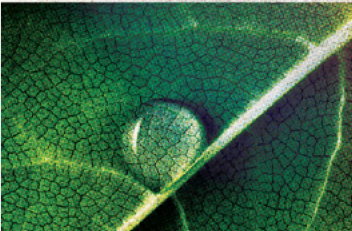
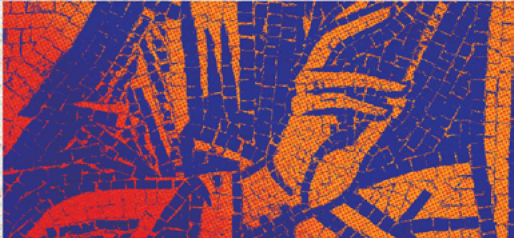


# WHO ARE YOU, REALLY?

**A PHILOSOPHER'S  
INQUIRY INTO THE  
NATURE AND ORIGIN  
OF PERSONS**



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# 1

## INTRODUCING THE INQUIRY

*The subject of mind involves certain difficulties.*

ARISTOTLE

### THE QUESTION

Your existence is familiar, like your breath. But despite your familiarity, your existence is far from insignificant. It is not obvious how something like you could ever exist. What are you? How did you come to be? Could a sandstorm produce a being like you?

You are a peculiar kind of reality. You are a conscious being. You can think. You can feel. You can decide to read this book. But how can there be something that *thinks, feels, or decides*, anywhere, ever?

When I reflect on the familiar reality of my own existence, I sometimes have the thought that reality is too strange. It would be simpler if there were just nothing at all. But if there is going to be something, surely there would never be conscious beings, like myself. Here is a simple argument for that conclusion:

1. If conscious beings can exist, then there is some possible explanation of their existence.
2. There is not a possible explanation of the existence of conscious beings.
3. Therefore, conscious beings cannot exist.

Ah, simplicity. The mysteries of reality are now solved.  
Not convinced?

Well, maybe we could explain conscious beings in terms of conscious-being-makers. A conscious-being-maker is something that has powers to sprinkle into our world thoughts, feelings, desires, hopes, and other contents of consciousness. But the existence of conscious-being-makers would only deepen the mystery. Why and how could reality include any conscious-being-makers? Suppose some clumps of matter can make conscious beings. Still, how does matter like *that* exist? If conscious beings are mysterious, is the existence of something that can make a conscious being any less mysterious?

Suppose we appeal to a supreme being. We say, “A supreme being made consciousness!” Then we push back the mystery all the way down into the foundation of reality. If the foundational reality is a supreme being, then this being is itself capable of consciousness (at least analogically). So, what explains its consciousness? If we say “nothing,” then there is no explanation of the existence of consciousness—which presents its own mystery. (We will return to the question of what, if anything, could be an ultimate explanation of consciousness as we approach the end of our inquiry.)

So, we have a great mystery. There are conscious beings, like you and me.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is not obvious how any such beings can exist. How can any reality—big or small, simple or complex—unfold into real, conscious beings?

To seek insight, I will investigate the nature of a reality that can give rise to conscious beings. My investigation will organize around this question: *Who are you?* I will divide this question into two big questions. First, what are you? Second, how could you have come to be? For convenience, I shall call the sort of being you (and I) are “a personal being.” My quest, then, is to pursue a greater understanding of the nature and origin of personal beings.

In this quest, I aim to put light on a path leading, step by step, to a greater vision of our existence as personal beings. By highlighting the steps, I hope travelers from a wide range of perspectives will see a greater vision of who they are by their own clearest light.

A thesis that will emerge from this inquiry is that our existence is deeply rooted. I have come to believe that the roots of personal, perspectival reality go deeper than many people imagine. In fact, it is my conviction, forged

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<sup>1</sup>For sake of inquiry, I will not take even this premise for granted. One of my first tasks in this inquiry will be to see how we might see that any conscious being is real.

through my research for this book, that personal reality has its roots all the way down into the fundamental nature of reality. By tracing these roots to their foundation, I hope to bring into greater light the nature of a world in which beings like you and I can exist.<sup>2</sup>

## THE STAKES

I do not believe I can overemphasize the significance of the question at hand. The stakes extend without measure. On some theories of personal beings, you are the sort of being that can live perpetually, without end. On other theories, you are more fragile. For example, some theories analyze personal beings in terms of specific configurations of matter—such as molecules organized into a functioning brain. On these theories, either “you” flicker out of existence as soon as any molecules are replaced, or you are able to persist through a wider range of molecular changes.<sup>3</sup> Either way, a time is coming when you will experience your last act of awareness. When the light of your consciousness goes out, you will never be aware of anything again, not ever. The differences between these theories are infinite in their ramifications.

It is not just your future that is at stake. It is also the meaning and value of your life. Does your life have purpose? What is a life? What is “purpose”? If the path of your life reduces to the paths of point particles, can you have any assurance that your future is bright?

These questions point to the value of our quest. We may want certain answers to be true, but only certain answers are actually true. Embarking

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<sup>2</sup>The resources that contribute to my analysis range from works of ancient philosophers to contemporary developments in science and analyses relevant to this inquiry. Highlights include Aristotle’s *De Anima* (350 BC), Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* (1637), Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Berkeley’s *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709), Leibniz’s *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings* (1898), Russell’s *Analysis of Mind* (1921) and *Analysis of Matter* (1927), Dennett’s *Consciousness Explained* (1991), Chalmers’s *The Conscious Mind* (1996), Hasker’s *Emergent Self* (2001), Kim’s *Physicalism or Something Near Enough* (2005), Rovelli’s *Reality Is Not What It Seems* (2014), Hoffman’s *Case Against Reality* (2019), and most recently, pioneering articles on quantum brain theory and the informational theory of matter. I hope my analysis will help display some fruits of these (and related) works in a larger light.

<sup>3</sup>It is not trivial to say how, precisely, you continue to exist on any of these theories. T. Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) provides a thorough analysis (and the best I’ve seen) of different proposals about how persons persist through time. We will zoom in on the challenge of accounting for your persistence when we examine theories of personal identity in chap. 11.

on the quest to understand the nature and origin of persons will position us to discern answers to these questions for ourselves.

Not only does one's theory of consciousness have immense practical and philosophical implications, but the inquiry into consciousness is also interesting in its own right; to unravel the mystery of consciousness is to unravel the mystery in all mysteries. After all, to understand consciousness is to understand the realm in which all understanding is possible.

Finally, consciousness connects to everything you could ever care about. Without consciousness, you experience nothing; you see nothing; you know nothing. Without consciousness, nothing matters to you; nothing is significant to you. In consciousness, you experience all your thoughts, your questions, your sensations, your emotions, your intentions, your hopes, your dreams, your fears, your imaginations, your visual images, your pains, your inferences, your memories, your feelings of curiosity, your feelings of doubt, the sense that something is true, the sense that something is wrong, your every feeling of purpose, and every other sense you ever have. Your consciousness is the storehouse of everything significant in your life.

So, why do any conscious beings exist? An answer to this question would be a great reward.

## **OBSTACLES TO PROGRESS**

There are several obstacles that keep people from even beginning to embark on a journey like this. I will point out three obstacles here.

The first obstacle is the mist of uncertainty. The inquiry into consciousness is like entering a dark cave. People don't see what is ahead. What they do see are shadows of ideas that disappear into the darkness. Is there a way to light the darkness?

One place people turn to get answers is the sciences. Perhaps we can unlock the mysteries of consciousness by studying the inner workings of the physical structure of the brain. However, even as we are able to make significant advancements in our understanding of how brains function, there are questions left unanswered. How can first-person perspectives emerge from third-person brains at all? Why do certain brain states connect to certain conscious experiences and not others? Is it possible to build a machine that consciously thinks? How might conscious intentions translate

into bodily motions? Thinking about these questions invariably lead to considerations that lie beyond the scope of a purely quantitative investigation of brain behaviors.

Where, then, might we find answers? If we look to philosophy, the worry is that we will only find endless speculation. Can we tether our theories to clear observations? How? If we can't see how to test our theories of consciousness, how can we even begin our investigation?

A second obstacle I see is widespread disagreement about the nature of consciousness. Those who dedicate their lives to exploring the nature of consciousness (whether neuroscientists, philosophers of mind, or Buddhist monks) display no consensus. The controversy can leave one feeling disempowered at the start.

Third, perhaps the biggest obstacle is prior paradigms. Prior paradigms filter our vision of the world. The problem here is not that we think answers are impossible. The problem is that we think the answers are already known. If we think we already know the answers, we might be right, but we might also be unaware of our own blind spots.

Sometimes a compelling story can limit our vision by covering over other potential explanations. In academic settings, I sometimes hear stories passed along about what experts have supposedly shown. These stories can become blue skies in the background of our thinking. The blue skies are so familiar that we take them for granted. As a result, we can easily miss new ways of looking at things, even when new information comes along.

These obstacles do not need to stand in our way. I believe it is possible to illuminate a path deep into the cave of consciousness. We just need the right tools. I will next describe the tools that I believe can help us the most on our journey.

## **TOOLS OF INQUIRY**

To illuminate the steps in our journey into the cave of consciousness, we will use tools that anyone can use to see things for themselves. Two tools will be our primary lights: introspection (by which we can collect relevant data firsthand) and reason (by which we can analyze data). I will share how I think these lights can help us on our quest. The third tool is a broadly scientific method of inquiry. I will describe that method and

how our primary tools can help illuminate scientific data relevant to our inquiry.

**Tool 1: Introspection.** The first tool is introspection. Introspection is the tool for collecting “first-person” data about consciousness. For example, if you smell coffee, you can detect your experience of the smell. This experience of a smell is a bit of first-person data. By collecting first-person data, we prepare ourselves to test hypotheses about the nature of consciousness itself.

Immediately, you might wonder: Can introspection actually help us detect things about consciousness? Some theorists have expressed doubts about the utility of introspection to help illuminate consciousness.<sup>4</sup> I even met a philosopher who said he wasn’t sure whether he could rely on introspection to reveal his own existence. “How can we trust introspection?” he asked. Fair question.

Since introspection will be one of the primary tools for our journey, I will offer three notes about why I think introspection can illuminate data relevant to our quest. My first two notes are clarifications that follow Bertrand Russell’s response to skeptics of introspection via the precisification of key concepts.<sup>5</sup> My third note is about why I think introspection is foundational to other things we know.

So first, to clarify what I mean by “introspection,” I offer a minimal definition: introspection is any power to sense or be aware of something in consciousness by directing one’s attention inward. For example, if you can be aware of your own thoughts, feelings, or your experience of reading these words, then these are examples of things revealed by introspection. On this minimal definition, we can leave open at the outset different theories about the nature of the things revealed via introspection (or even whether introspection reveals anything).

A second clarification: I do not claim that you cannot make mistakes about your own contents of consciousness. On the contrary, I think you can

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<sup>4</sup>For a representative development of key distinctions and considerations relevant to the reliability of introspection, see K. Dunlap, “The Case Against Introspection,” *Psychological Review* 19, no. 5 (1912): 404-13; R. E. Nisbett and T. D. Wilson, “Telling More Than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes,” *Psychological Review* 84, no. 3 (1977): 231-59; and E. Schwitzgebel, “A Phenomenal, Dispositional Account of Belief,” *Noûs* 36, no. 2 (2002): 249-75.

<sup>5</sup>B. Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1921).



make mistakes—such as if you misremember what you were thinking a moment ago. The possibility of mistakes does not remove the possibility of using introspection to detect anything within your consciousness.

In my view (based on introspection), mistakes from introspection ultimately have their origin in some shaky inference—an inference that leaps beyond what one can witness in the introspective experience itself. To illustrate, suppose you see a gray cube in front of you. One of the faces of the cube is darker than two other faces that you see. You might infer that your visual experience represents a light gray cube with one face in shadow, but this thought could be a mistake. Suppose you adjust the light source and rotate the cube such that your experience of gray changes slightly. This change in your experience could lead you to believe that the cube is actually dark gray instead of light gray. You might now say that you made a mistake in your initial belief that the cube was light gray. The mistake here would not be in your belief that you had a certain experience, but in your inference about what that experience implies.

We intuitively make inferences about the things we are acquainted with. Sometimes the inferences we make are mistaken. Regardless, I believe we can be directly consciously acquainted with contents of consciousness prior to forming a theory-laden, conceptual analysis of what we are acquainted with. If that is correct, then any mistaken belief about our experience (e.g., about whether a certain image matches something else, external or internal) derives from an analysis, based on inference, that goes beyond what we actually know by direct experience.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever you make of this analysis, my more fundamental thought is this: you don't need to have perfectly infallible, clear awareness to have some introspective awareness. Some things in consciousness can be clearer

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<sup>6</sup>Some readers may be familiar with the “gray squares” illusion, where squares with the same shade of gray appear to have different shades of gray. Some have suggested that this illusion calls into question the reliability of judgments based on introspection, for it shows that we can be mistaken about the shades of gray in our own visual field. On my analysis, however, the illusion here (the reason for error) is not in a failure to know how the squares *appear* (via introspection) but in an inference from how they appear to what they *represent* (or how they compare to each other). For example, we may think they represent different shades, even if they do not. Here is the crucial point: without introspection, we could not say anything about how the squares *appear*, or even that we have an experience of gray squares at all. So, if we make a mistake in our judgment, it is from an inference, not from direct awareness of the experience itself.

to you than others. It may be clearer, for example, that you feel vaguely hungry, even if it is less clear what exactly you feel hungry for. So long as introspection can illuminate something (leaving open what exactly it is), we can use introspection for our inquiry.

Third, and fundamentally, I believe introspection is a foundational source of many things we know. On my definition of “introspection” (as a power to sense something within consciousness), introspection is your source of knowing contents of consciousness, including your feelings, thoughts, and your experience of these words. Without the light of introspection, you would be in the dark about whether you can even question whether introspection is reliable. That’s darker than things are.

Now I want to be careful not to step ahead too quickly. In the next chapter, I will investigate the prospect of eliminating contents of consciousness altogether; maybe there are no feelings, thoughts, or questions at all. I will consider a certain motivation some philosophers have for eliminating contents of consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

Here I want to draw attention to a more fundamental problem with turning off the light of introspection (or not turning it on). The problem is this: without the light of introspection, all possible reasons to doubt introspection would themselves be in the dark too; you could not even recognize the very reasons in your own mind to be skeptical. Your mind would be completely dark. Call this problem “the darkness problem.”

To further draw out the darkness problem, suppose someone presents an argument against the reliability of introspection. And suppose this argument actually feels quite convincing to you. Should you then believe their conclusion that introspection is unreliable? Well, there is a problem: if introspection is unreliable, then you could not rely on introspection to recognize your very experience with their argument. You could not even tell whether the argument *seemed* convincing to you, since the feeling that

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<sup>7</sup>Some philosophers also worry here about the prospect of *illusions*. Could our sense of what it is like to have an experience be an illusion (cf. Keith Frankish, “Illusionism as a Theory of Consciousness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 23 [2016]: 11-39)? I will examine the prospect of illusions when I examine the nature of perception in chap. 4. There I will share why I think illusions themselves are only possible if we can see some things *directly within consciousness* (which fail to represent other things). This analysis allows that certain things in consciousness could still be illusory in some sense.

something seems convincing is itself illuminated by introspection. Your feelings would also be in the dark. Without the light of introspection, things are too dark to even recognize you are in the dark.

So, here is my solution to the darkness problem: turn on the light of introspection. Then you can see some thoughts, feelings, and your sense of sight itself.

I would like to complete my consideration of the utility of the tool of introspection by considering how introspection contributes to scientific inquiry. When we conduct a scientific inquiry, we make observations to test hypotheses. Introspection is embedded in even these familiar practices. For to report an observation, someone must at some time be aware of making observations. While one does not need introspection to observe a thermometer, for example, one does need introspection to *notice* that one is observing a thermometer and to later recognize one's memory of that experience. Moreover, to test a hypothesis, one must be aware of logical deductions in one's mind. These acts of awareness (of one's experience with observations and one's deductions) depend on awareness of states within one's consciousness.

To draw out this connection a bit further, suppose you read a scientific report on the reliability of introspection. This report claims that we know, on the basis of many experiments, that introspection is never reliable to any extent. Do you believe the report? Maybe you could. Perhaps you trust the authors. However, logical reflection reveals a problem: the report is self-undermining. If the report were true, then the scientists would not have any access to their own experience of making observations or to the reasons in their minds leading to their conclusions. Experiences and reasons are accessed via introspection. So, without introspection, scientists could not report their observations or analysis; no one would even know what "observation" or "analysis" means. You also could not tell whether or not you are reading a report about introspection if you have no access to your own experience of reading. Without introspection, you cannot tell whether you ever experience anything at all.

There is a fundamental problem, then, with first demonstrating the reliability of introspection by scientific experiments. A scientific demonstration of introspection would run us in a circle, since we would need

to use introspection to discern whether we are making observations or thinking through an analysis relevant to our experiments.

Fortunately, there is another way. We can avoid a circular justification of science if introspection is itself a tool for knowledge. If introspection is a tool for knowledge, then you don't need to first know that you have a brain to know, via introspection, that you have thoughts and feelings. Instead, introspection allows you to know something about your thoughts and feelings in a basic way; you can know them directly. By direct acquaintance with your own consciousness, you can be acquainted with your own experience of making observations and testing hypotheses. Then science can sprout. (I will have more to say about the power of direct acquaintance when we examine the nature of perception in chapter four.)

Again, I do not claim that introspection can never mislead you, such as if you misjudge what you sense by introspection. Rather, I claim that introspection can illuminate some things—thoughts, feelings, sensations, and so on—within your own consciousness. (We will return to the question of whether any consciousness is even real in the next chapter.)

As a final note about introspection, I want to suggest that the best way to see the power of introspection is to test it out. In the course of this book, I will attempt to use introspection to probe many things. You can view this book as an experiment in the use of this tool. The experiment involves seeing what you can see by collecting first-person data via introspection and then analyzing that data.

**Tool 2: Reason.** Another major tool we will use is reason. By “reason,” I mean the power to see truths by logical analysis. For example, when carefully thinking through the definitions of a “square” and “circle,” you can see this truth: nothing can be both a square and a circle. Here are some other truths you can see by reason: triangles must have angles, rocks cannot turn into numbers, trees cannot sprout into thoughts, and so on. In general, by reasoning, you can discern universal principles about what must be or what cannot be. The experience of acquaintance with universal truths is the experience of seeing truths by the light of reason.

While reason may be familiar, its applications and powers are far more significant than many people may realize. The applications of reason are comparable to the applications of the internet. When the internet first came

out, we only saw a few limited uses for it, such as website searches and email. We associated the internet with these initial applications. Then new applications came to light: social media, video channels, ecommerce, and many others. As the applications of the internet expanded, we expanded the meaning of the term *internet*. In a similar way, the applications of reason have been expanding. The early application of reason gave us what we call “canonical logic.” This logic includes some simple principles of reason, such as the principle that nothing can be both A and not A (for any instance of A). We associated “reason” with those original principles (so-called analytic truths). Later, we discovered many other applications of reason, which have formed many growing branches of logic. For example, in the twentieth century, we developed the logic of possibility (modal logic), the logic of parts and wholes (mereology), the logic of time (tensed logic), and many other branches illuminated by reason. Reason has continued to reveal more and more, with no end in sight.

As with the tool of introspection, I will offer a few reasons why I think we can use the tool of reason to help us in our inquiry. I begin by addressing a worry. People have sometimes asked me how we can be sure reason can reveal anything about reality. Or, if reason can reveal some things, why think reason can help us with big philosophical questions, like questions about consciousness?

I offer three considerations in reply. First, the worry invites careful testing. I will not assume reason alone will lead our inquiry into truth. Rather than rush ahead with unbridled speculations, I will seek to tether the results of reason to the real world. This project will involve tying reason to reality with the rope of observations in a systematic, scientific way. (I will say more about this scientific approach in the next section.)

Second, I believe it is possible to see, by reason itself, some truths about reality far away. For example, by reason, you can see that everything, whether a pinecone next to your foot or an electron one billion light years away, has the feature of being identical with itself. This principle of self identity is called “the law of identity,” and it appears—by the light of reason—to have no restriction. Similarly, by reason, you can see that square circles don’t emerge anywhere. Another example: objects cannot become both colorless and green simultaneously. These examples may seem minute, but

they illustrate that reason can illuminate at least some constraints on the natures of things near and far.

In fact, some truths about far away things are more clearly illuminated by reason than by any other instrument we have. For example, we can see, quite clearly, that turtles with colorless-green shells do not inhabit galaxies far away. We can see this truth by seeing, from here, an incongruence in the nature of a shell that is both colorless and green simultaneously. Later in this book I will show how reason can reveal surprising constraints on theories of consciousness by revealing other incongruencies.

Moreover, reason's power to reveal universal truths (about things near and far) is foundational to many things we take ourselves to know locally (about things near). For example, by reason, we know that a true statement is not also false. If we did not know that, then we could not distinguish any true scientific hypothesis from any false one, and then all science would crumble.

Third, and finally, if we take skepticism of reason too far, we risk cutting off the very branch on which we stand. Everything goes dark if we turn off the light of reason entirely. After all, it takes reason to provide reasons to doubt reason. The very inferences in an argument against the use of reason are themselves illuminated by reason. The problem is that if we cannot rely on *any* reasoning, we cannot see the validity of our very reasons to doubt reason. It seems to me, then, that any argument against reason involves the use of reason itself.

The problem of cutting reason short is directly relevant to our inquiry. If we say that reason cannot help reveal any truths about conscious persons, then this very claim also depends on reasoning. How can we trust reason to tell us not to trust reason in this case? Perhaps reason can reveal some of its limits, but I do not see all the limits of what reason might reveal. I want to be careful, then, not to limit the range of reason prematurely.

In the end, I believe the best way to see what we can see is to look. It is difficult to say at the outset what we can discover via the light of reason. To see where the light of reason might shine, I see no other course than to experiment.

**Tool 3: *The scientific method.*** We will use a broadly scientific method of analysis. By this, I mean that we will test hypotheses by making

relevant observations. Our observations will include data from introspection (e.g., about how certain things seem or feel), from logical analysis, and any other observations from scientific studies relevant to our quest. We will then test certain hypotheses about consciousness in light of those observations. If a hypothesis fails to match the observations we collect, we will push that hypothesis off the table. This observation-based approach will help us build out a theory that is anchored to the clearest observations.

Some readers might wonder how this observation-based approach fits with my work as a philosopher. People sometimes express the worry that philosophers spin webs of ideas that are untethered or untestable. Can work in philosophy contribute anything useful to our inquiry into persons?

My answer is that philosophical work can help clarify key concepts that are fundamental to understanding the data we collect. Consider, for example, data about the relationship between states of consciousness and states of brain matter. Some relatively recent studies indicate inverse correlations between brain activity and the richness of conscious experience in certain contexts.<sup>8</sup> What should we make of these studies? Interpretations vary depending on a wide range of considerations, including those not strictly in the domain of brain science. Academic philosophers have fleshed out a body of analytical work—including the logic of parts and wholes, tensed logic (i.e., the logic of time), the analysis of personal identity, the analysis of language, the analysis of rationality, and theories of mind—that are relevant to interpreting scientific results.

Logical analysis can help us tease out unexpected implications of previous observations. Philosophers have developed new theorems about consciousness that are not widely known among scientists who study the brain.<sup>9</sup> These theorems, derived by deductions from first-person, introspective

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<sup>8</sup>R. Carhart-Harris et al., “Neural Correlates of the Psychedelic State as Determined by fMRI Studies with Psilocybin,” *PNAS* 109, no. 6 (2012): 2138-43.

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Tononi’s integrated information theory, which includes formal principles expressing first-person data of consciousness (“Consciousness as Integrated Information: A Provisional Manifesto,” *The Biological Bulletin* 215, no. 3 [2008]: 216-42). Another example is Hoffman’s scrambling theorem (“The Scrambling Theorem: A Simple Proof of the Logical Possibility of Spectrum Inversion,” *Conscious Cognition* 15, no. 1 [2006]: 31-45), deduced from first-person data. There is also my own deduction of the mindful thoughts theorem (about the basis of thoughts), which I will display in chap. 3.

data, expose valuable new considerations relevant to our understanding of what the current science is uncovering.

Furthermore, logical analysis can help remove conceptual obstacles to seeing things that have the potential to be quite clear. For example, as I will argue, I think your own existence, thoughts, feelings, and aspects of your field of awareness can be secure items of knowledge. Obstacles to this sight roll in, however, and it can take the instrument of careful analysis to roll them away. We will be using logical analysis to roll away barriers to sight.

As a final note, to help you get the most out of this inquiry, I aim to provide an analysis of data that anyone can independently check. For this reason, while I lean into a broadly scientific method (of testing hypotheses with relevant observations), I will not rest any claim on mere scientific authority. Sometimes authority-driven claims about what science says covers over key premises. To put light on our steps, I will tease out the hidden premises and point to observations and analyses anyone can examine for themselves.

We are now equipped to enter the cave of consciousness. Introspection will help us illuminate aspects of ourselves from the inside. Reason will help us illuminate the logical implications of our first-person data. The scientific method will help us organize our observations into a testable theory. With these tools in hand, we are ready to illuminate the steps ahead.

Before we continue, I offer a warning: we will go deep. The journey ahead will move into rough and strange places, including places I personally had never seen before my research for this book. We will not take for granted classical ways of thinking about consciousness but will instead work to see things in a new light. This journey is for explorers who want to uncover truths buried in the depths. I do not claim it will be easy at every step. I do predict this journey will be rewarding—and perhaps surprising.

## **ROAD MAP**

Our journey ahead has two parts. Part one is about your nature. Part two is about your origin. The majority of part one is devoted to a close-up examination of elements of you: feelings, thoughts, perception (sight), your power to choose, your value, and your body. This examination divides across seven chapters. In each chapter, I do two things: first, I collect relevant observations



(via our tools); second, I use these observations to analyze these elements and remove certain theories about them. My analysis of these elements of you prepares the way for the final chapter of part one. In this chapter, I put the scope directly on you—the subject who has and unifies the elements of you. I provide an account of this unifying subject, the being who is you.

The second part of our journey is devoted to understanding the nature of a world in which something like you can possibly exist. The guiding question is this: How can there be any personal, conscious beings (ever)? The previous part of the book prepares us to appreciate the significance and challenge of this question. Building on previous observations, I describe several “construction” problems with constructing any being like you. These problems provide severe constraints on any theory of your origin. I seek to develop, within these tight constraints, a more complete theory of the nature and origin of personal beings.

As we proceed, I invite you to own this journey. Whether you are a seasoned philosopher or curious soul, I invite you to test each part by the light of your own analysis. Take whatever serves you, and leave behind whatever doesn't. We will work to illuminate the essential steps to a big thesis by the end. Wherever you rest your beliefs, I hope this inquiry will empower you in your own exploration of who you are.

Let us now enter the cave of consciousness to see what we might see.

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