

Cudworthian Consciousness

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Abstract. Ralph Cudworth’s *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) is credited with the first instance of the English word “consciousness” used in a distinctively philosophical sense. While Cudworth says little in the *System* about the nature of consciousness, he has more to say in his (largely unpublished) freewill manuscripts. I argue that, in these manuscripts, Cudworth distinguishes two kinds of consciousness, which I call “bare consciousness” and “reflective consciousness”. What both have in common is that each is a kind of reflection or reflexive perception that therefore involves a “duplication” of the soul as both subject and object. While it is less clear how Cudworth takes these two kinds of consciousness to differ, I argue that the central difference for Cudworth is that, whereas bare consciousness is always directed towards *individual* cogitations, reflective consciousness is the kind of consciousness that the soul achieves through reflection upon itself *as a whole*. As a result, reflective consciousness introduces a unity into our experience that is not present at the level of bare consciousness.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Ralph Cudworth’s *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) as providing the first instance of the English word “consciousness” used in a philosophical sense.¹ Unfortunately, Cudworth does not clearly explain in the *System* what he takes this word to mean. The *System*’s lengthiest discussion of consciousness occurs in the “*Digression concerning the Plastick Life of Nature*” (*The True Intellectual System*, 146–172) in which Cudworth argues for the existence of unconscious “plastick natures”, immaterial entities that act but are not conscious of their actions. Cudworth notes in this context that consciousness contains a “*Duplication [...] which makes a Being to be Present with it self*” (*The True Intellectual System*, 159), but he does little to unpack this suggestion.

¹ See Thiel, “Cudworth and Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness,” 88 and Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 5–18 on the history of the word “consciousness”.

Cudworth says more about consciousness elsewhere, however. At his death in 1688, Cudworth left behind a large body of unpublished manuscripts.² While most have been lost, some survive, including five so-called “freewill manuscripts” totaling almost one thousand pages, the majority of which remain unpublished.³ While Cudworth’s overall goal in the freewill manuscripts is to explain the nature of “freewill”, he believes that previous philosophers have failed in this endeavour because they have started from faulty psychological premises.⁴ Accordingly, Cudworth proposes to develop “such an hypothesis of the soul as may render this thing called freewill possible and very intelligible” (4980, 1). This psychological project affords Cudworth ample opportunity to comment further on the nature of consciousness.

There has recently been a small but significant blossoming in the literature on Cudworth’s account of consciousness.⁵ Despite this revived attention, however, scholars of Cudworthian consciousness have largely neglected the freewill manuscripts, preferring to focus their attention largely (if not exclusively) on the published *System*.⁶ I believe that this narrowness has generated some

² See Thomas Birch’s contemporaneous description of Cudworth’s unpublished corpus (“Account”, xviii–xx)

³ British Library Additional Manuscripts 4978–4982. Unless otherwise indicated, all in-text citations refer to Cudworth’s freewill manuscripts by manuscript and page number (e.g. 4978, 1). 4982 is composed of three manuscripts bound together, which I designate “4982(1)”, “4982(2)”, and “4982(3)” (continuous pagination). 4978 was published in 1838 and republished in 1996 as *A Treatise of Freewill*. Additionally, the final twelve pages of 4981 were published in 1997 as an appendix to a collection of essays on Cambridge Platonism (“Summary”). When quoting published material, I follow the published versions in spelling, capitalization, etc. When quoting unpublished material, I modernize Cudworth’s spelling and capitalization and omit crossed-out text. While the composition history of the manuscripts remains unknown, see Burden, “Ralph Cudworth’s Freewill Manuscripts,” for the most recent analysis; see also Carter, *The Little Commonwealth of Man*, 161–168 and Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, 107–113.

⁴ Cudworth is particularly concerned about the distinction between understanding and will. See Esquisabel and Gaiada, “Le libre arbitre et « le paradoxe des facultés ».”

⁵ See Allen, “Cudworth on Mind”; Carter, “Theological Origins of Consciousness”; Hutton, “Salving the phenomena of mind”; Lähteenmäki, “Cudworth on Types of Consciousness”; Pécharman, “Cudworth on Self-Consciousness”; Sellars, “Is God a Mindless Vegetable?”; Thiel, “Cudworth and Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness”; Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 67–71; and Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke*, 17–20.

⁶ Carter, “Theological Origins of Consciousness” and Hutton, “Salving the phenomena of mind” draw extensively upon the freewill manuscripts, but not for Cudworth’s account of consciousness. Thiel, “Cudworth and Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness”; Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*; and Lähteenmäki, “Cudworth on Types of Consciousness” draw upon only the published *A Treatise of Freewill*, which contains little explicit discussion of consciousness. Pécharman, “Cudworth on Self-Consciousness” draws upon the unpublished freewill manuscripts but overlooks some of the most significant passages, such as those in which Cudworth explicitly distinguishes two kinds of consciousness, which will be central to my discussion.

misunderstanding. Commentators have tended to propose distinctions on Cudworth's behalf that are not, in my view, ultimately born out by the text, all the while overlooking the important distinctions that Cudworth himself clearly does draw in the freewill manuscripts. My goal is to develop a richer and more accurate interpretation of Cudworthian consciousness that takes proper notice of the freewill manuscripts.

More specifically, I am going to argue that Cudworth distinguishes two kinds of consciousness, which I will call "bare consciousness" and "reflective consciousness". What both kinds of consciousness have in common is that each is a kind of reflection or reflexive perception that therefore involves a "duplication" or "reduplication" of the soul as both subject and object. It is less clear, however, how Cudworth takes these two kinds of consciousness to differ. He says that reflective consciousness is "a higher kind of consciousness" that involves "a further reduplication" (4980, 76v), but this characterization of the difference is hardly illuminating. So, after introducing bare consciousness in §1 and reflective consciousness in §2, I will spend the rest of the paper trying to understand the difference between them. There is some evidence that Cudworth may understand the difference structurally, conceiving of bare consciousness as a first-order phenomenon and reflective consciousness as a higher-order phenomenon, but I do not think that this evidence is decisive (§3). Instead, I will argue in §§4–5 that the central difference between bare and reflective consciousness for Cudworth is that, whereas bare consciousness is always directed towards *individual* cogitations (thoughts), reflective consciousness is the kind of consciousness that the soul achieves through reflection upon itself *as a whole*. Consequently, in reflective consciousness, the soul is conscious not merely of *this cogitation* or *that cogitation* but of *all* of its cogitations (and cogitative powers) *together*. Reflective consciousness thus introduces a unity into our conscious experience that is not present at the level of bare consciousness.

1. Bare consciousness

In the “*Digression concerning the Plastick Life of Nature*”, Cudworth opposes the Cartesian claim that there is no “*Action distinct from Local Motion besides Expressly Conscious Cogitation*” (*The True Intellectual System*, 159). Descartes famously distinguishes two kinds of finite substance: extended substance and thinking substance. In the Second Replies, Descartes explains that he uses the term “*Thought [Cogitationis] [...] to include everything that is within us in such a way that we are immediately aware [consci] of it*” (AT VII, 160/CSM II, 113; compare AT VIII, 7/CSM I, 195). While the interpretation of this definition is controversial, Cudworth reads Descartes as “making the first General Heads of all Entity, to be *Extension* and *Cogitation*, or Extended *Being* and *Cogitative*, and then supposing that the Essence of Cogitation consists in *Express Consciousness*” (*The True Intellectual System*, 159). The result is that there are only two kinds of actions: the local motions of extended bodies and the conscious cogitations of thinking minds.

The problem with this division, according to Cudworth, is that there are some actions that are not reducible to local motions but nonetheless do not rise to the level of consciousness, including the “*Life and Vital Sympathy* in certain Vegetables and Plants” that “cannot well be supposed to have [...] *Express Consciousness*” as well as the “*Vital Sympathy*, by which our Soul is united and tied fast [...] to the Body”, which “we have no direct *Consciousness* of, but only in its Effects” (*The True Intellectual System*, 160). Accordingly, Cudworth proposes to expand Descartes’s ontology:

Wherefore we conceive that the first Heads of Being ought rather to be expressed thus; *Resisting* or *Antitypous Extension*, and *Life* (*i.e.* *Internal Energy* and *Self-activity*;) and then again, that *Life* or *Internal Self-activity*, is to be subdivided into such as either acts with express Consciousness and *Synasthesis*, or such as is without it; [...] So that there may be an *Action* distinct from *Local Motion*, or a *Vital Energy*, which is not accompanied with that *Fancie* or *Consciousness*, that is in the *Energies* of the *Animal Life* [...]. (*The True Intellectual System*, 159)

Cudworth does not oppose Descartes's definition of thought or cogitation. On the contrary, he later affirms the Cartesian claim that "*Consciousness [is] Essential to Cogitation*" (*The True Intellectual System*, 871).⁷ Instead, Cudworth argues that cogitation is not essential to the soul. For Cudworth, extension is opposed fundamentally not to cogitation but to "self-activity". As a result, the two kinds of substance, according to Cudworth, are not extended substance and *thinking* substance but extended substance and *self-active* substance: whereas extended substances can act only if they are acted upon externally, self-active substances are able to initiate their own actions. Cudworth then distinguishes two kinds of self-activity, namely, "such as either acts with express Consciousness and *Synaesthesia*, or such as it with out" (*The True Intellectual System*, 159).⁸ Cudworth thus distinguishes those activities of a self-active substance that *are* objects of consciousness (its cogitations) from those that *are not*, attributing the latter to its "*Plastick Powers*" (*The True Intellectual System*, 171).⁹

I will refer to the kind of consciousness that Cudworth takes to be essential to cogitation as "bare consciousness". While Cudworth never offers an explicit analysis of bare consciousness, we can make some inferences from his scattered remarks. The first point to note is that Cudworth often characterizes bare consciousness as a kind of perception or "self-perception" (e.g. *The True Intellectual System*, 173). More specifically, he seems to conceive of bare consciousness as the soul's perception of its own cogitations. He writes of our "inward *Consciousness* of our own *Cogitations*" (*The True Intellectual*

⁷ In context, Cudworth says that it is "directly Contradictious, to suppose *Perfect Knowledge, Wisdom, or Understanding*, without any *Consciousness* or *Self Perception*; *Consciousness* being *Essential to Cogitation*" (*The True Intellectual System*, 871). I read Cudworth as arguing in this passage that there cannot be perfect knowledge without consciousness because knowledge is a kind of cogitation and consciousness is essential to cogitation. There may be another way of reading this passage on which Cudworth is using "cogitation" in a narrower sense as synonymous with perfect knowledge. While I do not find this reading attractive, Cudworth is in any case quite clear in the freewill manuscripts that consciousness is essential to cogitation more generally (and not just to perfect knowledge): "consciousness is essential to cogitation; cogitation is such an action or energy as the agent itself is more or less conscious of" (4978, 28).

⁸ It is important not to get thrown off by the shifting terminology. Cudworth *rejects* Descartes's claim that "the Essence of Cogitation consists in *Express Consciousness*" (*The True Intellectual System*, 159), where "cogitation" is taken to encompass all of the modifications of thinking substance, but Cudworth nonetheless accepts that "*Consciousness [is] Essential to Cogitation*" (*The True Intellectual System*, 871) so long as we take "cogitation" to encompass only the soul's conscious activities.

⁹ See Hutton, "Salving the phenomena of mind" on the soul's plastic powers in particular. See Allen, "Cudworth on Mind" for an introduction to the doctrine of plastic natures more generally.

System, 159), claims that “cogitation is such an action or energy as the agent itself is more or less conscious of” (4979, 28), and observes that “the operations of sense” have a “consciousness and perception of our own operation in them” (4979, 151v). So, for example, if I am thinking about a tree, the object of my bare consciousness is not primarily either *the tree itself* (the object of my cogitation) or *the representation of a tree* (the content of that cogitation) but rather *the thought of the tree* (the act of cogitating).¹⁰

Cudworth sometimes suggests that we can have bare consciousness not only of our cogitations but also of our bodily actions—that is, of motions in the body to which the soul is vitally united. He writes, for example, that animals are “much advanced above the condition of mere machines” because they are “conscious of their corporeal actions and passions” (4979, 41). I suspect that, in such passages, Cudworth means to claim not that we can be *directly* conscious of bodily actions but merely that we can be conscious of them *indirectly* insofar as we are conscious of our perceptions of the body.¹¹ One reason for this suspicion is that, as we will see in a moment, Cudworth takes consciousness to involve the soul’s reflexive perception of itself, and it is unclear whether consciousness of bodily actions could involve this kind of reflexivity. Either way, however, it is clear that Cudworth takes bare consciousness to be directed towards *actions*—primarily cogitations, but perhaps also some bodily actions. In what follows, I will set aside the latter possibility.

While bare consciousness usually seems to consist in the soul’s perception of its own cogitations, Cudworth often implies that the objects of bare consciousness include not only *the act of cogitating* but also *the cogitating subject*, as when he writes of a being’s “Consciousness of it self” (*The True Intellectual System*, 106-107). Cudworth expands upon this implication when he draws attention to “that

¹⁰ I thus agree with Thiel’s characterization of consciousness for Cudworth as the “knowledge of the fact that one performs the actions one does perform” or “an immediate feeling or perception of one’s own thoughts and actions while one is performing them” (“Cudworth and Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness,” 88–89).

¹¹ Another possibility is that the “corporeal actions and passions” of which animals are conscious are not bodily actions but rather cogitations that the soul has through sympathy with the body. See Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 49–57/3.1–2.

Duplication, that is included in the Nature of συναίσθησις, *Con-sense* and *Consciousness*, which makes a Being to be Present with it self? (*The True Intellectual System*, 159). He returns to this point in the freewill manuscripts, where he writes that “there is some kind of duplicity” in consciousness insofar as the subject of consciousness is “both the thing perceived and that that perceives” (4980, 77–78):

Again there is consciousness more or less in all cogitation [...] which consciousness is a perception [...] of themselves and their own operation, and that which perceives itself and is conscious of itself and actions may be said in a manner to be both agent and patient to act upon itself and suffer from itself. (4980, 231)

When I am conscious of my thought of the tree, it is obvious that I am the *subject* of consciousness insofar as *I am conscious* of my thought. Cudworth observes, however, that there is also a sense in which I am the *object* of consciousness insofar as what I am conscious of is “[my] own operation”—in this case, my own thought. Just as, for Descartes, a thought is nothing more than a modification of a thinking substance or a way of thinking, so too for Cudworth a cogitation is nothing more than a modification of a self-active substance or a way of being self-active.¹² In bare consciousness, therefore, the soul is conscious not only of some *cogitation* but also of *itself qua cogitating*. In this sense, bare consciousness involves a “duplication” of the soul as both subject and object.¹³

This notion of duplication is central to Cudworth’s conception of consciousness. Cudworth draws attention to the etymology of the word “consciousness” when he writes that “*Duplication* [...] is included in the Nature of συναίσθησις [*synaisthesis*], *Con-sense* and *Consciousness*” (*The True Intellectual System*, 159). The English word “consciousness” has its roots in the Latin “*conscientia*”, which is the word that Descartes uses in his definition of thought (*cogitatio*). “*Conscientia*”, in turn, derives from a

¹² Simmons, “Cartesian Consciousness Reconsidered,” 5 makes this point about Descartes.

¹³ This is why I earlier expressed skepticism about whether we can have bare consciousness of bodily actions, since it is not clear that the soul would be duplicated if it were conscious of some motion in the body to which it is vitally united.

family of Greek terms, “synaisthesis” among them.¹⁴ In our passage, Cudworth gives “*Con-sense* and *Consciousness*” as direct translations of “synaisthesis”, a term that he appears to take from Plotinus’s *Enneads*.¹⁵ As Cudworth’s etymology intimates, these older Latin and Greek terms originally signified a knowledge that was shared in some way, originally with another person but eventually with oneself.¹⁶ *To be conscious* thus came to mean, roughly, *to know with oneself*. This etymology underscores the connection that Cudworth sees between bare consciousness and duplication: in Cudworth’s view, the subject of bare consciousness is duplicated in such a way that it, as it were, *knows with itself*, being both the subject of consciousness and the object of consciousness.

One more point about bare consciousness worth mentioning is that Cudworth takes bare consciousness to come in degrees. Cudworth indicates as much when he writes that “cogitation is such an action or energy as the agent itself is *more or less* conscious of” (4979, 28; my emphasis) and that “there is consciousness *more or less* in all cogitation” (4980, 231; my emphasis; see also 4980, 50 and 76). Moreover, as Vili Lähteenmäki (“Cudworth on Types of Consciousness”, 24) observes, this claim is implicit in Cudworth’s remark that “*the Sense of Cogitation of one in a profound sleep, differs from that of one who is awake*” (*The True Intellectual System*, 160). Since all cogitations are objects of bare consciousness, Cudworth’s point here is that we are conscious of our sleeping cogitations but that this bare consciousness is of a lesser degree than the bare consciousness that we have of our cogitations while awake. Bare consciousness thus comes in degrees.¹⁷

¹⁴ Thiel, “Cudworth and Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness,” 81.

¹⁵ Hedley, “Ralph Cudworth as Interpreter,” 149 points to *Ennead* III.8.4 as the key text. See also Hutton, “Salving the phenomena of mind,” 473; Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 67–71; and Thiel, “Cudworth and Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness,” 88–89.

¹⁶ Thiel, “Cudworth and Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness,” 82.

¹⁷ But note that, while Cudworth often characterizes bare consciousness as “clear” or “express”, these adjectives may not signify gradations of bare consciousness. In particular, since Cudworth subdivides the category of self-activity into “such as either acts with express Consciousness and *Synaesthesia*, or such as is without it” (*The True Intellectual System*, 159), it seems that he takes all bare consciousness to be “express” in some sense. See Lähteenmäki, “Cudworth on Types of Consciousness,” 23n58.

In summary, bare consciousness for Cudworth is a kind of reflexive perception, essential to cogitation, in which the soul perceives or is conscious of some act of cogitation to a greater or lesser degree and thereby also perceives or is conscious of itself qua cogitating.

Bare consciousness is the only type of consciousness that Cudworth discusses in the *System*. On this point, I disagree with most of Cudworth's commentators, who tend to claim that Cudworth distinguishes a further kind of consciousness in the *System*. Udo Thiel argues that, in the *System*, Cudworth distinguishes consciousness from "self-consciousness", which is the "assurance of the existence of one's own soul" that is "*inferred* from the fact that one can ascribe certain actions to oneself on the basis of [consciousness]" ("Cudworth and Seventeenth-Century Theories of Consciousness," 91–92; emphasis in original).¹⁸ Similarly, Lähtenmäki argues that Cudworth distinguishes in the *System* between the "elementary consciousness" that is essential to cogitation and "self-consciousness", which "amounts to knowing the reasons and/or intending the ends of one's action" ("Cudworth on Types of Consciousness", 23). I agree with Thiel and Lähtenmäki that Cudworth distinguishes bare consciousness both from the inferred knowledge of one's own existence and also from the knowledge of one's reasons or ends. So far as I can tell, however, there is no reason to think that Cudworth conceives of either of these forms of knowledge as a kind of consciousness or self-consciousness. Strikingly, Cudworth never uses the word "self-consciousness" in the *System*,¹⁹ nor does he characterize the phenomena that Thiel and Lähtenmäki discuss as kinds of

¹⁸ Compare Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 69–70.

¹⁹ Cudworth uses the terms "self-conscious" and "self-consciousness" once each, both in the freewill manuscripts. In these two passages, however, he seems to be discussing different phenomena. In the first, he writes that "all cogitative beings as such, are self-conscious" (4978, 100/ *A Treatise of Freewill*, 201). Here, "self-conscious" seems to refer to bare consciousness, since Cudworth maintains that all cogitative beings as such possess bare consciousness. In the second passage, by contrast, it is clear that Cudworth is talking about what (in the next section) I am going to call "reflective consciousness" (see note 29).

“consciousness”.²⁰ So far as I can tell, Cudworth only discusses one kind of consciousness in the *System*, namely, the bare consciousness that is essential to cogitation.²¹

2. Reflective consciousness

While bare consciousness is the only type of consciousness that Cudworth discusses in the *System*, he explicitly distinguishes a second kind of consciousness in the freewill manuscripts, which I will call “reflective consciousness”. Cudworth introduces reflective consciousness in the course of arguing for a new “hypothesis of the soul” premised upon a distinction between “as it were two stories or gradations and regions in the soul” (4980, 1). Cudworth illustrates this distinction with the image of a line: whereas the lower region of the soul “may be resembled to a straight line that is always running outwards and forwards without any flex or turning in upon itself”, the higher region is like “a reflected line or circle it being a certain life that doth as it were return into rebound and reach upon itself” (4980, 48; see also 4981, 107v/“Summary,” 222n13 and 4982(3), 77). The higher region of the soul is thus characterized by its reflexive structure, which is why Cudworth refers to the higher region as “the whole soul redoubled upon itself, self-comprehensive [and] self-reflexive” (4980, 1).

Cudworth’s point in distinguishing these two regions is not to divide the soul into two literal parts. After all, in the passage just quoted, Cudworth characterizes the higher region as “*the whole soul redoubled upon itself*” (emphasis added).²² Instead, Cudworth later notes that the soul’s regions are

²⁰ In Lähteenmäki’s defense, there is one passage in which Cudworth mentions consciousness and the comprehension of reasons in the same breath: “There is in the next place another *Imperfection* to be observed in the *Plastick Nature*, that as it doth not comprehend the *Reason* of its own Action, so neither is it *Clearly and Expressly Conscious of what it doth*” (*The True Intellectual System*, 158). This passage does not identify the comprehension of reasons as a kind of consciousness, however. Instead, it merely notes two things that plastic nature cannot do—(1) comprehend the reasons of its actions and (2) be conscious of its actions—without specifying the relation between them. Cudworth does likely think that the act by which we comprehend the reasons of our actions is itself a cogitation and therefore an object of bare consciousness, but he never suggests that comprehending the reasons of our actions is itself a kind of consciousness.

²¹ To be clear, my claim is not that, when Cudworth wrote the *System*, he only posited a single kind of consciousness. On the contrary, I am going to argue that Cudworth distinguishes a second kind of consciousness in the freewill manuscripts, at least some of which were likely composed before the *System* (see Burden, “Ralph Cudworth’s Freewill Manuscripts”). Instead, my claim is that bare consciousness is the only kind of consciousness that Cudworth discusses explicitly in the *System*.

²² Cudworth holds that the soul is unextended and therefore cannot be divided into literal parts. See Reid, *The Metaphysics of Henry More*, 222–224 on Cudworth’s opposition to Henry More’s doctrine of spiritual extension. While Cudworth stops

to be understood as powers (4980, 4). Elsewhere, Cudworth argues for the nominalist view that the soul “hath many powers or faculties in it” in the sense “that it can and doth display itself in several kinds of energies, as the same air or breath in a Pneumatic Instrum[ent], passing through several pipes, makes several notes” (4978, 37/*A Treatise of Freewill*, 171). Cudworth’s point in distinguishing two regions within the soul, therefore, is to distinguish two kinds of activities in which the soul is able to engage, namely, those that do and those that do not involve a certain reflexive structure.²³ On this view, the higher region of the soul is just the soul itself insofar as it is able to engage in activities that involve the soul’s “redoubling” or “self-comprehension”. In *A Treatise of Freewill*, borrowing a term from the Stoics, Cudworth refers to “the soul as comprehending itself” as the “hegemonicon” (the ruling or governing power) of the soul (4978, 51/*A Treatise of Freewill*, 178; compare 4981, 106/“Summary,” 221),²⁴ which is the term that Cudworth’s commentators typically use. While I will often follow this usage, bear in mind that, whenever I write of the hegemonicon as performing some action or possessing some power, I mean that the soul qua “redoubled” or “self-comprehensive” performs that action or possesses that power.

Cudworth compares the reflexive structure of the hegemonicon to the reflexive structure of bare consciousness:

It is readily granted that there is in some sense a certain duplicity or reduplication of life in all freewilled self-powerful beings otherwise than in brutes or lower cogitative beings that are acted by simple instincts of nature only, and have no clear and distinct reflection upon themselves nor self-power. Indeed there is a lower kind of reflection that may be attributed to

short of rejecting More’s position outright in the *System*, he is somewhat more explicit in the freewill manuscripts (4981, 63–65), where he objects to a series of arguments from More’s *Divine Dialogues* 1, §§25–27 (96–111).

²³ Compare Hutton, “Salving the phenomena of mind,” 480, who understands the higher region of the soul as a “super-power”.

²⁴ “Hegemonicon” is Cudworth’s transliteration of “ἡγεμονικόν”, a term that Cudworth explains “was first introduced by the Stoics” even if they “were but bad philosophers and did not well and clearly settle their own notions” (4980, 53).

them also because consciousness is essential to cogitation; cogitation is such an action or energy as the agent itself is more or less conscious of. But those self-comprehending beings that are clearly sensible of themselves [...] have a further reduplication and perfection of life in them [...]. (4979, 28)

Cudworth makes two important comparisons in this passage. First, he implies that the “redoubling” or “self-comprehension” of the hegemonicon consists in a “clear and distinct” reflection that is similar to the “lower kind of reflection” involved in bare consciousness. Cudworth makes the connection with reflection more explicit elsewhere. In one passage, he straightforwardly identifies “self-comprehension” with “self-reflection” (4980, 76). In another passage, he writes of “the Soul as redoubled *and reflected upon* it Self” (4981, 106/“Summary,” 222; my emphasis). Cudworth thus equates the redoubling or self-comprehension of the hegemonicon with a kind of reflection. Cudworth also makes the connection with bare consciousness more explicit elsewhere. In one passage, he claims that “human souls have a more express reflection upon themselves” compared with that “consciousness” that is “in all cogitation” (4980, 77). In another passage, he explains that the “consciousness that is in all cogitation [is] but an umbrage or imitation of that more express self-reflection that we men have experience of” (4980, 231).²⁵ Cudworth thus sees an important similarity between the reflexive perception of bare consciousness and the soul’s ability to reflect upon itself in a “more express” way, which he takes to be constitutive of the hegemonicon.

Here is the second comparison that Cudworth draws in the block quotation above: just as the reflexive perception of bare consciousness involves a duplication of the conscious subject, so too the reflection of the hegemonicon generates “a further reduplication” of the soul upon itself. Cudworth

²⁵ See also 4979, 151v: “There is a certain umbrage of this self-reflection in the lowest of all cogitative beings and in the operation of sense themselves, in that there is a conscience or consciousness and perception of our own operation in them [...] which consciousness is nothing but an obscure and cloudy self-reflection.”

repeats this comparison elsewhere. While “There is in all cogitative beings and in those lower cogitations in us which are natural and necessary a consciousness of themselves which some make to be the essence of cogitation”, Cudworth claims that the human soul “can also more expressly reflect upon itself and actions so that there is a further reduplication in it than in that consciousness that is included in all cogitation” (4980, 76v).²⁶ Indeed, Cudworth often characterizes the hegemonicon simply as “the whole soul reduplicated upon itself” (e.g. 4980, 1) or, more poetically, as “the whole soul redoubled upon itself and [...] as from a higher watch tower viewing and beholding itself” (4982(3), 79). For Cudworth, therefore, the reflection of the hegemonicon, like the reflexive perception of bare consciousness, brings about a “reduplication” of the soul as both *the subject* that reflects upon itself and also *the object* upon which it reflects.²⁷

Given these similarities between the reflection of the hegemonicon and the reflexive perception of bare consciousness, it should come as no surprise that Cudworth often characterizes the reflection of the hegemonicon as itself constituting a kind of consciousness. Shortly after dividing the soul into two “stories or gradations and regions”, Cudworth characterizes the higher region (that is, the hegemonicon) as “the whole soul reciprocating and rebounding upon itself, conscious of all its congruities and capacities whereby it becomes present with itself” (4980, 1).²⁸ Likewise, he later writes that one of the “two properties chiefly to be taken notice of” in the hegemonicon is “that it is self-

²⁶ See also 4978, 100/*A Treatise of Freewill*, 184: “We are certain by inward sense that we can reflect upon ourselves and consider ourselves, which is a reduplication of life in a higher degree.”

²⁷ Cudworth draws attention to the Stoic background of his view: “This [more express self-reflection] some of the later Stoics make to be the peculiar privilege of man from brutes that he can παρακολουθειν εαυ[τ]ῶς animadvert themselves and attend to their own actions which implies a reduplication of the same thing upon itself, that which can reflect upon itself and animadvert itself and its own actions” (4980, 231–232). Cudworth likely has in mind Epictetus’s *Discourses* 1.6.12–22 (Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 395), especially since Cudworth cites the *Discourses* frequently elsewhere (see e.g. 4980, 53v, where Cudworth discusses Epictetus on the hegemonicon). See Sorabji, “Epictetus on Proairesis and the Self,” 95–96 and Hahm, “A Neglected Argument,” 36–46 on the Stoic account of παρακολούθησις (*parakolouthesis*).

²⁸ Compare 4982(3), 88–89, where Cudworth characterizes the hegemonicon as “the whole soul collected into itself self-reflective and conscious of all the natural congruities and capacities in it”.

comprehensive” and then goes on to explain this self-comprehension is a kind of consciousness (or even “self-consciousness”):²⁹

[I]t is self-comprehensive, that is, it is conscious of the several congruities in the soul, higher and lower, that of particular animal appetites of inferior reason and of the τὸ θεῖον the divine principle in us as also of the superiority of these to one another, conscious of its own power of putting forth and intending itself more or less toward the higher, of wielding and turning the whole soul of determining assents and actions and lastly conscious of its own volitions and action [...]. (4980, 51)

According to Cudworth, when the soul reflects upon itself in the “more express” way that is characteristic of the hegemonicon, it is thereby becomes “conscious” of various activities and powers within itself, some of which Cudworth lists in this passage. Strikingly, Cudworth goes on in the same passage explicitly to distinguish this kind of consciousness from bare consciousness:

There is indeed something of consciousness more or less in all cogitations, that is, in all energies of the soul above the plastic powers and therefore some conclude the essence of cogitation to consist in consciousness. But this is another thing. It is not that consciousness that is in all cogitation, even in brutes themselves. [It is] one peculiar power or faculty of the soul most inward to it whereby it reflects upon all its other powers and cogitations [...]. (4980, 51)

While every cogitation is an object of bare consciousness, the soul’s power “[to reflect] upon all its other powers and cogitations” gives rise to a further kind of consciousness, which I am calling

²⁹ This is the only passage in which Cudworth uses the word “self-consciousness”. After discussing the first property of the hegemonicon (its “self-comprehension”), Cudworth begins to discuss its second property: “Secondly besides self-comprehension and self-consciousness it is self-active and self-powerful” (4980, 51). See note 19.

“reflective consciousness”.³⁰ Cudworth repeats this contrast between bare consciousness and reflective consciousness later when he notes that, while “There is in all cogitative beings and in those lower cogitations in us which are natural and necessary a consciousness of themselves”, the “self-comprehension of freewilled beings is a higher kind of consciousness whereby some one thing in them [...] takes notice of all the powers congruities and capacities that are in that part of the soul that we call simple nature” (4980, 76v). According to Cudworth, the soul’s reflection upon itself (“self-comprehension”) is in fact “a higher kind of consciousness” in which the hegemonicon (“one thing in them”) is reflectively conscious (“takes notice”) of everything that is in the lower part of the soul (“simple nature”).³¹

Cudworth recognizes the novelty of this view. I noted earlier that the English word “consciousness” derives most immediately from the Latin “conscientia”. *Conscientia* was primarily a moralized notion, similar to the English “conscience”, pertaining either to the soul’s knowledge of moral principles or to the application of those principles to action.³² It is only in the seventeenth century that Descartes and others began to use “conscientia” (and the French “conscience”) in a non-moral sense similar to the modern “consciousness”. Usually, Cudworth distinguishes consciousness from conscience, using “conscience” to refer either to the principle of motivation that inclines to virtue (“the dictate of conscience” [4978, 44/*A Treatise of Freewill*, 175]) or to the soul’s retrospective judgment about its past actions (“conscience, in a peculiar sense, [is] attributed commonly to rational beings only [...] when they judge of their own actions according to that rule” [4978, 100–101/*A*

³⁰ On this point, I take myself to be broadly in agreement with Pécharman, who argues that “*the highest kind of self-consciousness*” is achieved “when the human soul’s self-reflexivity or reflection upon itself comprehends the whole of its powers” (“Cudworth on Self-Consciousness,” 310).

³¹ While Cudworth says here that the soul is reflectively conscious of the “powers congruities and capacities” that are in the lower region of the soul, he makes it clear elsewhere that the hegemonicon itself (the higher region of the soul) is also an object of reflective consciousness: “this redoubled and reflexive ray of the Soul can again reflect upon it Self, in which it is like a Secondary Echo, or an Echo repeated or reverberated upon it Self” (4981, 107/“Summary,” 222; compare 4979, 24).

³² The literature on *conscientia* is vast. See Langston, “Medieval Theories of Conscience” for a concise introduction and Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* for a detailed and analytically sophisticated treatment.

Treatise of Freewill, 201]). While Cudworth typically attributes conscience in the latter sense to the hegemonicon, arguing that it is the hegemonicon that passes retrospective judgment upon past actions, he goes further in the lines immediately following the last block quotation, where he straightforwardly identifies the “power or faculty of the soul most inward to it whereby it reflects upon all its other powers and cogitations” with “conscience” (4980, 51). He quickly emphasizes, however, that “conscience” in this sense is not confined to moral matters:

[N]either ought it to be restrained to religious or moral things only, but it is a general or universal power [...] for συνείδησις conscience and self-comprehension is a power that pervades the whole soul belonging to that which is the head and top of it. (4980, 51)

In this passage, Cudworth presents his account of reflective consciousness as developing upon the traditional notion of *conscientia*. Reflective consciousness is the kind of consciousness that arises through the soul’s reflection upon itself. This reflection, Cudworth recognizes, is similar in some ways to the moralized reflection upon one’s actions traditionally associated with *conscientia*. The difference is that, whereas *conscientia* had been restricted to the soul’s reflection upon its actions and their moral quality, Cudworth holds that reflective consciousness arises from the soul’s more general ability to “[reflect] upon *all* its other powers and cogitations” (my emphasis).

3. The structure of consciousness

I think that it is clear from the freewill manuscripts *that* Cudworth distinguishes two kinds of consciousness. Whereas every cogitation as such is an object of bare consciousness, reflective consciousness is a further kind of consciousness that the soul attains through a “more express” reflection upon itself.³³ It is also relatively clear what Cudworth takes bare and reflective consciousness

³³ Pécharman argues that Cudworth distinguishes another kind of consciousness, which Pécharman terms “to-oneself consciousness” (“Cudworth on Self-Consciousness,” 310). I see little reason, however, to think that Cudworth uses the phrase “conscious to itself” as a technical term marking out a particular kind of consciousness. There are some passages

to have *in common*. According to Cudworth, each is a kind of reflection or reflexive perception. As such, each gives rise to a “duplication” or “reduplication” of the soul because, in either case, the soul is both the subject of consciousness (*the soul* is conscious of itself) and also the object of consciousness (the soul is conscious of *itself*). It is less clear, however, how Cudworth takes bare and reflective consciousness *to differ*, which is what I will examine in the rest of this paper.

Here is one way to understand the difference. Cudworth claims that bare consciousness is “Essential to *Cogitation*” (*The True Intellectual System*, 871). This claim might seem to imply that bare consciousness is an intrinsic or non-relational property of cogitation. On this reading, bare consciousness would be a kind of intrinsic reflexivity that is, as it were, built into every cogitation as such. By contrast, reflective consciousness clearly is not intrinsic to cogitation but instead requires a higher-order act of reflection. We might conclude, therefore, that the difference between bare and reflective consciousness is fundamentally structural. Whereas bare consciousness is the intrinsic reflexivity of cogitation (a first-order phenomenon), reflective consciousness requires a further act of reflection (a higher-order phenomenon).

This reading has some compelling historical precedents. We have already seen that Cudworth presents his discussion of consciousness in the *System* as a response to Descartes. This context is significant because a number of commentators have attributed a similar distinction to Descartes, arguing that Descartes distinguishes the first-order consciousness that is intrinsic to thought as such

in which Cudworth clearly uses this phrase to refer to bare consciousness, as when he says that “brutes [...] have a certain life of their own[,] not only plastical but sensitive[,] whereby they are conscious to themselves of their own motions (4980, 49). There are other passages in which Cudworth uses the same phrase to refer to reflective consciousness. For example, Pécharman cites a number of passages in which Cudworth discusses the difference between sleeping dreams and waking imaginings (“Cudworth on Self-Consciousness,” 300–301). According to Pécharman, the difference for Cudworth is that, while the soul is (barely) conscious in either case of its dreams or imaginings, it is only in the latter case that the soul “is conscious to itself, that these phantasms are arbitrarily raised by it, or by its own activity” (Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 69/3.4.5). In the freewill manuscripts, however, Cudworth argues that the difference between sleep and wakefulness is precisely that, when we are asleep, the reflective activity of the higher part of the soul is diminished (see esp. 4980, 1–4). So, in the passages that Pécharman cites, Cudworth is likely using the phrase “conscious to ourselves” to refer to reflective consciousness: in sleep, we are unable to recognize our dreams as such because we lack the necessary reflective consciousness.

(see esp. AT VII, 160/CSM II, 113; AT VIII, 7/CSM I, 195) from the higher-order consciousness that arises when the mind exercises its “power to reflect on its thought [...] and to be aware [*conscia esse*] of its thought in this way” (AT V, 149/CSMK 334).³⁴ Moreover, while this interpretation of Descartes is controversial,³⁵ many of Descartes’s seventeenth-century followers either understood or developed his views in this way. Perhaps most famously, Antoine Arnauld distinguishes the first-order or “virtual” reflection (*reflexion virtuelle*) that “accompanies all our perceptions” in virtue of the fact that “our *thought* or *perception* is essentially reflective upon itself” from the higher-order or “explicit” reflection that occurs “when we examine our perception by means of another perception” (*On True and False Ideas*, 71/*Des Vraies et Des Fausses Idées*, 53).³⁶ Arnauld only draws this distinction in his 1683 *Des Vraies et Des Fausses Idées*, too late to have influenced Cudworth’s written views.³⁷ We know, however, that Cudworth owned a Latin translation of Louis de la Forge’s *Traité de l’esprit de l’homme* (1666), which draws much the same distinction:³⁸

I think I can define the nature of thought as that consciousness, awareness and inner feeling by which the mind is aware of everything it does or suffers and, in general, of everything which takes place immediately in itself at the same time as it acts or is acted on. I say ‘immediately’ to let you know that this testimony and inner feeling is not distinct from the action or passion and that the actions and passions themselves make the mind aware of what is taking place in itself. Thus you will not confuse this inner feeling with the reflection that we sometimes make

³⁴ See Lähteenmäki, “Orders of Consciousness”; Radner, “Thought and Consciousness in Descartes”; and Simmons “Cartesian Consciousness Reconsidered.”

³⁵ See Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 43–54 for a voice of dissent.

³⁶ See Nadler, *Arnauld and the Cartesian Philosophy of Ideas* and Schmal, “Virtual reflection”.

³⁷ Cudworth’s *System* was published in 1678 (and the imprimatur is dated even earlier, to 1671). Moreover, while the exact dating of the freewill manuscripts is unknown, Burden, “Ralph Cudworth’s Freewill Manuscripts” argues that at least the majority of the freewill manuscripts were composed prior to the *System*.

³⁸ The 1669 Latin translation *Tractatus de Mente Humana* is listed in the catalogue of Cudworth’s library (Millington, *Bibliotheca Cudworthiana*, 16).

on our actions, which is not found in all our thoughts because it is only one type of thought.

(*Treatise on the Human Mind*, 57/*Traité de l'esprit de l'homme*, 54)

Given this acquaintance both with Descartes's own writings about consciousness and likely also with La Forge's exposition of the Cartesian position, it is not implausible to map Cudworth's distinction between bare and reflective consciousness onto the Cartesian distinction between the first-order, intrinsic reflexivity of cogitation and the higher-order, explicit reflection upon cogitation. Call this "the Cartesian interpretation".

There is also a compelling philosophical case to be made for the Cartesian interpretation. Suppose that, contrary to the Cartesian interpretation, bare consciousness were a higher-order phenomenon, requiring a numerically distinct act of reflection. This act of reflection either is a cogitation or it is not. If it is a cogitation, then—since all cogitations are conscious—Cudworth faces a regress: the first act of reflection, as a conscious cogitation, must itself be the object of a second act of reflection, and so on *ad infinitum*.³⁹ Cudworth would thus be under some pressure to deny that the act of reflection supposedly involved in bare consciousness is a cogitation. This view is not particularly plausible as an interpretation of Cudworth, however, since reflection seems to be a paradigmatic kind of cogitation. The threat of regress thus lends further support to the Cartesian interpretation.

The Cartesian interpretation may be attractive for historical and philosophical reasons, but is there any textual evidence for it? Well, I can find no textual evidence *against* it. Cudworth does characterize bare consciousness as "self-perception" (e.g. *The True Intellectual System*, 173) or "an obscure and cloudy self-reflection" (4979, 151v), which might suggest that bare consciousness involves a higher-order act of self-perception or reflection. Recall, however, that Arnauld characterizes the intrinsic reflexivity of thought as a kind of reflection (*reflexion virtuelle*). In the same way, Cudworth

³⁹ There is reason to think that Cudworth would have been sensitive to this worry, since Hobbes raises essentially this objection against Descartes in the Third Objections (AT VII, 173/CSM II, 122–123).

could hold that bare consciousness is a kind of self-perception or reflection that is intrinsic to cogitation.

Nonetheless, even if there is no textual evidence *against* the Cartesian interpretation, there is very little textual evidence *for* it. There is almost no evidence for it in the *System*. Cudworth's claim that bare consciousness is "Essential to *Cogitation*" (*The True Intellectual System*, 871) might suggest that bare consciousness is intrinsic to cogitation, but then again Cudworth might simply hold that bare consciousness is an essential yet extrinsic or relational property of cogitation.⁴⁰

Lähteenmäki ("Cudworth on Types of Consciousness", 19) has suggested that Cudworth's distinction between duplication and reduplication implies something like the Cartesian interpretation. According to Lähteenmäki, whereas duplication is "a reflexivity that is involved in all consciousness", reduplication is a "[h]igher-order reflective relation" that arises when "a second mental act explicitly [takes] a temporally previous one as its object".⁴¹ Cudworth does not consistently distinguish duplication from reduplication, however. There is a passage in the *System* in which Cudworth refers to bare consciousness as "Redoubled Consciousness" (*The True Intellectual System*, 173), implying that bare consciousness itself involves reduplication. And, conversely, Cudworth sometimes characterizes reflective consciousness as involving not "reduplication" but "duplication", as when he refers to the higher region of the soul as "the whole soul duplicated and self-comprehensive" (4980, 53) or when he writes that "the Soul thus redoubled upon it Self [...] implies a certaine duplicity" (4981, 107/"Summary," 222; see also 4979, 28). Consequently, Cudworth does not seem to draw a sharp distinction between first-order duplication and higher-order reduplication. Instead, he seems to use the words "duplication" and "reduplication" more or less synonymously: while all cogitation involves

⁴⁰ It might be objected that, if bare consciousness were extrinsic to cogitation, then Cudworth would lack an explanation of *why* it is essential to cogitation. Since Cudworth defines "cogitation" as conscious activity, however, he could hold that bare consciousness is essential to cogitation because what makes an activity a cogitation is precisely the fact that it is an object of bare consciousness.

⁴¹ Pécharman, "Cudworth on Self-Consciousness," 310 makes a similar suggestion.

some duplication, the reflective consciousness of human souls involves a further duplication, which Cudworth typically calls a “reduplication”.⁴²

There are at least two more pieces of evidence for the Cartesian interpretation in the freewill manuscripts. First, Cudworth claims that “to think and be conscious seems to be one and the same thing” (4979, 41). Since Cudworth cannot mean straightforwardly to *identify* thought or cogitation with bare consciousness, we might read this passage in line with the Cartesian interpretation as claiming merely that they are “one and the same thing” in the weaker sense that bare consciousness is intrinsic to cogitation. Cudworth often uses the phrase “one and the same thing” somewhat hyperbolically, however. In one passage, for example, he imagines a “city or common-wealth” in which “the particular subjects had no will of their own but all their actions were necessarily determined by the will of the prince” and then claims that the subjects and the prince “would then be all but one and the same thing” (4980, 201). Clearly, Cudworth’s point here is not to deny that the subjects are numerically distinct from the prince. Consequently, we ought not to lean too heavily upon Cudworth’s claim that thought and consciousness are “one and the same thing”. Second, and somewhat more promisingly, Cudworth often says that bare consciousness is contained “in” cogitation, as when he writes that “There is indeed something of consciousness more or less in all cogitations” (4980, 51) or that “consciousness [...] is included in all cogitation” (4980, 76; see also 4980, 77–78 and 4980, 231). Such passages might suggest that bare consciousness is “included in” cogitation in the sense that it is *intrinsic to* cogitation. Again, however, some caution is warranted. There are other ways of interpreting the spatial metaphor. Bare consciousness might be “included in” cogitation only in the weak sense that all

⁴² Lähteenmäki, “Cudworth on Types of Consciousness,” 21 offers two more arguments for the Cartesian interpretation. The first is that it is required in order to explain the “immediacy” of bare consciousness, but see Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 67–71 for criticism of this argument. The second is that it is required in order to explain Cudworth’s claim that “Duplication [...] is included in the Nature of *Con-sense* and *Consciousness*” (*The True Intellectual System*, 159) because, if bare consciousness were a higher-order act of reflection, then the duplication of bare consciousness would not strictly be “included in” bare consciousness but would instead arise from the relation between bare consciousness and cogitation. One difficulty with this argument is that, in the passage at issue, Cudworth claims not that duplication is included in *bare consciousness* itself but merely that it is included in the *nature* of bare consciousness.

cogitation involves bare consciousness in some way. As a result, while such passages likely provide the strongest evidence for the Cartesian interpretation, even they are not decisive.

In summary, while the evidence does seem to tend generally towards the Cartesian interpretation, it remains ambiguous. As a result, I think that we ought to be wary of the Cartesian interpretation. Even if something like the Cartesian distinction between the first-order reflexivity of thought and the higher-order reflection upon thought may be implicit in Cudworth's view, Cudworth himself does not clearly draw this distinction, which suggests at least that it is not central to how Cudworth himself understands his position. On the contrary, I am going to argue in the next section that Cudworth has a very different way of understanding the difference between bare and reflective consciousness, which is independent of the Cartesian distinction.

4. The unity of consciousness

Cudworth often emphasizes that, in reflective consciousness, the soul is conscious of *everything* (or almost everything) that is in it:

For there being in the human soul different congruities higher and lower and a multiplicity of capacities and powers, [...] there must of necessity be in the soul one common focus or centre in which all these lines may meet, some one thing in which all this diversity is collected and knit up together, something that is conscious of all the cogitative powers of the soul (for the plastick and plantall ones (if there be any such) belong not to his cognizance) of all congruities and capacities higher and lower [...]. Now this can be no other than the whole soul reduplicated upon itself, which [is] as it were within itself, comprehending itself [...]. (4980, 50)

One interesting aspect of this passage is that, whereas I argued in §1 that Cudworth takes *cogitations* to be the primary objects of bare consciousness, Cudworth also includes “powers”, “capacities” and

“congruities” among the objects of reflective consciousness. I will return to this point later. For now, I want to focus instead on Cudworth’s claim that the soul is reflectively conscious of *all* of its powers, capacities, congruities (with the notable exception of those plastic powers responsible for the soul’s unconscious activities) and that reflective consciousness thereby “knits together” all of the “diversity” that is in the soul. Cudworth returns to this point throughout the freewill manuscripts, characterizing the hegemonicon as “the whole soul reciprocating and rebounding upon itself, conscious of all its congruities and capacities” (4980, 1; see also 4979, 40) or writing that “the chief sway of the soul and the reins of government belong to the reduplicate self-activity, this being conscious of all and all being concentered in it” (4979, 159).⁴³ Cudworth makes it clear that the kind of consciousness at issue in these passages is reflective consciousness when he claims that “this self-comprehension of Freewilled Beings is a higher kind of consciousness whereby some one thing in them [...] takes notice of all the powers congruities and capacities that are in that part of the soul that we call simple nature” (4980, 76v). Cudworth’s point in these various passages, therefore, is that reflective consciousness allows the soul to be conscious of *everything* that is in it (that is, everything other than the plastic powers). It is likely for this reason that Cudworth characterizes the hegemonicon as “*the whole soul* redoubled upon itself, self-comprehensive [and] self-reflexive” (4980, 1; my emphasis), not because “the whole soul” is the *subject* that reflects upon itself—after all, “the whole soul” is presumably the subject of *every* cogitation—but rather because “the whole soul” is the *object* upon which it reflects. Reflective consciousness is the kind of consciousness that arises from the soul’s reflection upon itself *as a whole*.

This characterization of reflective consciousness contrasts subtly but significantly with what Cudworth says about bare consciousness. When Cudworth discusses bare consciousness, he almost

⁴³ Another way that Cudworth makes this point is by saying that the hegemonicon “sums up” everything that is in the soul: the hegemonicon “compriseth and comprehends all that is in the whole soul[,] it being the whole soul as it were recontracted [and] summed up together” (4979, 6). See also 4978, 83/*A Treatise of Freewill*, 19 and 4981, 106/“Summary,” 222.

always speaks of bare consciousness as a kind of consciousness that is involved in *individual* acts of cogitation. Consequently, whereas bare consciousness seems to be the soul's *local* consciousness of its individual cogitations, reflective consciousness seems to be the soul's *global* consciousness of itself as a whole. Cudworth illustrates this idea by characterizing reflective consciousness as that power “whereby they have a prospect of themselves and all their concernments before them and themselves are as it were a landskip [i.e. landscape] to themselves” (4980, 76). The word “landscape” (or “landskip”, a common seventeenth-century form) originated in the early seventeenth century as a technical term related to landscape painting.⁴⁴ Cudworth's point in deploying this word is that, in reflective consciousness, the soul is conscious of itself as if in a landscape painting that depicts all of the scenery of the soul in a single frame. To extend the analogy, if reflective consciousness is like landscape painting, bare consciousness might be like portraiture: whereas reflective consciousness presents all of the soul's cogitations and cogitative powers together in a vast landscape, bare consciousness provides distinct portraits of individual cogitations within that landscape.

Cudworth indicates the philosophical significance of this difference between bare and reflective consciousness when he notes that the soul's power to “[reflect] upon all its other powers and cogitations [...] is the common sense of the whole soul” (4980, 51; see also 4979, 11 and 4981, 109/“Summary,” 224). In the Aristotelian tradition, the common sense (*sensus communis*) is an internal sense that receives sensory input from the five external senses and unifies them into a single, multi-modal sensory representation. When I take a bite out of an apple, for example, it is the common sense that allows me to distinguish the apple's redness (perceived through sight) from its sweetness (perceived through taste) and to unify these different sensory inputs into a single representation of the

⁴⁴ See the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for “landscape, n.”. An early etymology, which also confirms the connection between “landskip” and “landscape”, may be found in Henry Peacham's *The Art of Drawing with the Pen* (1606): “Landtskip is a Dutch word, & it is as much as wee shoulde say in English landship, or expressing of the land by hills, woodes, castles, seas, valleys, ruines, hanging rocks, Citties, Townes &c. As farre as may be shewed within our Horizon” (28).

apple as both red and sweet. Cudworth suggests that reflective consciousness has a similar function. While each of my present cogitations is an object of bare consciousness, it does not follow from the fact that I am conscious of *each* of these cogitations *individually* that I am therefore conscious of *all* of these cogitations *together*. It is at least conceptually possible that my consciousness might be radically fragmented: I might be conscious of *this cogitation* and conscious of *that cogitation* without being conscious of *both* cogitations *together*. In Cudworth's view, it is reflective consciousness that is responsible for introducing this unity into my experience. While every cogitation is an object of bare consciousness, it is only in reflective consciousness that the soul is conscious of all of its cogitations together in a unified way.⁴⁵

I think that this unifying function lies at the core of Cudworth's conception of reflective consciousness. What distinguishes reflective consciousness from bare consciousness, for Cudworth, is not that they possess different *structures* (the one higher-order, the other first-order) but rather that reflective consciousness introduces a unity into our experience that is not present at the level of bare consciousness. Bare and reflective consciousness thus differ not structurally but functionally or qualitatively. Bare and reflective consciousness are each a kind of reflection or reflexive perception that brings about a duplication or reduplication of the subject, but bare consciousness is a more *fragmentary* kind perception directed towards individual cogitations while reflective consciousness is a more *unified* kind of perception directed towards one's entire mental life.

Significantly, Cudworth's claim is not that there are, in fact, beings that possess only bare consciousness and not reflective consciousness. Instead, I take his point to be that we can distinguish conceptually between two kinds of consciousness, the one fragmentary and the other unified, which both contribute to our own conscious experience. Admittedly, there are some passages in which

⁴⁵ One shortcoming of the analogy with common sense is that, whereas common sense is responsible only for unifying the deliverances of sense, reflective consciousness is responsible unifying all of the soul's cogitations and cogitative powers and not just the deliverances of sense.

Cudworth suggests that “brutes” may lack reflective consciousness (e.g. 4980, 76v). Elsewhere, however, Cudworth is reticent to speculate about the cognitive abilities of brutes, “whose insides we cannot enter into” (4978, 83/*A Treatise of Freewill*, 193). He even suggests that there may “be something in brutes superior to their *hormae*, some one thing [...that takes] notice both of outward objects by sense, and of its own fancies and *hormae*” (4978, 82/*A Treatise of Freewill*, 193).⁴⁶ Cudworth’s central motivation for distinguishing bare consciousness from reflective consciousness, therefore, is not to distinguish the more fragmentary consciousness of brutes from the more unified consciousness of humans but rather to distinguish two levels or degrees of consciousness within human experience. The comparison with the common sense is instructive here. Given that Aristotelians attribute the common sense to all animals and not just to humans, it is clear that the motivation for positing a common sense is not to explain the difference between animal and human sensory experience but rather to explain certain features of sensory experience in general. Similarly, I take it that Cudworth’s central motivation for positing reflective consciousness is not to explain the difference between brute and human consciousness but rather to explain certain features of human conscious experience (in particular, its characteristic unity), which may or may not be relevantly similar to that of brutes.

One important point that this focus on unity helps to bring out is that we ought not to confuse reflective consciousness with introspection. Cudworth does discuss a phenomenon that he calls “introspection” or “self-attention”. He writes, for example, that “our souls as comprehending themselves [...] can exert themselves more or less in self-recollection, self-attention, heedfulness, and animadvertence” (4978, 61–62/*A Treatise of Freewill*, 183) or that beings that are “reduplicated upon themselves and self-comprehensive” have “a power of intending [themselves] in a way [...] self-attention or introspection” (4980, 30). In these passages, however, introspection seems to be an

⁴⁶ Burden, “Ralph Cudworth’s Freewill Manuscripts” argues that 4978 was likely composed considerably later than the other freewill manuscripts. Consequently, 4978 may reflect Cudworth’s considered position. Cudworth’s views about animals also seem to have changed in other ways by the time he composed 4978.

additional power of the hegemonicon that itself presupposes reflective consciousness. Cudworth implicitly underscores the difference between reflective consciousness and introspection when he compares reflective consciousness to the experience of seeing oneself reflected in a mirror:

[A]s Antipheron in Aristotle wherever he went saw himself reflected to himself in the air surrounding him, as in a glass, so the soul wherever it goes or whatsoever it does, still carries its own glass about with it. It is as it were reflected to itself, comprehending itself and its own actions and various congruities. (4979, 259)⁴⁷

For Cudworth, reflective consciousness is a relatively static feature of our waking mental lives. Indeed, Cudworth suggests that sleep occurs precisely when “the reduplicate, self-comprehensive [...] power of the soul is [...] consopited and relaxed” (4980, 2).⁴⁸ Cudworth thus maintains that, while awake, the soul is *always* reflected to itself in reflective consciousness. Introspection, by contrast, is more dynamic: the soul may exert itself more or less in directing its attention inwards, and it may direct its attention first to one inner object and then to another. To extend the analogy, if reflective consciousness is like carrying a mirror reflecting one’s face, introspection seems to be more like fixing one’s gaze on different parts of the face reflected in the mirror.

This way of understanding the relation between reflective consciousness and introspection marks an important difference between Cudworth and the Cartesian tradition of thinking about consciousness that I discussed in the last section. When Arnauld or La Forge distinguish the intrinsic reflexivity of thought from the higher-order reflection upon thought, they clearly conceive of the latter as a kind of introspection. So, if I am correct that Cudworth does not wish to identify reflective

⁴⁷ The reference is to Aristotle’s *De Memoria* 451a which gives “Antipheron of Oreus” as an example of someone “suffering from mental derangement”.

⁴⁸ Cudworth goes on in the same passage, however, to observe that we sometimes wake suddenly from sleep when we begin reflectively to suspect ourselves to be in a dream, implying that a diminished kind of reflective consciousness may persist in sleep.

consciousness with introspection, then it looks as if Cudworth's reflective consciousness is importantly different from the introspective or higher-order notion of consciousness found in Arnauld, La Forge, and others. For Cudworth, reflective consciousness occupies an intermediate position between bare consciousness and introspection: it rises above the level of bare consciousness, since it introduces a unity into our experience that is not present at the level of bare consciousness, but it is logically prior to the act of introspection, in which the soul focuses its attention on some cogitations rather than others.

5. The role of reflective consciousness

To better understand Cudworth's account of reflective consciousness, it may be helpful briefly to examine the role that reflective consciousness plays in other aspects of his philosophy.

Perhaps most intriguingly, reflective consciousness figures centrally in Cudworth's account of the self—or, more accurately, of what he (following Plotinus) usually calls “we ourselves”.⁴⁹ While I cannot detail Cudworth's account of the self here, there is abundant evidence that Cudworth identifies the self with the hegemonicon.⁵⁰ He writes, for example, that “that which is properly we ourselves [...] is the soul as comprehending itself” (4978, 51/TFW, 178) or that “the soul reduplicated upon itself [...] is properly we ourselves” (4980, 78v). Since the hegemonicon is just the soul qua reflectively conscious of itself, it follows that Cudworth takes reflective consciousness to be at least partially constitutive of the self. Cudworth thus appears to hold, suggestively, that what it is to be a self is to be the kind of being that is conscious of itself as a whole or in the unified way that is characteristic of reflective consciousness.

⁴⁹ E.g. *Enneads* IV.4.18.13–16. See Remes, “Self-Knowledge in Plotinus” on Plotinus's account of the self and the phrase “we ourselves”.

⁵⁰ I argue for this interpretation in a work-in-progress. For an alternative interpretation, see Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 71. See also Pécharman, “Cudworth on Self-Consciousness,” 305–313.

Reflective consciousness also plays an important role in Cudworth's account of human agency. Strikingly, Cudworth takes reflective consciousness to be co-extensive with libertarian freedom. While I cannot detail Cudworth's account of libertarian freedom here either, the connection is that Cudworth takes the "two properties chiefly to be taken notice of in [the hegemonicon]" to be "First that it is self-comprehensive"—i.e. that it is reflectively conscious—"and secondly that it is self-active and self-powerful"—i.e. that it is the uncaused cause of (at least some of) its actions (4980, 51).⁵¹ Reflective consciousness and libertarian freedom are thus the two central properties of the hegemonicon. Unfortunately, Cudworth does not discuss the connection between these two properties—whether, for example, possession of the one is necessary or sufficient for possession of the other. Moreover, the very fact that Cudworth takes reflective consciousness and libertarian freedom to be co-extensive makes it difficult to discern whether, when Cudworth discusses various features of human agency, he takes those features to depend upon reflective consciousness, libertarian freedom, or both.

Nonetheless, there is at least one connection between reflective consciousness and human agency that is relatively easy to discern. In a remarkable passage, Cudworth repeats the claim that "there is in us some one hegemonical [...] comprehending all the other powers, energies, and capacities of our soul (in which ἀνακεφαλαινοῦται they are recollected and as it were summed up)" before going on to argue that "there must of necessity be such a thing as this in men" because

there being so many wheels in this machine of our souls, unless they be all aptly knit and put together, so as to conspire into one, and unless there be some one thing presiding over them, intending itself more or less, directing, and ordering, and giving the fiat for action, it could not go forward in motion, but there must be a confusion and distraction in it, and we must needs be perpetually in puzzle. (4978, 83–85/*A Treatise of Freewill*, 193–194)

⁵¹ See Leisinger, "Cudworth on Freewill" on Cudworth's account of libertarian freedom.

Cudworth's overall aim both in this passage and in the subsequent discussion is to argue that the hegemonicon is needed to govern all of the other powers of the soul. The hegemonicon is responsible, for example, for directing the deliberation of the understanding and preventing it from being distracted by "involuntary thoughts and passions swelling up of themselves" (4979, 19) and also for adjudicating between conflicting desires in order to decide what to do. The important point to note for our purposes, however, is that, when Cudworth says that "there must be such a thing as this in men", his specific claim is that there must be something in us "comprehending all the other powers, energies, and capacities of our soul". Cudworth thus seems to think that reflective consciousness is required in order for the hegemonicon to play its governing role.

Why does Cudworth think that the self-governance of the hegemonicon presupposes reflective consciousness? Cudworth's thought seems to be that, in order for the hegemonicon to exercise its self-governance, it must first be conscious in a unified way of what it is to govern. If the hegemonicon is to adjudicate between two conflicting desires, for example, it is not sufficient for the hegemonicon merely to be conscious of the first desire and conscious of the second desire. It must moreover be conscious of *both* desires *together*, otherwise it would have no way of comparing those desires with one another in order to decide which to act upon.

We can see Cudworth reasoning in this way in a discussion of moral conscience, understood here as the hegemonicon's power to pass judgment on its past actions:

And lastly here [*πρὸς* in the hegemonicon] it is that conscience is also seated for this being comprehensive of the whole soul and as it were the common sense of it and conscious of those different congruities in it of honesty and selfish good and that the τὸ δέον the good of duty is more sovereign and sacred and ought to be preferred before the lower animal gratifications, whenever it doth be contrary it judgeth and condemns its own actions and is inwardly dissatisfied with itself. (4979, 11)

Cudworth characterizes conscience in this passage as depending upon reflective consciousness. According to Cudworth, the hegemonicon is able to function as the seat of moral conscience precisely because it is “as it were the common sense of [the whole soul]”, able to survey all of the soul’s various “congruities” and pass judgment upon its actions accordingly. When I act wrongly, for example, I am able to condemn myself as having acted in conformity with “selfish good” rather than “honesty” because I am reflectively conscious not only of these two “congruities” but moreover of certain relations between them, namely, that honesty “is more sovereign and sacred and ought to be preferred before the lower animal gratifications”. In this sense, judgments of moral conscience presuppose the unified self-awareness of reflective consciousness.

So, one connection between reflective consciousness and agency for Cudworth is that the unity of reflective consciousness is a necessary prerequisite for the self-governance of the hegemonicon. A second connection has to do with the objects of reflective consciousness. When Cudworth discusses bare consciousness, he usually emphasizes that the soul has bare consciousness of its *cogitations*. By contrast, I noted earlier that, when Cudworth discusses reflective consciousness, he usually emphasizes that the soul is reflectively conscious of its “powers”, “capacities”, and “congruities”.⁵² What is the reason for this shift of emphasis?

The answer, I believe, is that Cudworth takes reflective consciousness to have a forward-looking, practical orientation. Cudworth seems to think that, in order for the hegemonicon to govern the soul’s behaviour, it must be conscious of those powers of the soul that are available to be exercised. The hegemonicon would not be able to command the exercise of some power if it were not first conscious of that power. Cudworth concludes that, in reflective consciousness, I must be conscious

⁵² To be clear, Cudworth does not deny that the soul is reflectively conscious of its cogitations, but he does not emphasize it either.

not merely of what is *actually* going on in my soul right now but moreover of the powers that I *am able* to exercise in the future.

Cudworth draws attention to this line of thought in the following passage:

Neither ought this to seem strange that we suppose such a consciousness of all power and capacities in the soul, since we see that even brute animals are so prompted and instructed by nature as to be conscious not only of all that furniture which they actually have but also of that which nature intends to bring upon them, insomuch that some creatures that are intended to be cornute having not only a natural presage hereof but also supposing themselves to have that which they have not, will butt before they have horns, anticipating nature herein. And other animals are able to use their legs and direct their muscles in going or swimming dextrously at the very first and command all the other organs of the body as occasion serves. And it may more reasonably be supposed that such beings as are expressly reduplicated upon themselves should comprehend all their own congruities and capacities, and be able as readily to exercise any particular power or faculty which it hath [...]. (4980, 51v; see also 4982(3), 105)

Cudworth's main claim comes in the final sentence: the human soul is reflectively conscious of its powers in such a way as to be ready "to exercise any particular power or faculty which it hath". The soul's reflective consciousness of its powers is thus meant to explain how it is able to exercise those powers on the appropriate occasions: part of the reason why I am able to decide to exercise some power at a given moment is because, at that moment, I am already reflectively conscious of my own possession of that power. In the preceding sentences, Cudworth seeks to make this claim more plausible by suggesting that many animals appear to have a similar or at least analogous kind of consciousness: some animals appear to be conscious of abilities that they do not yet actually possess but will possess in the future, and other animals appear to be conscious of abilities that they actually

possess but have never exercised. Just as a young bird may be conscious in a way of its nascent but unexercised ability to fly and consequently begin to flap its wings, so too may the hegemonicon be reflectively conscious, for example, of its ability to direct the deliberation of the understanding and consequently endeavour to avoid distraction. Clearly, this claim is somewhat contentious. While we may be able to infer the existence of certain powers from our consciousness of their exercise, it is unclear what it would mean for us to be directly conscious of those powers themselves, let alone for us to be conscious of them prior to any exercise.⁵³ Unfortunately, however, Cudworth does not elaborate upon this suggestion.

To sum up, reflective consciousness clearly plays a central role in Cudworth's psychology. First, it seems to be bound up in some way with his account of the self: to be a self, for Cudworth, is to be the kind of being that is conscious of itself as a whole. Second, Cudworth also seems to assign reflective consciousness a significant practical function: the soul is able to govern itself only because it is conscious of itself as a whole, and it is able to exercise its powers on the appropriate occasions only because this consciousness of itself as a whole includes the consciousness of its unexercised powers. Of course, my discussion of these issues has been extremely brief. Much work remains to be done on the relation between reflective consciousness and, for example, selfhood or self-governance. These, however, are topics for another paper.

6. Concluding remarks

I have argued that Cudworth distinguishes two kinds of consciousness, bare consciousness and reflective consciousness. What qualifies each as a kind of *consciousness* is that each is a kind of reflection or reflexive perception. Consequently, each brings about a duplication or reduplication of

⁵³ Cudworth's views about the reflective consciousness of powers mark a significant divergence from Descartes, who argues in the Fourth Replies that "although we are always actually aware of the acts or operations of our minds, we are not always aware of the mind's faculties or powers, except potentially" (AT VII, 246/CSM II, 172). In Cudworth's view, the soul is actually (and not just potentially) reflectively conscious of unexercised powers.

the subject: in consciousness, the soul is both the subject that is conscious and also the object of which it is conscious. There is some circumstantial evidence for thinking that, whereas reflective consciousness requires a higher-order act of reflection, Cudworth takes bare consciousness to be an intrinsic property of cogitation as such. This evidence is not decisive, however. Instead, I have argued that Cudworth has a very different way of distinguishing bare and reflective consciousness, which has nothing to do with their respective structures. Cudworth's view is that, whereas bare consciousness is always directed towards some individual cogitation, reflective consciousness is the kind of consciousness that arises through the soul's reflection upon itself as a whole. In reflective consciousness, the soul is conscious of *all* of its cogitations, cogitative powers, congruities, capacities—that is, of *everything* that it is in it (other than its plastic powers and their unconscious activities). As a result, reflective consciousness introduces a unity in our conscious experience that is not present at the level of bare consciousness. Cudworth seems to think that reflective consciousness plays an important role both in the constitution of the self and in the coordinated agency of complex beings like us, but the precise connection that Cudworth sees between reflective consciousness and these topics remains to be fully understood.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ I am indebted to Steve Darwall, who introduced me to Cudworth and the freewill manuscripts, and to Richard Dees, whose transcriptions of selections from 4980 and 4982(1) were invaluable when I began working on Cudworth (see Darwall, *The British Moralists*, 115n13). I conducted most of the research for this paper as a Research Fellow at Emmanuel College, Cambridge (where Cudworth himself was once a Fellow). I am grateful to the College for its support and to Catherine Pickstock in particular. I have been fortunate to discuss Cudworth's views with many people. I am particularly grateful to Jacqueline Broad, Sarah Hutton, Vili Lähtenmäki, Marleen Rozemond, and Alison Simmons, who provided helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper—in some cases, multiple drafts! Special thanks also to Michael Della Rocca and Kenneth Winkler, who shepherded my first thoughts about Cudworth. A distant ancestor of this paper was presented at a workshop on personal identity in the history of philosophy organized by Ruth Boeker at the University of Melbourne in August 2016. Less distant ancestors were presented at a workshop on early modern moral philosophy also organized by Ruth Boeker at University College Dublin and as part of the Royal Institute of Philosophy lecture series organized by Jonathan Head at Keele University. My thanks to all of these audiences. My apologies to those whom I have overlooked.

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