The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss
Part II of II

From the book by David Bentley Hart

W. Bruce Phillips
Wonder & Innocence

*Wisdom is the recovery of wonder at the end of experience.*
The Four Classical Causes

1. **Material**
2. **Formal**
3. **Efficient**
4. **Final**
Consciousness
Consciousness defined

• Awareness of reality
  – *Subjective*
  – *Unitary*

• We relate to this world
  – *Intentionality*
  – *Judgment*
  – *Will*

“We receive the world in its integrity and diversity, hold past, present and future together in one continuum, look on the concrete and contemplate the abstract, and all with a unity of existence that is lifelong and non-continuous with our physical reality.”
Materialism “explains” consciousness

- **Direct product of brute matter**
  - *Simple matter of increased complexity*
  - *Contradicts everything we know about matter*

  “... how [is it that] essentially aimless matter achieves so intense and intricate a concentration of its random forces that it becomes the very antithesis of what matter is?”

- **Consciousness is an illusion**
  - *Eliminative materialism*
  - *No reason or free will*
Qualia
or
Secondary Characteristics
Qualia or Secondary Characteristics

• “What it’s like” to experience something
  – Intensely personal, private impression
  – Unexplained by the physical apparatus of naturalism

“... there seems to be no conceivable causal model, of the sort credible to modern scientific method, that could seamlessly, intelligibly explain to us how the electrochemistry of the brain . . . could generate the unique, varied, and incommunicable experience of a particular person’s inner phenomenal world.”

• Common to all the senses
Reason
Reasoning: an example

• Logical argument structure
  – If A then B
  – A
  – Therefore B

• A related argument
  – If A then B
  – Not B
  – Therefore Not A

• An invalid argument
  – If A then B
  – B
  – Therefore A

A: It rains.
B: The streets are wet.
Intentionality
Hart’s comments

“Physical reality, however, according to mechanistic metaphysics at least, is intrinsically devoid of purpose, determinacy, or meaning. It is not directed toward any ends at all, it has no final causes, it cannot intend anything.”

“Intentionality is therefore an abstract and conceptual operation entirely contrary to the logic of purely physical causation.”
SIMPLICITY IS THE ULTIMATE FORM OF SOPHISTICATION
Abstract

Concepts
Vision – the materialist version
A bouquet of roses
Yet another rose!

Entity or substance
Shape
Color
Comparison

Generic Flower
Biological or ecological system
Horticultural Achievement
Romantic symbol Artistic subject

Hart: There is no perception without conception.
“Reality” without abstract concepts
“The mind interprets reality so as to have a reality to interpret, and the order of priority is irreversible.”

“The categories that connect all things in a rational arrangement cannot be the [mental] residues of [sense] experiences that, through sheer accumulation, arrange and interpret themselves; the coherence and intelligibility of experience is conditional upon those categories.”
The Materialist Response
Artificial Intelligence – Strong form

• The brain functions much like a computer

• When computers get complex enough they will behave like humans

• Consciousness will emerge
  – **Ignoring all those pesky problems we’ve just noted**
“What makes the question of consciousness so intractable to us today, and hence so fertile a source of confusion . . . is not so much the magnitude of the logical problem as our inflexible and imaginatively constrained loyalty . . . to a particular conception of nature. Materialism, mechanism: neither is especially hospitable to a coherent theory of mind. This being so, the wise course might be to reconsider our commitment to our metaphysics.”

And that’s what we’re about to do!
Insights from consciousness
“The grammar for our thinking about the transcendent is given to us in the immanent, in the most humbly ordinary and familiar experiences of reality.”

“. . . in the case of our experience of consciousness, however, the familiarity can easily overwhelm our sense of the essential mystery. There is no meaningful distinction between the subject and the object of experience here, and so the mystery is hidden by its own [omnipresence] ubiquity.”
Consciousness directed at consciousness
Nature and consciousness

My Interpretation of Reality

Reality
Hart’s on being and consciousness

Couldn’t it be that rather than mind being dependent on the material – meaning the modern conjecture that mind is simply an outgrowth of the material world - that the material world that we know is in fact dependent on mind?

“. . . the fullness of being upon which all contingent beings depend is at the same time a limitless act of consciousness.”
Where object and reflection meet

Existence

GOD

Consciousness

Intelligibility
“God is at once both the knower and the known, infinite intelligence and infinite intelligibility.”

“That is to say that, in Him, rational appetite is perfectly fulfilled, and consciousness perfectly possesses the end it desires.”

“. . .this, of course, is perfect bliss.”
Bliss
The nature of desire

• Only two ways to want or desire something
  – Instrumentally – to assist in getting something else
  – Intrinsically – for itself alone

• Almost everything is desired instrumentally

• Only “transcendentals” are desired intrinsically
  – Characteristics of all things, of existence itself
  – Typically Unity, Goodness, Truth and Beauty
  – Seen as the characteristics of God
  – All convertible into one another

• Transcendentals are the ultimate desires of man
The Four Classical Causes

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“The mystery remains: the transcendent good, which is invisible to the forces of natural selection, has made a dwelling for itself within the consciousness of rational animals. A capacity has appeared within nature that, in its very form, is supernatural: it cannot be accounted for entirely in terms of the economy of advantageous cooperation because it continually and exorbitantly exceeds any sane calculation of evolutionary benefits.”
Beauty
Is this not bliss?

*Wisdom is the recovery of innocence at the end of experience.*
Thank You