

The Nature of Consciousness
Handout [21]
Colin McGinn: *Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?*

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§ McGinn's Assumptions:

1. Kant:

___ the phenomenal world vs. the noumenal world (thing-in-itself)

2. Hume:

___ **The Humean Mind:** since ideas must always be copies of "impressions"; therefore the concept-forming system cannot transcend what can be perceptually presented to the subject.

3. Locke:

___ our cognitive faculties may not be up to solving every problem that confronts us.

§ McGinn's Argument for Naturalism

- ___ **1. Minds are biological products like bodies, and like bodies they come in different shapes and sizes, more or less capacious, more or less suited to certain cognitive tasks.**
- ___ **2. There are various degrees of "cognitive closure" to different species of minds.**
- ___ **3. But cognitive closure with respect to P does not imply irrealism about P.**
- ___ **4. Human mind is built in such a way that the natural property of the brain (or of consciousness) is cognitively closed to him.**
- ___ **5. Therefore, the fact that we cannot conceive of our consciousness' being naturalistic does not imply that our consciousness is not naturalistic.**

§ McGinn's Overall Argument:

Let *P* be the property instantiated by the brain, in virtue of which the brain is the basis of consciousness.

To Show: that we could *never* have some theory *T*, referring to *P*, which fully explains the dependence of conscious states on brain states.

[The Argument]:

- ___ **1. There are only two avenues open to us in our aspiration to identify *P* :**
 - (i) we could try to get to *P* by investigating consciousness directly, i.e., through introspection; or
 - (ii) we could look to the study of the brain (neuroscience) for *P*.

- ___ 2. But (i) through introspection, we have direct cognitive access to one term of the mind-brain relation, and yet we do not have such access to the nature of the link; and
- ___ 3. (ii) The property of consciousness itself is not an observable or perceptible property of the brain, i.e., consciousness is *perceptually closed* to us in our observation of the brain.
- ___ 4. Furthermore, the senses are geared to representing a spatial world, but we cannot *link* consciousness to the brain in virtue of spatial properties of the brain.
- ___ 5. Thus *P* is also perceptually noumenal (perceptually closed) to us.
- ___ 6. If *P* is perceptually noumenal, then it will be noumenal with respect to perception-based explanatory inferences (Inference to the best explanation of purely physical data will never take us outside the realm of the physical, forcing us to introduce concepts of consciousness).
- ___ 7. Therefore, we can never get to *P*.