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Dr. Orr is Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion at the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, a position he took after four years as a McDonald Postdoctoral Fellow in Theology, Ethics, and Public Life at Christ Church, Oxford, England. He is also the Chair of the Edmund Burke Foundation UK, and a Trustee of the Roger Scruton Legacy Foundation.

Dr. Orr holds a Ph.D. and an M.Phil. in the Philosophy of Religion from the University of Cambridge, and a B.A. in Classics from Balliol College, Oxford. Before entering academia, he worked for several years in corporate law at Freshfields and Sullivan & Cromwell.

Dr. Orr is engaged in a range of policy debates in the public square, on the topics of, among others, academic freedom and freedom of speech, patriotism and nationhood, and bioethical issues arising at the beginning and end of human life. His research interests include Husserl and the background to early movements in German phenomenology; Heidegger's critiques of theology and Kant's pre-critical appeals to teleology; the union of mystical theology and scholastic metaphysics in Edith Stein's later writings; and, in the analytic tradition, contemporary debates between David Lewis and David Armstrong on the metaphysics of natural laws and causal powers.

In his spare time, Dr. Orr enjoys playing the bagpipes, skiing, shooting, and walking in the Scottish Highlands.

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A Taste of Divinity

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Few experiences have more power to catapult me into a Proustian childhood reverie than the taste of a scoop of ice cream speckled with black Madagascan vanilla. Philosophers of mind designate the specificity of flavour as an example of *qualia*, academic shorthand for the raw *what-it-is-like* of subjective experience. The reality of conscious experience is notoriously difficult to explain in scientific terms or to reduce without remainder to the domain of physics alone. There is something incommunicably particular about the taste of vanilla ice cream — nothing less than a unique signature inscribed on my senses that neither I nor an omniscient neuroscientist could convey to one who has never tasted it.

To be sure, neuroscience might map with exquisite precision the collisions of vanilla molecules and taste receptors on my tongue, or trace the electrochemical dance of neural firings in my brain. But here we peer into a chasm that no materialist can bridge. For why should *this* neurological choreography give rise to *that* subjective experience rather than any other? Nothing in the physics of the brain requires the one-to-one correlation of a particular category of brain-states and a particular category of sensory qualities. The materialist narrative fractures at the point where objective description meets subjective experience.

The problem is not that there is a temporary 'gap' in scientific explanation, ripe for future elucidation had brain scientists but money enough and time. Those who claim otherwise mirror natural theologians who attribute hitherto unexplained scientific phenomena to divine agency. That is why philosophers have named this difficulty the hard problem of consciousness. The brute fact that certain neural firing patterns reliably yield the taste of vanilla rather than, say, the smell of petrol or the sound of Middle C, points toward something that transcends the physical order.

The truth is that the psychophysical correlations that make up my savouring a scoop of vanilla ice cream point *either* to an unimaginably improbable series of cosmic coincidences between mind and brain *or* to the intentional harmonising of the entire psychophysical constellation of states in mind and brain. When we consider that these correlations between mind and brain occur with almost perfect consistency and allow us to navigate and savour reality, the latter explanation comes to seem more attractive than any attempt to account for them within neuroscientific parameters.

So there is something theistically suggestive in that humble scoop in the cone, a reminder that qualitative first-person experience — indeed consciousness itself — and the paradise of irreducible *qualia* and their flawless congruence with physical states, testifies not only to a reality that transcends materiality, but to a personal agency that can both conjure consciousness from matter and sustain the inconceivably complex symmetries between my taste of vanilla and the neurophysiological states that match it. The taste of vanilla is, in its way, a taste of divinity, a gustatory homily on the plausibility of theism over naturalism, a sensory intimation of transcendence stitched into the fabric of experience.