

Consciousness

David Bentley Hart



THE EXPERIENCE OF

GOD

BEING, CONSCIOUSNESS, BLISS

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ALL THINGS ARE FULL OF GODS

*The Mysteries of
Mind and Life*

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God is not a cause like other causes in the universe, but a cause that constantly sustains existence and from which existence emerges, as flowing or radiating from a source.

Christian thinkers have understood it as a continuing act of God's creation, so that the scale of beings in existence leads thought upward to this spiritual origin of all that exists.

I believe in the formal and final causality of mind shaping and animating organic life, and of organic life shaping and animating its material substrate – mind “descending” into matter and raising matter up to itself as life and thought.

How Scientific Materialism Understands Consciousness

A sufficient number of neurological systems and subsystems in the brain, operating in connection with one another at some point naturally produce unified, self-reflective, and intentional consciousness.

Objection: One can conduct an exhaustive surveillance of all those electrical events in the neurons of the brain that are undoubtedly the physical concomitants of mental states, but one does not thereby gain access to that singular, continuous, and wholly interior experience of being this person...

Consciousness as an actual phenomenon is entirely confined to the experience of a particular mind, a particular subject. It is a uniquely “first person” phenomenon..., the sole act whereby anyone is anyone at all... My thoughts and feelings are my own.., and none of us has access to anyone’s but his or her own. ...

One can alter, confuse, or interfere with particular conscious states by intruding upon the activities of the brain, chemically, surgically, traumatically, or otherwise; but one can never enter into, let alone measure, the persistent and irreducibly private perspective of the subject in whom these states inhere.

This inaccessible first person
subjectivity...full of numberless
qualitative sensations...is so radically
elusive a phenomenon that there seems
to be no hope of capturing it in any
complete scientific account.

The difference in kind between the material structure of the brain and the subjective structure of consciousness remains fixed and inviolable.

The precise relation between them cannot be defined or even isolated as an object of scientific scrutiny.

We know both ourselves and the reality we inhabit in a single unified act of awareness, one that allows us to contemplate ourselves and the world simultaneously...

In a single moment of the mind, we perceive reality as both one and incalculably diverse, at one and the same time grasping the world as a profound unity and as a collection of countless particular things...

In order for there to be such a thing as reason, or coherent experience, or subjectivity, or even the experience of consciousness to itself, there must be a single unified presence of consciousness to itself...

[The “I”]

These “interior” characteristics of the “I” of consciousness or mind are the same in all persons.

Each person is different as the personal “I” of the I myself, as born and reared as the child of my parents and of my personal history. Hart calls this “the psychological self.”