefore I am a mind” (AT VII, 534; CSM II, 364). But this is not Descartes’ view. The core of his answer lies in how ‘conscious of thinking’ is understood: he does not deny that consciousness is what distinguishes mind from matter, but by saying that the initial thought is enough to grant the superiority of mind over matter he sets consciousness as a property of a single thought. “If it is conceded that a corporeal thing [e.g. a brute animal] has the first kind of thought” (AT VII, 559; CSM II, 382), which is what Bourdin suggests (AT VII, 534; CSM II, 364), we will commit a dangerous error because “then there is not the slightest reason to deny that [matter or certain compositions of matter] can have the second [act of thought]” (AT VII, 559; CSM II, 382), since the first and second acts of thought are similar in kind. For this reason, reflection cannot be the differentiating feature between corporeal things and incorporeal ones.

Descartes sees it as simply fallacious to suppose that to become aware of something requires employing an explicit reflective act (*ibid.*). In another context, he expresses the same idea by saying that when we think of our thoughts there is an “internal awareness which always precedes reflective knowledge” (*Sixth Replies* AT VII, 422; CSM II, 285). This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that we can think about our thinking by means of other thoughts and be aware of them also in this way, but it must be distinguished from the internal awareness preceding reflection.¹⁶ The discussion in this section leads us to ask and inquire whether Descartes provides resources for a more detailed analysis of the internal awareness involved in all thinking. Let us next concentrate on types of consciousness which are more elementary than consciousness acquired through attentive reflection.

8.3 RUDIMENTARY AND REFLEXIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

We can find many passages which impel distinctions into different types. The first passage crucial to my argument for distinguishing between rudimentary and reflexive consciousness is in Descartes’ reply to Arnauld. Here he explains:

¹⁶ See also *Discourse on the Method* where Descartes states that “many people do not know what they believe, since believing something and knowing that one believes it are different acts of thinking, and the one often occurs without the other” (AT VI, 23; CSM I, 122). It is clear that this does not prevent these people from being conscious of something whenever they believe something.

[T]he first and simple thoughts of infants are *direct* and not reflexive [. . .]. But when an adult feels something, and simultaneously perceives that he has not felt it before, I call this second perception *reflection*, and attribute it to intellect alone, in spite of its being so linked to sensation that the two occur together and appear to be indistinguishable from each other. (*Letter to Arnauld*, 29 July 1648 AT V, 221; CSMK, 357)

This is an intriguing passage which merits a central role in my interpretation. This is because here Arnauld has pressed Descartes to explicitly consider the differences between the natures of infant and adult thought. We can see from Descartes' answer that infants lack the capability of "reflex thought" but they have "direct thoughts". Descartes affirms that "the mind begins to think as soon as it is implanted in the body of an infant, and [. . .] it is immediately aware of its thoughts, even though it does not remember this afterwards because the impressions of these thoughts do not remain in the memory" (*Fourth Replies* AT VII, 247; CSM II, 171–172). Thinking thus begins already in the mother's womb where humans feel "pain, pleasure, heat, cold, and other similar ideas" (*Letter to Hyperaspistes* AT V, 149; CSMK, 189–190). There is no doubt that Descartes regards also direct thought as conscious and that this rudimentary consciousness can be involved in perception without occurrence of the kind of reflexive relation that Descartes associates with adult thought.¹⁷

The reflexive relation pertaining to adult thought consists of the second perception taking the initial perception as its object, and this reflexivity results in presenting the initial perception under some particular feature. In the quoted example, the feeling is perceived *as new*.¹⁸ It is noteworthy, however, that Descartes does not claim that reflex thought is inevitably involved in grown-up thinking but rather maintains that adults, in distinction to

¹⁷ In *The Passions of the Soul* (see AT XI, 327ff.; CSM I, 328ff.) Descartes classifies different passions (i.e. perceptions) according to their cause. As regards our topic, there is no reason to assume that perceptions of different kinds of objects would involve relevant differences in how we come to be aware of the perceptions.

¹⁸ Anne A. Davenport analyses the role of the intellectual perception as follows: "Material things that are known in sensation do not include as a feature their novelty relative to the mind: there is nothing in the patch of red that impinges on my retina that says that I have or have not experienced it before. Consequently, the intellect itself must supply the index of 'novelty' to any sensation that I experience for the first time" ("What the soul remembers: Intellectual memory in Descartes", *The New Arcadia Review* 3 (2005), 4). "Novelty" is obviously not the only feature which things apprehended in sensation do not include in themselves. The same can be said of a number of features under which a perception itself or an object of perception appears to the mind.

infants, are capable of it.¹⁹ This contention finds support from Descartes' explanation in his letter to Gibieuf: "I believe that the soul is always thinking for the same reason that I believe that light is always shining, even though there are not always eyes looking at it [. . .]" (AT III, 478; CSMK, 203). He then points out that "every night we have a thousand thoughts, and even while awake we have a thousand thoughts in the course of an hour" (ibid.). Each and every one of our thoughts during dreaming and all the countless thoughts we have while awake hardly contain second-order perceptions which would present each and every perception under some feature.²⁰

By maintaining that the mind always thinks in one manner or another, Descartes subscribes to the view that there are a variety of degrees of consciousness between which we continually vacillate. In somewhat more technical terms this means that we can be conscious by having direct thoughts and by having reflex thoughts. Infants form an exception as they do not have the capability of such reflex thought as described earlier.²¹ Adults, on the other hand, are capable of both kinds of thinking.²² As Descartes denies non-

¹⁹ Alison Simmons ("Changing the Cartesian mind: Leibniz on sensation, representation, and consciousness", *The Philosophical Review* 110, 1 (2001), 31–75) is one to draw a distinction between these two types of consciousness. She calls them phenomenal and reflective consciousness. She describes the phenomenal (my rudimentary) consciousness, by saying that it "affords an experience in which things are phenomenally present to the thinking subject". By 'phenomenal presence' she means that experiences are something felt by the subject of consciousness, "there is something it is like to think this or that". Reflective (my reflexive) consciousness differs from rudimentary consciousness as regards experiential content. In reflective consciousness things are also considered *as* something: as new, remembered, etc. Reflexion adds something to experience (Simmons 2001, 36).

²⁰ As we will see later, volitions are nevertheless always accompanied by second-order, intellectual perceptions.

²¹ In *Letter to Arnauld, 4 June 1648*, Descartes writes that we cannot remember our early sensations: "For that we would have to observe that the sensations which come to us as adults are like those which we had in our mother's womb; and that in turn would require a certain reflective act of the intellect, or intellectual memory, which was not in use in the womb" (AT V, 192–193; CSMK, 354).

²² To my knowledge Descartes nowhere explicitly affirms or denies that adults sometimes think like infants. He, however, regards our perceiving being sometimes similar to that of brutes. He states that animals do not see as we do when we are aware that we see, but as we do when our mind is elsewhere (See *Letter to Plempius for Fromondus* AT I, 413; CSMK, 61). This supports the present claim in so far as Descartes intends the seeing of animals as an experience in the first-personal mode, regardless of how slight or confused an experience he might think of it.

conscious modes of thought, this means furthermore that rudimentary consciousness minimally belongs to every presently occurring thought.

This much is relatively clear about Descartes' replies to Arnauld, but the response merits further attention. Remember that in this account he characterises the adult's awareness as being by virtue of a second perception which is so closely linked to its object "that the two occur together and appear to be indistinguishable from each other". It is important that even though Descartes treats the second perception here as numerically distinct from the first, he immediately points out that they are closely joined elements constitutive of a single experience. It is furthermore noteworthy that also the second perception, which Descartes attributes "to intellect alone", is a passion (of the soul) and thus as automatic or inevitable as the first perception. The novelty associated with the first perception in Descartes' example would not have been revealed to the subject of experience had not the second perception occurred.

This description of reflexivity differs drastically from the notion of reflexivity in the Burman quote. It is common to both of these notions of reflexivity that the second act or perception does not necessarily accompany every initial perception. But, as we noticed, in the conversation with Burman Descartes emphasises the mind's power to reflect as it likes, while according to the notion of reflexivity that we have been examining in this section the occurrence of a second perception does not depend on any deliberate act. What we have here is an intellectual perception of a logically prior but temporally simultaneous perception which occurs as a byproduct of the initial perception. Together they afford a phenomenally unified experience to which reflexivity pertains in an inconspicuous way. This type of experience is something quite typical for us, albeit not the only type.

Reflex thought, as it has been characterised in this section, is not literally a matter of practising acts of mind, since perceiving is passive, and not active. Therefore it is worthwhile to examine whether Descartes has any different account of how consciousness comes about in mind's actions proper, i.e. volitions. Descartes provides two noteworthy insights about willing and consciousness associated with it. Firstly, he maintains that we cannot will anything without having understanding of *what* we will. We are thus inevitably aware of what our willing is about. In a letter to Regius, he explains the difference between activity and passivity of the mind by saying that:

Understanding is the passivity of the mind and willing is its activity; but because we cannot will anything without understanding what we will, [. . .] we do not easily distinguish in this matter passivity from activity. (*Letter to Regius* AT III, 372; CSMK, 182)

An act of will has an object. According to Descartes, we are aware of that object, since, as he says, we have some understanding of it. This passage does

not convey whether Descartes presumes that understanding of what we will is by virtue of a numerically distinct perception. On the one hand, it could well be pointed out that regarding something as a passion or an action is only a matter of terminology for Descartes and that therefore in this passage willing and understanding are not really two distinct things but only two aspects of a single thing. On the other hand, understanding can take place in the absence of willing which implies that they should be treated as being separate. Furthermore, in considering the characteristics of adult thought in contrast to infant thought Descartes is explicit in stating that there are two operations where the first-order operation is perceived by the second. Therefore, I opt for a reading that follows the model made explicit in the case of adult perception, i.e. involving two connected but numerically distinct mental operations. Following the case of adult perception, we have here an act of will which occurs together with an intellectual perception. As Descartes states in this passage, our understanding concerns especially the object of the act of will. As will be shown later, the act of will reveals itself as an act of will, but understanding of the object of will is not achieved by the single act alone.

Descartes stresses here again that it is not easy to distinguish the perception concerning what our willing is about from the act of will. He concedes, again, that they make up a unified appearance. The case of being aware of what we will and the case of adult perception in the reply to Arnauld are similar in the respect that both cases involve an intellectual perception. They differ in two respects however. First, here one of the mental operations is an act of will whereas in the reply to Arnauld both are perceptions. Second, an intellectual perception does not accompany every first-order perception, but it is impossible to ever execute an act of will without having understanding of what we will.

So far it seems that reflexive consciousness has fairly clear-cut characteristics in terms of its intentional structure. Matters get a bit more complicated when we take a look into Descartes' view that we cannot will without knowing *that* we will. This is not the same as being aware of what we will, i.e. of the actual object of will, since here willing is considered as something by which we are aware of the mental operation itself.²³ It is noteworthy that Descartes accounts for our awareness of the act itself even though he is clear

²³ The expression 'to be aware that one wills' amounts to saying that, when one wills, the willing is experienced *as* willing. The experience is thus readily categorized as a certain kind of thought. It is also important to see that this cannot happen without the subject of willing, as it were, owning the act. This does not mean a full-blown self-consciousness but it is to acknowledge that any thought (in so far as it is conscious) must be *for* a subject.

that our willing is always intentional in the sense that we cannot will without thereby being aware also of what we will. The following is the next crucial passage for my argument. Descartes says:

I claim that we have ideas not only of all that is in our intellect, but also of all that is in the will. For we cannot will anything without knowing that we will it, nor could we know this except by means of an idea; but I do not claim that the idea is different from the act itself. (*Letter to Merenne*, 28 January 1641 AT III, 295; CSMK, 172)

We know that we will whenever we will, i.e. we are aware of our willing through the act of will itself. I do not wish to dwell on the debates of what is the proper understanding of the Cartesian notion of *idea*. It is safe, and enough for the present purposes, to say that Descartes holds the following views. (i) We can, and always do know our acts of will only by means of an idea. (ii) This idea is not different from the act of willing. He thus employs both a distinction and identification between act and idea. In yet other words, Descartes is saying that we should not regard our being aware that we will as a result of an operation of mind distinct from the act itself because everything happens within the single act.²⁴ Unlike in the two cases of reflexive consciousness considered earlier, here we have a case of only one act which thus has an internally complex structure. There are two things going on at once: the actual willing (of something) and awareness of the act of willing itself.

In this way, we can see how one act can be about something and also grasped by itself as the particular kind of act it is. We must be careful in distinguishing this from how Descartes explains passive adult thought. He is after all very clear in his reply to Arnauld in distinguishing between the initial and second perceptions. Indeed, this distinction is the very basis of the difference between the natures of infant and adult thought, as we saw earlier. Similarly, we must be careful in distinguishing “being conscious that we will” from “being conscious of what we will”, since the latter involves two distinct operations. An act of will alone *would not* be a similar means of having understanding of the object. This must be expressed in the conditional

²⁴ Descartes says that the word ‘idea’ is ambiguous. It can be taken materially as an act of the intellect, or objectively as the thing represented by that act (AT VII, 8; CSM II, 7). We can notice that the present interpretation concerning the fact that an act of will reveals itself does not depend on in which sense Descartes applies ‘idea’ here. If it is in the latter sense, the thing represented by the act is the act itself. If it is in the former sense he just identifies ‘act’ with ‘idea’. In that case they become interchangeable and we are entitled to say that act is known by means of the act itself.

because, as Descartes maintains, an intellectual perception always accompanies the act of will. Therefore, the account given of being aware that we will is about something that never in actuality occurs alone because willing always involves understanding. The descriptions Descartes gives of our awareness *that* and *what* we will are thus complementary elements in explaining both *how* we get to be conscious of our thoughts, and *what* kind of experiential content these acts have.

What about rudimentary consciousness, typical of infant thought, which seems to be by virtue of a single perception involving no reflexivity? We seem to lack an account of how it comes about. One way to resolve this is to consider the account given of the intentional structure of our awareness “that we will” as applying also to rudimentary consciousness. Namely, in the quoted passage Descartes generalises upon what he says about our being aware of our acts of will to everything that is in our intellect. Even though perceptions depend on the mind–body compound, they are affairs of the mind as sensations proper. Descartes is quite clear about this. For example in *Optics*, he explains that bodily events “which, acting directly upon our soul in so far as it is united to our body, are ordained by nature to make it have [. . .] sensations” (AT VI, 130; CSM I, 167), and a little later he elaborates that “it is the soul which sees, not the eye” (AT VI, 141; CSM I, 172). Sensations are, as it were, the end products of chains of bodily events and in this sense they pertain to the mind alone.

Therefore we may regard the same inherent reflexivity that pertains to acts of will, as such, to pertain to perceptions also. Thus, when we perceive something we are aware of our perception similarly through an idea as we are aware of our act of will. This model would then apply to thinking of infants also, i.e. of how rudimentary consciousness comes about. What would still be lacking is the experiential addendum that would be brought about by an accompanying intellectual perception – which always accompanies volitions and typically perceptions (of adults). I wish to point out this line of reasoning without arguing for it however. This is because, admittedly, Descartes’ considerations on the nature of infant thought are a somewhat special case, and it may be that he would not be inclined to analyse infant perception analogically to acts of will. If that is the case, then one has to remain content with noticing that rudimentarily conscious thought is primitively so, allowing no account of how this consciousness comes about. Fortunately, as regards unravelling the three types of consciousness in general, this is not a detrimental shortcoming.

Finally, I believe that the differences between how consciousness is associated with perceiving and willing by Descartes can be explained by the fact that willing, since it is an activity, presupposes more maturity and liberty of

mind than that of being a passive percipient. We should consider Descartes' observation in his letter to Hyperaspistes:

[W]e know by experience that our minds are so closely joined to our bodies as to be almost always acted upon by them; and although when thriving in an adult and healthy body the mind enjoys some liberty to think of other things than those presented by the senses, we know there is not the same liberty in those who are sick or asleep or very young; and the younger they are the less liberty they have. [I]t seems most reasonable to think that a mind newly united to an infant's body is *wholly* occupied in perceiving in a confused way or feeling the ideas of pain, pleasure, heat, cold and other similar ideas which arise from its union and, as it were, intermingling with the body. (AT III, 424; CSMK, 189–190; my emphasis)

In a similar manner, Descartes explains that “in the mind of an infant there have *never* been any pure acts of understanding, but *only* confused sensations” (*Letter to Arnauld, 4 June 1648* AT V, 192; CSMK, 354; my emphasis). Lack of liberty in infants and in the sick limits the ways in which they can come to be conscious. As a consequence, there are obviously limitations in what types of conscious states they can have: liberty or capability to be concerned with something other than what is presented by the senses means that one can execute acts of will and think about one's thoughts and consequently be conscious of thoughts also through volition and reflection. As I have argued, Descartes regards the conscious states achieved through volition and attentive reflection as clearly different types from rudimentary consciousness, and from each other, since he gives different explanations of how these conscious states are generated in the mind.

In the light of what I have argued in this section, we can finally reconcile between Thiel and Aquila. The considerations on intentional structure of consciousness, the discrepancy between it and the phenomenal givenness of consciousness, and finally the consequent exposition of different types of consciousness provide grounds for preserving the central tenets of both Thiel's and Aquila's views. We do not have to choose between the central convictions of their positions but we can, and in my view we indeed should, incorporate the spirit of Aquila's claim with that of Thiel's. Namely, we can assimilate Aquila's claim that Descartes considers the second mental operation which takes the first mental operation as its object as somehow one with the first with Thiel's insistence that “Descartes distinguishes between the act of reflection itself and the thought which is the object of reflection”.²⁵ They are both right in their claims. The cases considered in this section show that two operations can make up a phenomenally unified experience. In this sense, there is

²⁵ Thiel 1994, 92.

identification. However, from another perspective, as a single thought can involve a relation underlying the unified appearance, there is clearly a distinction involved. Moreover, although Descartes holds that we can acquire consciousness through attentive reflection it is not the only way of being conscious. My reading thus incorporates Thiel's and Aquila's views to the extent that it accommodates two central elements of Descartes' conception of consciousness which they tend to see as exclusive of one another.

8.4 THE THREE TYPES OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND INFINITE REGRESS

According to what Descartes says in the passages considered so far, we are impelled to grant that he has a relatively complicated account of consciousness. Firstly, we can recognise three different types of consciousness which roughly go together with different kinds of thinking: consciousness involved in infants' perceptions, consciousness that comes about through intellectual perception of an initial perception or an act of will, and consciousness acquired through deliberate attentive reflection.²⁶ The first type is rudimentary consciousness which is minimally involved in all thinking. The second type is reflexive consciousness. Reflexive consciousness comes about in acts of will because they always involve understanding. An intellectual perception does not always accompany an initial perception, however. This is the case in infants' perceptions and often in sickness and tiredness as well as in dreaming. But when an intellectual perception occurs together with the initial perception (itself sufficient for rudimentary consciousness) having the initial perception as its object, this also constitutes a case of reflexive consciousness. The third type of consciousness is a result of attentive reflection, whereby a person explicitly and deliberately thinks about her thoughts, attends to them, or considers them.²⁷

²⁶ Overall, existence of different senses or orders of consciousness should not strike us as peculiar. See, for instance, the introduction of this book for John Maxwell's 1727 exposition of several senses of consciousness: "reflex act", "direct act", "the power or capacity of thinking", "simple sensation", and "the power of self-motion, or of beginning motion by the will".

²⁷ Further support for the distinction between rudimentary and reflexive consciousness can be found from Descartes' discussion about the three grades of sensory response in the *Sixth Replies* (AT VII, 436–438; CSM II, 294–295). The first grade involves only stimulation of bodily organs, i.e. mechanical movements. The distinction between second and third grade is drawn so that the second grade includes the immediate effects in the mind which arise from the intimate union of mind and body and which do not properly involve the intellect (such effects being pain, pleasure, hunger, sound, taste, heat, etc.). The third grade concerns things outside us and, in particular, our judgements about those things. Descartes says that when we make

These distinctions of the intentional structure of consciousness are naturally related to the issue of how the different types of consciousness should be understood as appearances to mind, as lived through experiences. As is clear, for Descartes the mind always thinks and its thinking is always conscious. Then minimally, thoughts are experientially present for the mind. Sometimes perceptions are accompanied by secondary perceptions which have the initial perceptions as their object. This reflexivity adds something to the experience: things are experienced under some feature, but the fact that it is due to an accompanying perception is not revealed in the experience as lived through by the subject. And always, in willing, acts of will reveal themselves as acts of will and are accompanied by intellectual perception which enriches the experiential content by contributing knowledge about the object of willing. The third sense of being conscious established by Descartes is through attentive reflection when a person deliberately attends to her own already conscious thoughts. This is thinking of thinking in the most typical sense and it can afford rich and articulate content, and also result in self-knowledge and self-determination. One more noteworthy distinction is that in Descartes' categorisation willing and attentive reflection belong to a different category than passive perceptions, since for him they are mental activities essentially independent of the body. Nonetheless, it is worth stressing that persons ultimately have the capacity for self-determination which presupposes the capability to attend to and consider one's thoughts in a thorough manner.

Let us now briefly look into the problem of infinite regress to see how it, for its part, motivates the distinctions into the three types of consciousness. To avoid regress Descartes would have to deny the assumption that for thinking

some certain judgement for the first time we are more inclined to attribute the judgement to the intellect, and thus treat the sense-perception and the judgement as two distinct operations. Supposedly this means that we either come to notice that a judgement is involved in addition to the sense-perception or we more or less purposely make the judgement about the thing represented in the sense-perception. But, mistakenly in Descartes' view, we tend to refer judgements to our senses when there is nothing new in the sensation. In such cases, we make the judgement so quickly that we do not distinguish the judgement from simple sense-perception. This distinction between second and third grades of sensory response resembles Descartes' statements about the difference between the natures of infant and adult thought: the former lacks the participation of the intellect, whereas a judgement (or, intellectual perception) is often involved in the latter but in such a way that the fact that there are two operations involved remains concealed from the subject of thought. However, we can come to notice our automatic judgements, as well as we can deliberately reflect on our thoughts.

to be conscious, every thought would require a distinct thought directed at it. On the other hand, he would obviously not want to commit himself to the view that no thought can be taken as an object of another thought. At first sight he seems to be liable to infinite regress: First, according to him there is no presently occurring thought which is not conscious. Second, in his conversation with Burman he says that to be aware is both to think and to reflect on one's thought. A way out is to deny that in his reply to Burman he explicates the only possible manner of being conscious. Then it will not follow from his definition of thinking that in order for a thought to be conscious it requires yet a further thought directed at it, and *ad infinitum*.²⁸

It is undeniably Descartes' view that consciousness can be associated with attentive reflection and be brought about by explicitly thinking about one's previous or simultaneous, but yet separate thoughts. But as we have seen, it is not the only view Descartes maintains about consciousness. For him consciousness does not necessarily require reflexivity in the sense of involving a relation of distinct acts of thought. Such concept of non-reflexive consciousness is most directly presented in his comments on the nature of infant thought where he states that infants are capable of direct but not reflex thought. What infants lack compared to adults, in Descartes' understanding, is not rudimentary consciousness but a specific kind of consciousness which categorises the present thought as a certain kind of thought. Moreover, infants also lack the capability to consider or attend to their (already conscious) thoughts. Even more importantly, as regards the vicious regress, Descartes maintains that also an act of will primitively involves awareness of itself through built-in self-referentiality even though it is always accompanied by an intellectual perception.

On top of all this, thinking which involves reflexive consciousness, be that willing or (adult) perceiving, can be analysed from two perspectives. On one account, reflexive consciousness requires occurrence of two distinct mental operations. As I have argued, there is also another viable account presented by Descartes, according to which this is an analysis of the intentional structure of consciousness underlying the unified appearance. Descartes nowhere indicates that the accompanying intellectual perception should itself be rendered conscious by yet a further perception. This is because he regards appearance that results from the compound of two operations as a single conscious thought.

²⁸ Hobbes points out this problem by claiming that even though "someone may think that he *was* thinking (for this thought is simply an act of remembering), it is quite impossible for him to think that he *is* thinking, or to know that he is knowing. For then an infinite chain of questions would arise" (AT VII, 173; CSM II, 122).

8.5 REFLEXIVITY AS INTENTIONAL STRUCTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND AS PHENOMENAL GIVENNESS

My reading that there are three types of awareness in Descartes challenges certain accounts presented in recent Descartes scholarship. Daisie Radner and Michael Radner have dealt with the issue of reflexivity associated with Descartes' conception of consciousness. I agree with them in emphasising that Descartes is clear that also infant thought is accompanied with consciousness, and that infant thought is on a par, for instance, with passing dreams of adults.²⁹ But I argue that their interpretation does not provide a complete enough account of Descartes' conception. I believe it neglects the fact that Descartes has a say on the relations between and within mental operations which are not manifest in how our thoughts appear to us, and that Descartes also treats actions and passions differently. Therefore, Radner and Radner's interpretation must be related to the passage where Descartes actually draws the distinction between infant and adult thought³⁰ and in which he characterises the latter in terms of intellectual perception accompanying a first-order perception. It is also important to remember the considerations in the passages where Descartes argues that we cannot will without knowing *that* and *what* we will. These passages provide the grounds for my interpretation that Descartes holds a view concerning what I have called the intentional structure of consciousness.

Radner and Radner strive to present a comprehensive characterisation of Descartes' understanding of consciousness. They claim that humans, including infants as well as sleeping adults, are conscious in the sense that "there is only one act, the act of thinking of x, which has x as its primary object and itself as secondary object. Object x is primary in the sense that it is, properly speaking, what I am thinking about or what my thought is directed toward. The act reveals itself along with this object as a kind of by-product, albeit an essential one".³¹

They consider this characterisation of consciousness as excluding only the type of consciousness that is achieved through attentive reflection. Radner and Radner's formulation of Descartes' view does not discriminate between

²⁹ Radner, Daisie, and Radner, Michael, *Animal Consciousness* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 35.

³⁰ As noted earlier, sometimes adult thought is similar to infant thought, as sometimes in dreaming. By 'adult thought', I will in this section refer to what is characteristic of it in distinction to infant thought, i.e. that it can be reflexively conscious.

³¹ Radner and Radner 1989, 29. See also Radner, Daisie, "Thought and consciousness in Descartes", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26, 3 (1988), 446.

rudimentary and reflexive types of consciousness. Their account does not (and does not purport to) take notice of the underlying intentional structure which is the basis for the distinction between them.

The purpose of my distinction between rudimentary and reflexive consciousness is not to claim that rudimentary consciousness as an occurrent experience would not be *for* someone alongside with what the experience is primarily about (experiences do not just float around!), but primarily to point out that Descartes gives different accounts of the underlying structure of these different types of consciousness. So even though we may regard also rudimentary consciousness involving reflexivity in the sense that it is for a subject, this kind of reflexivity must be distinguished from reflexivity pertaining to intentional structure of consciousness.

If we fail to do this and operate only with the notion of reflexivity in reference to appearance or phenomenal givenness of consciousness, Descartes' account of adult thought as involving intellectual perception accompanying an initial perception, and his view of acts of will which involve understanding of what we will, do not fit into the framework. As we have seen, Descartes is explicit that the *two* operations occur together and appear to be indistinguishable from each other. These two mental operations together thus constitute a unified appearance. In the light of this fact, we can see that adult thought cannot be analysed through the notion of reflexivity embraced by Radner and Radner, because Descartes is explicit that the relation is between two distinct mental operations, whereas Radner and Radner argue that there is only one operation. Descartes articulates that in adult thought there are two, albeit intertwined operations precisely in the purpose to show how adult thought differs from infant thought.³² Second, adult thought cannot be regarded as an instance of attentive reflection either, since it is clear that the kind of reflexivity it involves is not subordinated to voluntary control. Therefore, Descartes' conception of consciousness cannot be exhausted by the notions of reflexivity as phenomenal givenness and attentive reflection.

As mentioned, this disagreement is not fundamental. Radner and Radner's description of Descartes' view is correct in so far as it is taken to state that thinking reveals itself along with its primary object to the subject of experience. This can be safely said of both rudimentary and reflexive consciousness. But in its neglect of what Descartes says about relations which do not reveal themselves to the subject undergoing the experience, their description fails to recognise the differences between rudimentary and

³² See also note 27 for Descartes' considerations about different grades of sensory response and how the third grade involves two distinct operations.

reflexive consciousness. As mentioned, even though phenomenal givenness is a minimal condition for all consciousness, reflexive consciousness carries richer experiential content than rudimentary consciousness. It categorises thoughts as certain kinds, presents them under some feature, or involves understanding of the object.

8.6 RELATION OF REFLEXIVE CONSCIOUSNESS TO ATTENTIVE REFLECTION

There are also other recent views that focus on the notion of consciousness understood particularly as self-relative, but I believe they also understand ‘reflexivity’ in reference to the fact that for Descartes all thinking as it were reveals itself to itself. According to Lilli Alanen, Descartes’ notion of consciousness includes inherent reflexivity, which does not require a “distinct and secondary awareness having the primary awareness as its object”.³³ Alanen sees such reflexive consciousness as a form of self-consciousness, although not in the sense of being consciousness of a self, but rather consciousness’s awareness of itself. She holds that consciousness understood in this way is “the kind of awareness accompanying thought in Descartes’ wide sense [of thought]”. In other words, reflexive consciousness is “what Descartes regards distinctive of human thought” in general.³⁴ This is on a par with what has earlier been said about reflexive consciousness.

This sense of consciousness is very important in understanding the nature of attentive reflection. Namely, reflexive consciousness is presupposed in a person’s capability to reflect and to control one’s thoughts.³⁵ Similarly to Alanen, Robert McRae insists that, according to Descartes, by virtue of consciousness, thoughts are present to the mind in such a way that attention can capture them. He expresses this by saying that, for Descartes, attentive reflection is not a steerable “light beam” which illuminates its object, but

³³ Alanen 2003, 100. She points out that if it did that would lead to an infinite progress of instances of consciousness. It is worthwhile to notice that it would also make the notion of deliberate attentive reflection altogether futile, given Descartes’ own definition of thinking, where consciousness necessarily accompanies thought. Thus secondary consciousness would have to be, besides properly distinct from the primary, also necessarily generated. Except for Descartes’ own definition of thought as always conscious there seems to be no other reason to think that the problem of infinite regress would arise in so far as the secondary act is subordinated to mind’s power to invoke it, as is asserted in the Burman quote.

³⁴ Alanen 2003, 100.

³⁵ See Alanen 2003, 101.

“possible only if the object is already in the light”.³⁶ Also in a similar vein, Stephen Gaukroger maintains that it is characteristic of human sense perception that it “involves an awareness of one’s perceptual states as perceptual states, whereas animal sense-perception does not”.³⁷

I agree with these scholars with the qualification that infants form an exception (together with animals, perhaps), for as we saw, there is a period of time when one’s mind is wholly occupied in perceiving in a confused manner or feeling pain, hunger, cold, etc. And in his letter to Hyperaspistes, Descartes takes the same to hold for those who are asleep or sick.³⁸ Even though the confused perceptions and feelings certainly qualify as conscious experiences, it is not indicated by Descartes that these states include awareness of them as some kind of states. To be able to attend to the content of one’s thought the content (or, the object) of thought must be readily apprehended as something. Similarly, reflection on our mental operations themselves presupposes them as already apprehended as the certain kind of thoughts they are: as doubting, seeing, feeling, etc. As by virtue of rudimentary consciousness the thought is (merely) phenomenally present to the mind, it is difficult to see how reflective attention could be directed at the thought without it being reflexively conscious, i.e. already categorised as something. Remember Descartes’ assessment about infants: in the mind of an infant there are only confused sensations and no reflexive acts,³⁹ and those creatures who can be only rudimentarily conscious also lack the capability to attentively reflect on their thoughts.⁴⁰ Liberty and maturity of the mind bring with them the conceptual categorisation of the acts and contents of perception and volition.

I will not get involved with the question of animal awareness here, but we should notice that Descartes considers the difference, or rather the semblance, between animals and infants: “I should not judge that infants were endowed with minds unless I saw that they were of the same nature as adults; but animals never develop to a point where any certain sign of thought can be detected in them” (*Letter to More*, 15 April 1649 AT V, 345; CSMK, 374). Infants acquire the ability of real speech, to name one certain sign, but there is a period of time when their lives do not notably differ from that of animals. While it is a matter of dispute whether Descartes grants

³⁶ McRae 1972, 70. McRae uses the expression ‘reflective attention’.

³⁷ Gaukroger 1995, 349.

³⁸ See AT III, 424; CSMK, 189–190.

³⁹ *Letter to Arnauld*, 4 June 1648 AT V, 192; CSMK, 354.

⁴⁰ See *Letter to Hyperaspistes*, August 1641 AT III, 424; CSMK, 189–190.

animals awareness of some kind or degree, he is clear that infants, ensouled beings that they are, are conscious. As I have argued, in its lack of reflexive relations which would inconspicuously categorise thought as something, the rudimentary consciousness pertaining to infant thought is best understood as phenomenally given to the mind. Rudimentary consciousness is the foundation for reflexive consciousness which, for its part, is prerequisite for our capability to deliberately reflect on our thoughts.