

**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*.