

**Phil 397**  
**The Mind/Body Problem**

**Fall 1995**  
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**Colin McGinn: *Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?***  
**[Handout #8]**

**§ 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:**

**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 General 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.

**[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*.