

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11124-9 - Acts of Consciousness: A Social Psychology Standpoint

Guy Saunders

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acts of Consciousness

Drawing on compelling material from research interviews with former hostages and political prisoners, Guy Saunders reworks three classic thought experiment stories: Parfit's 'Teleporter', Nagel's 'What is it like to be a bat?' and Jackson's 'Mary the colour scientist' to form a fresh look at the study of consciousness. By examining consciousness from a social psychology perspective, Saunders develops a 'Cubist Psychology of consciousness' through which he challenges the accepted wisdom of mainstream approaches by arguing that people can act freely. What makes 'Cubist Psychology' is both the many examples taken from different viewpoints and the multiple ways of looking at the key issues of person, mind and world. This is a unique and engaging book that will appeal to students and academics in the field of consciousness studies and other readers with an interest in consciousness.

GUY SAUNDERS is a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of the West of England, Bristol, where he teaches courses on 'Psychology of Consciousness' and 'Psychology and the Arts'.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11124-9 - Acts of Consciousness: A Social Psychology Standpoint

Guy Saunders

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11124-9 - Acts of Consciousness: A Social Psychology Standpoint

Guy Saunders

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acts of Consciousness

A Social Psychology
Standpoint

GUY SAUNDERS



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-11124-9 - Acts of Consciousness: A Social Psychology Standpoint
 Guy Saunders
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521128544

© Guy Saunders 2014

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Saunders, Guy, 1954–

Acts of consciousness : a social psychology standpoint / Guy Saunders.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-521-11124-9 (Hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-12854-4 (Paperback)

1. Consciousness. 2. Social psychology. I. Title.

BF311.S375 2014

302–dc23 2013040562

ISBN 978-0-521-11124-9 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-12854-4 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xiii</i>
Introduction	1
The research background: the genre of captivity	2
How the book is set out	4
The three stories	5
How the book is written	7
Part I: To be conscious	
Introduction	11
1 To teleport or not to teleport? (Parfit)	15
Persons and integrity: unity and continuity	20
Persons as positive shapes: the boundary of the skin	23
Persons characterised as social kinds	24
Persons transformed: growing up and upbringing	26
Persons and place: copying background	27
To be one and the same person: making more than one replica	29
Persons and identity: partial duplication	31
Bundle or collection theories of persons	33
Collections of memories: John Dean’s testimony	36
Chapter conclusions	39
2 To be a person: ego, bundle and social theories	42
Negative spaces, shapes and contours	44
How artists use negative and positive spaces, shapes and contours	46
The making of persons	48
Senses of self	54
Social identities	61
What collects us together?	64
	v

Contents

	Other people: the stories of feral children	64
	Other people: the story of Martin Guerre	67
	Remembering and recollecting	69
	Our memories: the life of Clive Wearing	75
	Chapter conclusions	78
3	To be captive	88
	Anthony Grey	90
	Brian Keenan	92
	Vladimir Bukovsky	95
	Polyphony	97
	Brian Keenan and polyphony	105
	Terry Waite	110
	Anthony Grey on polyphony	112
	Chapter conclusions	114
	Conclusions for Part I	116
 Part II: To have consciousness		
	Introduction	121
	How we treat experience	122
	Subjective conscious experience	124
	Event / experience	126
	Experience / experiment	127
	Phenomenal feels / qualia	128
	Point of view	129
	One after another and one next to another (<i>nacheinander</i> and <i>nebeneinander</i>)	131
	Cubism / Cubist Psychology	132
	The mind–body problem	135
4	‘What is it like to be a bat?’ (Nagel)	139
	‘I wouldn’t be me if I were you!’	139
	Why did Nagel choose bats?	140
	Commentary on Nagel’s article	143
	Point of view	146
	Subjectivity and a particular point of view	151
	Ways of knowing	154

Contents

Wider discussion of subjective conscious experience: the bigger picture	157
Chapter conclusions	160
5 Treatments of subjective conscious experience	
in the arts	164
Film	167
<i>Being John Malkovich</i>	167
Film conventions	170
Point of view	174
<i>The Return of Martin Guerre</i>	175
<i>Blade Runner</i>	176
<i>The Diving Bell and the Butterfly</i>	178
Television	179
<i>The Wire</i>	179
Painting	180
<i>Guernica</i>	180
Denote, connote and signify	180
The novel	183
Writing conventions	183
Subjectivity in written works: writerly consciousness	186
Chapter conclusions	190
6 A captive mind	192
‘Turning the tables’	194
Acting freely	196
Memory and imagination transformed	200
Private experience	203
Genre of captivity and the human condition	205
Chapter conclusions	207
Conclusions for Part II	208
Part III: To know consciously	
Introduction	211
To <i>know</i> that you know	212
To be minded	212
Can a person remember their early life?	213
	vii

Contents

	Sense of self and proto-minds	214
	Becoming minded and what is known as 'Theory of Mind'	215
	The consequences of knowing that we know	217
	Do other animals have minds like ours?	218
	Examples	219
	Gesture / symbol	221
	Mind-minded conversation	223
	Conclusions for the introduction to Part III	224
	Conceptual conclusions	225
	World about us	226
	How do I know you?	228
7	Landscape and the world about us	231
	The landscape garden movement	231
	We make the landscape that landscapes us	233
	Landscapes wild and tamed	235
	Example: the picturesque	237
	Standpoints in the arts	238
	Treatments and landscape	239
	Freedom and commitment	240
	Ways of viewing	241
	Chapter conclusions	246
8	'Mary the colour scientist' (Jackson)	248
	Variation: 'Mary the captive scientist' or 'the black and white cell'	253
	Example 1: Rosa Parks	254
	Example 2: Aung San Suu Kyi	255
	Example 3: Nina Simone	258
9	Knowing how it feels to be free	260
	Commentary	261
	Conclusions	262
	Subjunctive mood	263
	Conclusions	265
	Captivity	265
	Acts of consciousness and conscience	268

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-11124-9 - Acts of Consciousness: A Social Psychology Standpoint
Guy Saunders
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

Minded	270
Persons	274
World about us	280
Cubist Psychology	283
Last words	287
Notes	288
<i>Further reading, viewing and listening</i>	309
<i>References to films, paintings and other artworks</i>	314
<i>Bibliography</i>	316
<i>Index</i>	327

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11124-9 - Acts of Consciousness: A Social Psychology Standpoint

Guy Saunders

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

This book is about how we come to be a person, how we develop a mind of our own and how we come to have an impact on the lives of others through the acts of consciousness we make in the world about us. I want to engage you and I hope you might suspend belief and test your worldview against mine. I will write as plainly as I can about life and living and discuss the familiar, commonsensical and commonplace.

I will discuss three stories as a way of examining our basic beliefs about life and living. The three stories are written as ‘thought experiments’. A *thought experiment* is an exercise in thinking about something we wish to investigate for which an actual experiment would be unethical and / or impossible to carry out with current technology. I’ll take a fresh look at the stories from a different standpoint.

My focus will be on the familiar features of persons and places, such as minds, points of view and experiences, but with the emphasis on action. I’ll take the root verbs – ‘to be’, ‘to have’ and ‘to know’ – and use these as a starting point for an investigation of consciousness and as headings for the three parts of this book.

I will draw on the accounts of former hostages and political prisoners and the research I carried out with their help. I think that the extreme situation of solitary confinement amplifies what it is to be human. Our everyday lives may be drowned out by the noise of normal life such that we are caught up in all manner of matters that take our attention. I’ll systematically examine what happens to people in solitary confinement and apply understanding from this to the burning question: what’s this life and living all about?

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11124-9 - Acts of Consciousness: A Social Psychology Standpoint

Guy Saunders

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

I offer this book as my contribution towards the field of consciousness studies. I will put a case *for* the standpoint I am taking rather than argue against other standpoints in the field. I'll refer you to other works I've read so that you can hear other voices on these matters. I'll add some notes on recommended further reading all of which I've further read myself.

I recommend reading this book from the beginning through to the end as an unfolding story, but it is structured to allow those who like to dip in to do so. The Introduction is essential but can be read in conjunction with any of the three parts of the book. There is a name and subject index so that you can find explanations of key terms.

I will be raising questions about how we conventionally think about consciousness both in common practice and in more specialist enquiries. I believe that the artist René Magritte was on the right track when he said he wanted to 'sabotage the familiar' and 'to put the real world on trial'.¹ I would put it less confrontationally: I want to suspend belief, to try out and to test out the familiar world of person and place, to explore the world about us, to ask what life and living is all about.

Care to join me?

Acknowledgements

Very many people have a voice in this book and some may go unacknowledged here. Much of what follows may have been picked up in one way or another from others: casual conversations, unattributed reading and the general social affairs of living that contribute to all of us. Where this book is good it is because of the help people gave me; where it is not, then it is down to me. In particular, I should like to thank John Hodgson, whose skilful editorial help – showing me how I could make my writing clearer – has made this book much more readable. I should like to thank Harriet Powney who also gave editorial help, particularly in the early stages of writing. My wife Frances read drafts and offered ideas that helped improve the clarity of this book. To all those who read drafts and offered encouragement: thank you.

Where I know sources, I have cited them. The sources cited may be the ones that set my thinking in train and need not be the original source of any particular argument. All errors are mine and I hope to address these and other matters as an ongoing process. I have included a list at the back of the book of those works that are the main influences and that I would recommend readers to follow up; this list includes some comments suggesting why I think it's worth taking the time to read, view or listen to some or all of the recommended works. There is a list of references to films, paintings and other artworks where I think these may help you understand the main themes. There are no illustrations, but you should easily find all the images you need online. There is also a simple bibliography of works that, even if not directly cited, form the main backdrop of scholarship.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11124-9 - Acts of Consciousness: A Social Psychology Standpoint

Guy Saunders

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

Many have helped me and the following have done more than their fair share. So, a big thank you to Vladimir Bukovsky, Brian Keenan, Terry Waite and Anthony Grey for their previous participation in interviews from which I derived much of my doctoral thesis (Saunders 1998) and for permission to quote material in this book. Thanks are also due to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) who funded the doctoral research work that led to my thesis on consciousness and captivity.

Thanks are due to Ciarán Benson, who has always been open-handed in his academic support. A special thanks to Dave Chalmers, John Pickering, Martin Skinner, Ray Tallis, Les Lancaster, Robert Pepperell and Charles Whitehead for the rich conversations and material derived from them that I have used here; and for reading or reviewing draft manuscripts. I owe a debt to those who have encouraged me: to Ray Land, who encouraged me to go to university, and a special thanks to William Wood-Davies, my uncle Bill, who started me off on this academic adventure exploring consciousness when he suggested that I read Julian Jaynes's book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*.

Many who have helped I have met through the Consciousness and Experiential Psychology section of the British Psychological Society, and I would like particularly to thank Jane Henry, Debbie Biggerstaff, Max Velmans, John Pickering, Steve Torrance, Richard Stevens, Susan Stuart, Mike Beaton, Gethin Hughes, Bryony Pierce and Lesley Graham. If you go to events organised by this group, you will be further engaged on the subjects treated in this book. See <http://cep.bps.org.uk/> for further information.

I am indebted to my colleagues in Psychology at the University of the West of England in Bristol, and particularly Mick Emerson with whom I've shared an office for over ten years. Thank you to those in the Centre for the Understanding of Social Practices for academic support and a research home. A very particular thank you goes to Sue Blackmore, who taught a 'Consciousness' course at UWE – which I continued when she left – for many conversations

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11124-9 - Acts of Consciousness: A Social Psychology Standpoint

Guy Saunders

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

and for writing the best introduction to consciousness book on the market. I would like to thank all the students who have taken my 'Consciousness' course, and particularly Duncan Gillard.

The lyrics from the song 'I wish I knew how it would feel to be free' are used by permission of Duane Music and © 1964 Duane Music Inc., USA assigned to Westminster Music Ltd, Suite 2.07, Plaza 535 King's Road, London SW10 0SZ. International copyright secured. All rights reserved.

I would like to thank my publishers Cambridge University Press for daring to sanction such a book as this, and the Syndicate for reading and accepting my proposal. Thank you to my anonymous reviewers who offered much encouragement and many helpful suggestions. Thank you to Andy Peart who was the original commissioning editor and helped me through the proposal process, to Hetty Marx who was always there for me throughout the review process, to Carrie Parkinson for her help taking the manuscript through to final publication and to Kay McKechnie for her help in copy-editing the final typescript. This book is the fulfilment of the proposal.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Frances for her continuous support; my friends, family and loved ones, and particularly John, Gerry and Rosie; Zowie, Lorena, Ruby-May, Luca and especially my son Paul to whom this book is dedicated.