METAZİHİN YAPAY ZEKA VE ZİHİN FELSEFESİ DERGİSİ
METAMIND: JOURNAL OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

ISSN: 2651-2963
www.dergipark.org.tr/metazihin

Aralık / *December* 2023
Volume: **6**, *Issue*: **2**, 53-71

Pseudo-Mysterianism of Colin McGinn †

[Colin McGinn'in Sözde-Gizemciliği]

Sena IŞIKGİL*
Ordu University

Received: 17.08.2023 / **Accepted:** 25.12.2023
DOI: 10.51404/metazihin.1345299
Research Article

Abstract: Colin McGinn claims that there is a naturalistic solution of the mind-body problem, but it is not constructive. That is, according to him, there is a natural and simple explanation of consciousness-brain interaction; however, because of our limited cognitive capacity we can never specify the link between the mind and the brain. Scientific explanation of the problem cannot be possible, so solution of the consciousness problem will remain an epistemic mystery for human beings. McGinn's theory which is the basis of his mysterianism, is called Transcendental Naturalism (TN), and he formulates this theory with three main arguments. The main purpose of this work is to reveal that McGinn's arguments are baseless and that his mysterianism is pseudo-mysterianism. To achieve this purpose, I will discuss TN by respectively analyzing his three main arguments and their problematic aspects. Firstly, I will draw attention to McGinn's first argument – I will call it "(i) the argument for naturalism." Secondly, I will draw attention to the second argument which I will call "(ii) the argument for closure," and I will show that McGinn's cognitive closure idea on which epistemic mystery of consciousness is mainly based is also problematic. After briefly explaining his last argument which I will call "(iii) the argument for dissolution," at the end of this work, I will have manifested that (i)-(iii) are not a satisfactory triad to leave the problem of consciousness to dark side, and McGinn's mysterianism is pseudo-mysterianism.

Keywords: mind-body problem, Colin McGinn, mysterianism, cognitive closure, pseudo-mysterianism.

† This paper is a revised version of a chapter of the dissertation titled *Pseudo-Mysterianism of McGinn: A Constructive and Naturalistic Solution of the Hard Problem of Consciousness Is Possible* which I submitted to Middle East Technical University, Department of Philosophy in Ankara in September 2022.

* **Author Info**: Sena IŞIKGİL
Ordu University, Faculty of Literature, Depertmant of Sociology, Cumhuriyet Yerleşkesi, 52200, Altınordu-Ordu, TURKEY. E-mail: senaikgl@gmail.com

To Cite This Paper: Işıkgil, S. (2023). "Pseudo-Mysterianism of Colin McGinn." *MetaZihin, C*(S): 53-71.

Öz: Colin McGinn, zihin-beden probleminin doğalcı bir çözümü olduğunu ancak bunun yapıcı olmadığını iddia etmektedir. Ona göre bilinç-beyin etkileşiminin doğal ve basit bir açıklaması vardır; ancak sınırlı bilişsel kapasitemiz nedeniyle zihin ile beyin arasındaki bağlantıyı asla belirleyemeyiz. Bu durumda problemin bilimsel bir açıklaması mümkün olamayacağı için bilinç probleminin yapıcı çözümü insanlık için epistemik bir gizem olarak kalacaktır. McGinn'in gizemciliğine temel teşkil eden teorisi Transandantal Doğalcılık (TD) olarak adlandırılır ve McGinn bu teoriyi üç ana argüman ile formüle eder. Bu çalışmanın asıl amacı McGinn'in argümanlarının temelsiz olduğunu ve gizemciliğinin de sözde-gizemcilik olduğunu ortaya koymaktır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda bu çalışmada sırasıyla bu üç ana argümanı ve her birinin sorunlu yönlerini inceleyerek TD'yi tartışacağım. Öncelikle McGinn'in ilk argümanına dikkat çekeceğim—bunu "(i) doğalcılık argümanı" olarak adlandıracağım. Sonrasında, "(ii) kapalılık argümanı" olarak adlandırdığım ikinci argümana dikkat çekeceğim ve bilincin epistemik gizeminin esas olarak dayandırıldığı bilişsel kapalılık fikrinin sorunlu olduğunu göstereceğim. "(iii) Çözümleme argümanı" olarak adlandırdığım son argümanını kısaca açıkladıktan sonra, bu çalışmanın sonunda (i)-(iii) üçlüsünün bilinç problemini karanlıkta bırakmak için tatmin edici olmadığını ve McGinn'in gizemciliğinin sözde-gizemcilik olduğunu ortaya koymuş olacağım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: zihin-beden problemi, Colin McGinn, gizemcilik, bilişsel kapalılık, sözde-gizemcilik.

1. McGinn's Mysterianism

Although consciousness is ordinary to us, for we directly and intimately know it, there is nothing more complicated to explain since consciousness cannot be easily fitted into the physical world. It is surely beyond doubt that conscious states are related with the physical brain states. We do not have a doubt that our redness experience is related with our physical brain states at the time of seeing red wall, but though we acquire the total knowledge of physical brain process, up to now we have not found an answer for the question of how physical brain states give rise to conscious states, which have subjective character. What is the relation between spatial brain properties and non-spatial conscious phenomena? How do non-material mental phenomena result from gray matter? These are manifestations of the hard problem of consciousness known as consciousness-brain (or mind-body) problem.

There are some solution-oriented approaches for the hard problem of consciousness. However, unfortunately none of them has been able to provide a satisfactory explanation for understanding of consciousness, and these failure stories drove some philosophers to despair about solving the problem of consciousness. In the last decade of the 20th century, Colin McGinn, a pioneer of the new movement called Neo-Mysterianism, suggested a dissolution of the consciousness-brain problem, and he claims that although there is a natural and simple solution of the mind-body problem, we, as human beings, cannot attain this solution because of our limited cognitive

capacity. That is, in his thesis called Transcendental Naturalism (TN) he defends the idea that because constructive solution of the consciousness problem is not possible, understanding of consciousness will remain inaccessible for humanity forever. The aim of McGinn is to impose that it is time to wave the white flag for philosophers who noodle over the problem of consciousness in hopes of finding its solution. However, I think that it is not digestible; therefore, in this study, I will examine his thesis in detail.

In his 1989 article, McGinn describes his extreme approach to the problem of consciousness by saying that "the approach I favour is naturalistic but not constructive". His thesis, which he describes as non-constructive naturalism, is based on three main arguments (1989: 352):[1]

(i) There exists some property of the brain that accounts naturalistically for consciousness (which I will call the 'Argument for Naturalism')
(ii) We are cognitively closed with respect to that property (which I will call the 'Argument for Closure')
(iii) There is no philosophical mind-body problem (which I will call the 'Argument for Dissolution')

I will explain his hypothesis by respectively analysing each step.

1.1. The Argument for Naturalism

Although the world we live in is completely spatial, consciousness has a non-spatial nature. It can be clearly seen that the brain is the causal basis of our mental lives; it is "the seat of consciousness", or rather it is like "a womb" for consciousness (1999: 4-5). However, there is a fundamental difference between consciousness and its causal basis. While we attribute some spatial properties, such as shape, volume, solidity, extension, and dimension, to the brain, these properties are not compatible with consciousness (1995: 149), and the non-spatial character of consciousness creates "a problem of emergence" and "a problem of interaction" (1999: 116).

[1] McGinn applies the approach that he defined for the problem of consciousness in his 1989 article to other philosophical problems, e.g., free will, the self, meaning and so on, in his 1993 book, and calls this thesis "Transcendental Naturalism" (TN) in which he argues that the solutions to such problems, including the problem of consciousness, are beyond our cognitive capacity. McGinn takes Chomsky's distinction between "problems" and "mysteries" as a starting point for TN. According to Chomsky, while problems are answerable questions within our cognitive faculties, mysteries are questions whose solutions are beyond our cognitive capacities (1976: 281; 1998: 137; 2013: 663). And according to McGinn, philosophical questions are mysteries whose (scientific) explanations are inaccessible by our cognitive faculties. For the details of this argument, see his 1993 and 1994 works, for the rest of this work I will continue with his argument for the problem of consciousness which he especially discussed in his 1989 article.

We know, by means of introspection, that there is a strong correlation between the brain and consciousness; the changes in brain activities cause an alteration of conscious states that we are introspectively aware of (1996: 45). Even if we know that there is a causal nexus between the brain and consciousness, we do not understand how a piece of meat causes non-spatial consciousness. We feel as if "the water of the physical brain is turned to the wine of consciousness" (1989: 349). It is obvious that conscious states do not emerge from brain states in a miraculous way, like a djinn rising from a lamp (1989: 352). If we do not have a supernatural position, believing "the magic touch of God's finger" or an eliminativist position that excludes consciousness, we must accept that there must be "some natural property of the brain" through which consciousness is linked to the brain and also a theory which explains this psychophysical nexus (1989: 353). McGinn constructs this claim with the following words:

> [T]here exists some property *P*, instantiated by the brain, in virtue of which the brain is the basis of consciousness. Equivalently, there exists some theory *T*, referring to *P*, which fully explains the dependence of conscious states on brain states. (1989: 353)

According to McGinn, consciousness itself is a biological phenomenon which naturally arises from the brain, so the relation between the brain and consciousness is as natural as the relation between the liver and bile (p. 362). There is a natural property, *P*, in the brain which is responsible for the link between the mental and the physical.

However, McGinn insists that even though *P* is one of the properties of the brain, "the brain has this property, as it has the property of consciousness" (p. 359), therefore it must have different features from the physical properties of the brain. It must be non-spatial because so far nothing spatial in the brain convince us that we have found the consciousness-brain link we seek (p. 357). He underlines:

> spatially defined properties […] that seem inherently incapable of resolving the mind-body problem: we cannot link consciousness to the brain in virtue of spatial properties of the brain. […] Consciousness does not seem made up out of smaller spatial processes. (p. 357)

Consciousness is non-spatial property of the brain, and non-spatial property itself cannot be composed of the spatial properties of the brain. For this reason, there must be any other property which is in conformity with the nature of consciousness, and McGinn's *P* is this property in his view.

1.2. The Argument for Closure

McGinn claims that even if there is a naturalistic theory of the nexus between the brain and consciousness, his approach to the solution of the consciousness problem is non-

constructive (p. 350). That is, he believes that we can never explain the natural property of the brain which makes possible the link between the brain and consciousness. He justifies this claim with his idea of "cognitive closure". According to the cognitive closure idea:

> A type of mind *M* is cognitively closed with respect to a property *P* (or theory *T*) if and only if the concept-forming procedures at *M*'s disposal cannot extend to a grasp of *P* (or an understanding of *T)*. (p. 350)

That is, if an organism's concept forming capacity is not sufficient for understanding a property or a theory, the organism is cognitively closed to the property or the theory. Each species has its own cognitive limitations, so a theory or a property may be achievable for some species but cognitively closed to others. For instance, "what is closed to the mind of a rat may be open to the mind of a monkey, and what is open to us may be closed to the monkey" (p. 350). If we consider the property of an electron, while human minds have sufficient cognitive capacity to understand the property of an electron, monkey minds can never understand what it is; they are cognitively closed to this property.

McGinn claims that different species can achieve different things in the world, and there is no species which is capable of understanding all properties of the world. However, being closed to some minds does not make a property less real than the realisable properties of the world; so human minds being cognitively closed to *P*, does not mean that *P* is not real (p. 351). McGinn supports the possibility of the cognitive closure thesis by following realism, which is an approach assuming an object's existence independently of a mind conceiving it. This is a reasonable starting point. If we do not adopt a dogmatic assumption like idealism, which claims that everything in the world can be understood by humankind, it is reasonable to assume that there are qualities in the world that are independent of our minds. And it is possible that the human mind cannot grasp all the qualities of the world. From this point of view, it is also possible that there are some problems which are unsolvable by human minds due to the qualities that human minds cannot comprehend. However, something is possible does not mean that it will be actual.

McGinn, as a strong mysterian regarding consciousness, claims that the property of the brain making possible the link between the brain and consciousness will never be understood by human beings because of the limitations in their concept forming faculties. The solution to the consciousness-brain problem will forever remain a mystery for humanity. He turns the possibility of the cognitive closure idea into an actuality and justifies the actuality of cognitive closure by showing the failure of our two distinct cognitive faculties in terms of understanding consciousness.

According to McGinn, there are only "two possible avenues" to understand *P* that will lead us to the solution: introspection and perception (p. 354). That is, we understand the entire world through either "introspection-based" or "perception-based" faculties (2003: 158); we do not have any faculty to understand *P* which would make the consciousness-brain link possible. We can try to understand *P* either by introspectively having direct knowledge of our mental states, or by conducting observations on the brain, but none of them would allow us to understand *P*.

Let us begin with introspection. Through introspection we become aware of the properties of consciousness; we can immediately access our mental states, and thus we can form concepts from our inner lives. However, this is not sufficient cognitive faculty to achieve *P*, because *P* has a mediating function between the brain and consciousness, but "introspection does not present conscious states as depending upon the brain in some intelligible way"; it gives us only one side of the consciousness-brain nexus (1989: 354). A further point is that we cannot obtain the concept *P* by analysing on the concepts of consciousness because we can only form the concept for the state of consciousness we can access by our own introspection. For instance, we cannot form the concept for the echolocational state of the bat; it is the bat's own subjective experience. Similarly, a blind person cannot comprehend the concept for an experience of 'red' she has never seen (1989: 355). In the same way, the conceptualisation of *P* as a solution of consciousness problem is beyond the realm of introspection; the concept of *P* cannot be structured. In the light of this explanation, McGinn claims that "the faculty of introspection, as a concept-forming capacity, is cognitively closed with respect to P" (1989: 355).

Another avenue through which we can try to reach *P* is the faculty of perception. However, according to McGinn, we cannot get a better result than by introspection because the function of the perception is to form our comprehension of the brain. For the investigation of the brain, we must use our senses, but senses only present to us objects of space with their spatial properties. McGinn claims:

> You can stare into a living conscious brain, your own or someone else's, and see there a wide variety of unstantiated properties-its shape, colour, texture, etc.-but you will not thereby see what the subject is experiencing, the conscious state itself. Conscious states are simply not potential objects of perception: they depend upon the brain but they cannot be observed by directing the senses onto the brain. In other words, consciousness is noumenal with respect to perception of the brain. (1989: 357)

Senses are effective to respond to spatial properties, but because nothing spatial can solve the consciousness problem, *P* must be a non-spatial property as consciousness itself. For this reason, according to McGinn, we cannot understand how *P* provides the

consciousness-brain nexus and explain consciousness by the investigation of spatial properties.

Being perceptually closed to something does not entail being cognitively closed to it, since the method of concept formation may work towards introducing theoretical concepts for *P* (1989: 358). However, McGinn claims that this method is also useless to give us *P*. We cannot obtain a theoretical concept of *P* by making an inference from the observational data, because we use the "principle of homogeneity" while we generate theoretical concepts based on our observations. The principle of homogeneity declares that the theoretical concept we formulate by means of the inference from physical data must be homogenous with the entity of our observation. He asserts that "if our data, arrived at by perception of the brain, do not include anything that brings conscious states, then the theoretical properties we need to explain these data will not include conscious states either" (p. 358). According to McGinn, this method works for concept formation of unobservable material entities. Although they are not the objects of observation, we introduce theoretical concepts about them by analogical extension of the physical data we do observe. However, *P* cannot be given by an analogical extension of the observable entities of the brain; neither consciousness itself nor *P* are entities of the same kind as the spatial properties of the brain, so their theoretical formation by perceptual brain data is prohibited by the homogeneity principle (pp. 358-9). For this reason, *P* is not only perceptually but also cognitively closed to us.

Consequently, according to McGinn, these two distinct concept-forming faculties, introspection and perception, present us with a partial picture of the relation between the brain and consciousness; they thus fail to reveal the underlying property that unifies the brain and consciousness. For McGinn, "it is a bit like having to view an elephant either from the tail end or the trunk end and never being allowed to take in the whole elephant" (1999: 48). Our partial knowledge about the brain-consciousness nexus is the result of the inherent limitations in our concept-forming faculties and unfortunately there is no way to change or extend them. Therefore, the brain-consciousness problem is condemned to remain a mystery for us.

1.3. The Argument for Dissolution

McGinn has a pessimistic position with respect to achieving a constructive solution to the consciousness-brain problem. However, he believes that we do not need to understand the nexus between the brain and consciousness to remove the philosophical perplexity. He claims that just knowing that there is a natural solution to the problem of consciousness in the science to which we will never have access to because of our inherent limitations, also removes the philosophical consciousness problem:

The philosophical problem about consciousness and the brain arises from a sense that we are compelled to accept that nature contains miracles-as if the merely metallic lamp of the brain could really spirit into existence the Djin of consciousness. But we do not need to accept this: we can rest secure in the knowledge that some (unknowable) property of the brain makes everything fall into place. What creates the philosophical puzzlement is the assumption that the problem must somehow be scientific but that any science we can come up with will represent things as utterly miraculous. And the solution is to recognize that the sense of miracle comes from us and not from the world. There is, in reality, nothing mysterious about how the brain generates consciousness. There is no metaphysical problem. (1989: 362-3)

Consciousness is not more complex than processes like "digestion" or "sexual reproduction", and the brain's release of consciousness is as natural as the liver's secretion of bile. The philosophical perplexity about the relation between the brain and consciousness is based on our sense that this nexus arose in a miraculous way. However, this sense, according to McGinn, is the result of the inadequacy of our cognitive capacity, and not the result of a miraculous world. That is, the mystery is not ontological but epistemological in the sense that the science which explains consciousness is beyond our cognitive limitations, and being aware of these limitations is enough to remove the philosophical consciousness-brain problem.

2. Pseudo-Mysterianism

McGinn attempts to prove the non-constructive but naturalistic solution of the consciousness-brain problem by his hypothesis. Even if I find McGinn's insistence that there is a naturalist solution to the consciousness problem rational, I think his thesis that this solution is noumenal for us is unacceptable. He implies that it is time to wave the white flag for philosophers who ponder consciousness in hopes of contributing to its solution. The nexus between the brain and consciousness is something mysterious that will forever remain on the dark side of the world for us because of our limited cognitive capacity. This is not a digestible claim. McGinn constructs his mysterianism with his cognitive closure thesis. However, I will reveal that the main argument he uses to justify his cognitive closure thesis is inconclusive and his mysterianism is illusionary. For this purpose, I will first argue for the problematic aspect of *P* he identified as providing the nexus between the brain and consciousness. I will then argue against his cognitive closure thesis which is at the core of his mysterianism.

2.1. Objections to the Argument for Naturalism

As explained above McGinn identifies a property of the brain, *P*, making consciousness a natural product of the brain. *P* "does for consciousness and the brain what gravity does for the planets and their orbits, or what kinetic energy does for molecules and the behaviour of the gases they compose" (1991: 58-9); that is, it removes the (ontological) mystery of the emergence of consciousness from the brain and provides a naturalistic solution. According to him, *P* is the property not only of the brain but also of consciousness because it must have sufficiently similar features with both to connect these two distinct characters to one another.

McGinn insists that even though *P* is a property of the brain, it must also be non-spatial like consciousness because spatial properties of the brain are not effective to mediate between the brain and consciousness. However, some commentators argue that the non-spatial character of *P* has similar characteristics with the supernatural position of Cartesian dualism, and thus contradicts the naturalist solution of the consciousness-brain problem. For instance, Brueckner and Beroukhim claim:

> [W]hat becomes of McGinn's claim to have given a naturalistic solution to the mind-body problem, a solution that is preferable to Cartesianism? […] To say that P is inaccessible to our best possible physicists' minds is one thing, but to say that P (along with consciousness) is non-spatial is another. If P is non-spatial in character, then it is hard to see what its being a natural property comes to, if not just being a real property of things. According to the Cartesian, properties of non-physical mental states and substances are natural in that sense. (2003: 403-4)

As seen in the above quotation, Brueckner and Beroukhim defend their thoughts on the non-naturalist position of McGinn's thesis by comparing McGinn's non-spatial property with the supernatural substance of Cartesian dualism. Cartesian dualism constructs the mind-body problem by claiming that mental states are the states of the non-spatial substance which is distinct from the body. From this point of view, according to Brueckner and Beroukhim, if McGinn's position is naturalistic, then we must assume that Cartesian dualists are naturalist in this sense, otherwise we have to accept that McGinn's thesis is also non-naturalistic like Cartesian dualism.[2]

However, I think that interpreting McGinn's position in this way is a result of missing some crucial points in his thesis. McGinn's *P* and the Cartesian substance are quite different from each other. Let us first explore the reason why we assume that the Cartesian position is supernatural. There are two main claims of Cartesian dualism: (1) the mind and the brain are two separate substances, and (2) the mind is a non-spatial substance and therefore different from the brain. These two claims are logically

[2] In his article, "Against McGinn's Mysterianism", Demircioglu also argues against McGinn's naturalistic position, and I also replied to Demircioglu in a similar way. For the detail, see Işıkgil (2017).

independent from each other. The existence of (1) does not necessitate (2). Descartes, the most famous defender of Cartesian dualism, could have identified two different spatial substances, but he assumed that the brain is an extended substance, and the mind is a non-extended thinking substance. The reason we assume Cartesian dualism is supernatural is not the existence of different substances but the non-spatial character of one of them. McGinn's position also seems non-natural because of the non-spatial *P*, but he protects his thesis from such an objection with some additional explanations. On the one hand, McGinn insists on the non-spatial character of *P* for the reason that the spatial property of the brain does not have the mediating feature that links the brain and consciousness. On the other hand, he tries to reveal that his concept of non-spatiality corresponds to the seeming non-spatiality which is the result of our cognitive limitations. That is, according to him, because of our cognitive limitations we cannot understand the objective space itself because the objective space also naturally involves non-spatiality. He asserts:

> It is not that consciousness is non-spatial, after all; rather, space is quite other than we think, and consciousness fits comfortably into the nature of space as it really is. So, when I repeated that the mind has no spatial properties, I must be taken to have meant that it does not have the spatial properties we attribute to space, which is consistent with saying that it has the properties that space objectively has. (1999: 123)

McGinn defends his idea regarding the objective space with the possibility of a pre-Big Bang universe. Following the claims of cosmologists, he explains that before the Big Bang there was no spatial universe; the universe had the dimension of non-spatiality, and space came along with matter after the Big Bang. This means that the origin of spatiality was not spatial itself but non-spatial or pre-spatial; a transformation from the non-spatiality to spatiality during the Bing Bang. However, McGinn claims that during the transformation of the current universe during the Big Bang, the earlier state of the universe did not entirely disappear from the universe; the dimension of pre-Big Bang, non-spatiality, is conserved in some form like consciousness in the animal or human brain (1999: 120-1). Even though objective space also naturally includes the dimension of non-spatiality, due to our cognitive limitations we conceive space as if it excludes the feature of consciousness. The non-spatial character of consciousness is the result of our ignorance of what real space is. That is, the clash between the non-spatial consciousness and the spatial brain is not an ontological fact but only an epistemological one (2004: 108). The seemingly non-spatial consciousness is included in space due to space's "hidden dimensions" which originated from the earlier state of the universe.

Whether McGinn's explanations are reasonable or not is a matter for another debate, but in the light of these explanations, it does not seem plausible to define his position as supernatural in the Cartesian sense. McGinn implies that the space we perceive does

not correspond to real space, and this idea makes McGinn's position totally different from the Cartesian view in terms of the naturalistic explanation of consciousness. McGinn himself also defines the Cartesian attitude as supernatural with the following words:

> The other form [of purported solutions to the problem], which has been historically dominant, frankly admits that nothing merely natural could do the job, and suggests instead that we invoke supernatural entities or divine interventions. Thus we have Cartesian dualism and Leibnizian pre-established harmony. These 'solutions' at least recognize that something pretty remarkable is needed if the mind-body relation is to be made sense of; they are as extreme as the problem. (1989: 350)

As seen in the quotation, because the Cartesian view admits that "nothing merely natural could do the job" McGinn identifies the Cartesian position as non-naturalistic. In this sentence "nothing natural" does not correspond merely to "nothing spatial" because McGinn also believed that nothing currently conceived as spatial could explain consciousness. However, the Cartesian approach asserts that "no brain property" could explain consciousness, and this is the reason why the position of Cartesian dualism cannot be assumed natural in the same sense as McGinn's position. According to the Cartesian view, the mind comes into being not through the properties of the brain, but "through some quite different agency, possibly God's" (1999: 118), and such assumptions push dualism out of the reach of naturalism. McGinn's position is also dualistic with respect to properties of the brain, but this is quite different from the classical version of dualism. Assuming that consciousness is a part of natural space means that space is not simply composed of the physical things in the sense that we understand, and this is a naturalised version of dualism. Consequently, while the Cartesian approach insists on the exclusion of consciousness from space, McGinn insists on the hidden inclusion of consciousness in space, and this crucial distinction keeps McGinn's position from being non-natural like the Cartesian approach.

I think that the non-spatiality of McGinn's *P* does not create a contradiction with respect to McGinn's naturalistic position, but this does not mean that his naturalistic thesis is satisfactory for the actual solution of the brain-consciousness problem. I also believe that there are some problems in the characterisation of *P*. To be able to mediate between two different character there must be a property which is sufficiently homogeneous with each, and McGinn insists that spatial properties of the brain cannot be adequate to provide the link between the brain and consciousness because they are not homogeneous with non-spatial consciousness. However, I think that McGinn's *P* is also unsatisfactory with respect to providing a mediating role. Even though McGinn says that "*P* must be a property both of the brain and of consciousness, since its role is to link

the one to the other" (1991: 60), he characterises *P* the same as consciousness. He identifies *P* as non-spatial property of the brain as consciousness is, and because of its non-spatial character *P* is unperceivable as consciousness itself is. In this case, the question of how a property which has the same features with consciousness can relate to the brain is as perplexing as the question of how consciousness arises from the brain. Regarding this issue, Whiteley also claims:

> I am not convinced that McGinn's property P could solve [the problem]. If variations in P can occur independently of the spatial properties of the brain, it cannot play its intended part as a mediator between brain and consciousness in a theory accounting for the physical determination of conscious states. If, on the other hand, its variations are wholly determined by these spatial properties, shall we not have the same sort of misfit between cause and effect which disturbed us in the causal relation between brain and consciousness? (1990: 394)

As seen in the above quotation, Whiteley shares the view that a property which provides the link between two heterogenous things must be homogeneous with each thing, but he also expresses the failure of McGinn's *P* in terms of a mediating role. A necessary condition for a mediating *P* is at least one common feature which is shared between both consciousness and *P*, and *P* and the brain, but *P* seems to have nothing in common with properties of the brain. So then, why do we need a property that has the same features as consciousness? What can such a property do for us other than increase the number of problems we face?

I think that McGinn's *P* not only fails in its mediating role, but it also raises two other problems besides the consciousness-brain problem: the problem of *P*-brain and the problem of *P*-consciousness. Until now, we were looking for what kind of connection there is between consciousness and the brain, but now we do not know what kind of connection there is between *P*-brain and between *P*-consciousness. About this issue Hanson also argues that:

> McGinn has in effect merely replaced one unintelligible connection with two: first, the unintelligible connection between the spatial properties of the brain and P, and second, the unintelligible connection between the mysterious P and consciousness. (1993: 583)

I totally agree with Hanson about *P*'s unintelligible connections, and he also makes an important point by saying that this situation may lead to a regress (1993: 583). If we continue with McGinn's idea, to explain these new connections, new properties must be proposed. As a natural explanation for the brain-consciousness relation, McGinn proposes an epistemically mysterious *P*, and maybe he could propose *P1* for the *P*-brain relation, and *P2* for the *P*-consciousness relation.

Consequently, it can be said that the non-spatiality of McGinn's *P* is not in contradiction with his naturalistic position regarding the solution of the brain-consciousness problem, but its one-sided harmony undermines its mediating role and renders it unnecessary.

2.2. Objections to the Argument for Closure

McGinn claims to defend a naturalistic approach to the problem of consciousness, but according to him, this natural and simple solution of consciousness is noumenal for human beings with respect to the cognitive faculties, and this is the reason why McGinn calls his thesis transcendental naturalism. McGinn establishes his cognitive closure thesis, which is the core of his mysterianism, with a double-stage method. As detailed above, he firstly tries to show the possibility of cognitive closure, and then he claims the actuality of human cognitive closure by appealing to two distinct concept forming faculties: introspection and perception. However, his cognitive closure thesis extending from possibility to actuality has some problems. In this section, I will first try to reveal that the arguments he mounts to justify the cognitive closure thesis are inconclusive, and second, I will show that his mysterianism regarding the consciousness problem is pseudo-mysterianism by replacing the cognitive closure with the psychological closure.

McGinn tries to justify the possibility of human cognitive closure with respect to the brain-consciousness link by making an analogy between animals and human beings. He claims that "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" (1989: 350). Each biological species has its own cognitive limitations, and a problem that is cognitively closed in one species may be open to another. For instance, a monkey mind cannot gain access to the knowledge of what an electron is. Similarly, a rat mind cannot understand solutions to trigonometry problems, while a human mind is open to them. However, McGinn claims that there is no guarantee that the human mind is powerful enough to understand the solution of every problem in the world:

> [W]e are natural beings, descended from apes, living in a natural world, and our capacities are as finite as can be. We can, it is true, do more with our mind than apes can, but that does not mean that we somehow magically escape the constraints of biology. We are animals all the way down, or up, not angels. (1999: 42)

This means that in the same way that monkeys cannot understand the concept of electrons or rats cannot understand the solutions of trigonometry, human beings also cannot understand some properties of the world like the property which makes possible the solution of the brain-consciousness problem.

I also do not rule out the possibility that the human mind, as a biological system, is cognitively closed to some things in the universe. I think that there may be very interesting and important properties of the universe that we are not aware of, do not know what they are about, and have any conceptual knowledge to ask questions about them. However, a consciousness that we can think and formulate questions about, and do research on some aspects of, does not seem to be among these properties. It is not reasonable to argue for the possibility of human cognitive closure with respect to the solution of the problem of consciousness by making an analogy between animals and humans because there is a radical difference between animals' closedness to some domains of the world and humans' closedness to the solution of consciousness. While human beings can formulate and understand the problems of consciousness, animals are unable to formulate and understand the problems about the domains they are cognitively closed to. That is, in contrast to animals, human beings are aware of what they are ignorant of. It is not surprising that monkeys are closed to the concept of electrons, and that rats cannot solve trigonometry problems, or dogs ponder on political problems, since none of these cases exist as problems in their world. Dennett (1991, 1995) and Kriegel (2003, 2009) also draw attention to this distinction between animals and human beings. According to them, McGinn fails to justify the possibility of human cognitive closure with the analogy argument because he ignores our linguistic ability which is the most important difference between the human mind and the animal mind. The passages I have quoted below clearly show us their attitude towards McGinn's cognitive closure claim:

> Monkeys, for instance, can't grasp the concept of an electron, McGinn reminds us, but I think we should be unimpressed by the example, for not only can the monkey not understand the answers about electrons, it can't understand the questions (Dennett 1991d). The monkey isn't baffled, not even a little bit. We definitely understand the questions about free will and consciousness well enough to know what we're baffled by (if we are), so until […] McGinn can provide us with clear cases of animals (or people) who can be baffled by questions whose true answers could not unbaffle them, they have given us no evidence of the reality or even likelihood of "cognitive closure" in human beings. (1995: 382-3)

Like Dennett, Kriegel also insists that considering other species cannot be evidence for the possibility of human cognitive closure with respect to consciousness. He says:

> Rats' minds do not understand trigonometry. Nobody would want to deny that. But trigonometric problems do not pose themselves to rats. Indeed, that rats' minds do not understand trigonometry is precisely why trigonometric problems do not pose themselves to rats. For trigonometric problems pose themselves to rats, rats' minds would have to understand a great deal of trigonometry. (2003: 183)

As mentioned in the above quotations, monkeys are cognitively closed in terms of the concept of electrons because there is not a question like "what is an electron" in a monkey's mind; they cannot comprehend such a question. The property of an electron has never existed in the life of monkeys as a problem that needs to be solved. However, unlike monkeys (or any other species), "we understand the unanswered question about consciousness" (Dennett, 1991). Kriegel emphasises that "there are conceptual connections between understanding a question and understanding its possible answers" (2003: 184). That is, if we do not have innate limitations to understand a problem itself, this situation is necessarily coupled with being cognitively open to its possible solutions as well. This does not mean that understanding a problem also requires knowledge of the correct one among its possible solutions. It only requires understanding what its solution would be, and with the right development and discoveries we can ultimately achieve the correct solution. It does not seem to be reasonable to assume that with our cognitive capacity, which is powerful enough to comprehend the problem, the solution of the problem can never be understandable for us. Considering all of these, it seems rather weak to base the claim that humans are cognitively closed in terms of the problem of consciousness on the analogy between humans and animals' closure.

In order to prevent this weak position, McGinn tries to turn the possibility of cognitive closure into actuality by claiming that humankind does not have the required cognitive faculty to understand the solution to the consciousness problem. In McGinn 1989, his closure argument goes like this: We can achieve *P* providing the brain-consciousness link neither by introspection and introspection-based concepts nor by perception and perception-based concepts, so the solution of the consciousness problem will remain for us forever on the dark side of the world. However, I think that this claim is too strong and without foundation. As explained in detail in previous sections, the main argument he proposes in order to show that we cannot reach *P* and introduce its theoretical concepts with the observation of the brain is the principle of homogeneity.

McGinn uses the homogeneity principle as a protection against "a form of magical emergentism with respect to concept formation" (1989: 358). However, this principle unfortunately "works by restricting inferential space to only the simplest, most straightforward sorts of connections" (Flanagan, 1993: 113). That is, by observing the brain we can only find the links between spatial brain states and introduce theoretical concepts about these data, and by introspection we can only comment on our own conscious states and introduce theoretical concepts about them. This seems undoubtably true, but while introducing theoretical concepts about our observational data, we invoke third avenue such as "investigating consciousness indirectly via third person observation of behaviour and associated reasoning" (Hanson, 1993: 583). Even

if introspection has a prominent role in shaping our concept of consciousness, it is clear that consciousness does not present itself only through introspection; we can examine the presence of consciousness in other creatures through its manifestation in their behaviours. And although McGinn claims that "to explain the observed physical data we need only such theoretical properties as bear upon those data, not the property that explains consciousness, which does not occur in data" (1989: 359), in the explanation of some of the observable data we invoke both the concepts of consciousness and the concepts of the brain properties. Flanagan illustrates this with the case of blindsight. Blindsight patients have lesions in their primary visual cortex (V1), also known as the striate cortex, but they can give statistically significant responses to visual stimuli that they cannot consciously see. In other words, when these patients are asked questions about the objects in the direction they look, they correctly answer the questions about the objects. They could also perform some actions correctly and identify the features of the objects in the direction they were looking, even though they say that they see nothing. In this case, as opposed to McGinn's claim, to explain the observed data we need to appeal both to the properties of consciousness (or lack of them), and to the properties of the brain to reveal the lesion in the visual cortex (1993: 114). The differences between fully-sighted people and blindsight patients with respect to visual consciousness, and the reason why visual consciousness is lacking in the blindsight cases while fully-sighted people have it, cannot be explained by purely physical data; theoretical explanations for such cases warrants a simultaneous appeal to both neural properties and conscious properties.

Besides this, humans are creatures who can think about, and introduce concepts for, the entities they may never have perceived. McGinn also admits that in our theories we refer to properties that are not the objects of our perception. However, McGinn insists that we introduce theoretical concepts about unobservable entities which comply with the procedure of the homogeneity principle. He claims that we form theoretical concepts about such entities by making an analogical extension from the physical data we observe, but because *P* is not a spatial property we can observe, we cannot form any theoretical concept about *P*. However, McGinn's homogeneity principle is excessively restrictive. We form concepts about unobservable objects by making an inference from our observations, but to say that our method of inference and concept formation is based solely on the analogy with the physical objects we observe would be to take science back to the dark ages. McGinn's homogeneity principle may be successful for the formation of theoretical concepts of unobservable objects at a relatively macro level, but as Perez says, there are also theoretical concepts from the field of the quantum physics at the microstructural level (e.g., "energy", "spin", "valance" etc.) that we form without the basis of an analogy with the spatial entities we observe (2005: 39). If we were producing concepts only through the analogical extension as McGinn claimed, we

would be closed to many scientific concepts that we have today. Therefore, the homogeneity principle, which is the basis of McGinn's cognitive closure thesis, seems rather unwarranted.

3. Conclusion

The persistent failure of traditional theories to explain consciousness-brain relation, a perplexing problem for philosophers of mind, has led McGinn to believe that there is no humanly accessible solution to the hard problem of consciousness. Even if there is an explanation of the relation between the brain and consciousness, as explained in detail, McGinn argues that we as human beings cannot achieve this because of our limited cognitive faculties. In other words, we are cognitively closed to the scientific explanation of consciousness. Instead of contributing to the possible solutions of the problem McGinn prefers to stop thinking about consciousness and puts forward the thesis of cognitive closure, which is the short-cut dissolution. With this groundless claim, he closes the books on the problem of consciousness and drives people to unnecessary despair.

This work aimed to reveal that McGinn's epistemic mysterianism with respect to the explanation of consciousness-brain relation is pseudo-mysterianism. In order to achieve this goal, I first attempted to explain McGinn's thesis Trancendental Naturalism, which forms the basis of his mysterianism, with its main arguments. And then, I tried to discuss the problematic aspects of each argument in detail. Finally, in the light of this discussion, I concluded that McGinn's thesis, especially cognitive closure argument that constructs his mysterianism, is an illusionary thesis, and his mysterianism built on such a groundless thesis is pseudo-mysterianism.

As can be seen in the above discussions, McGinn's closure thesis is merely an inconclusive assumption; he gives us no evidence or plausible reason why we should accept that the problem of consciousness is outside of our cognitive power. As Dennett (1991) says in the review of McGinn's book: "In order to defend a thesis about the outer limits of our powers, one should at least take a peek at the concepts made available to those who have armed themselves with the new technology". Unfortunately, however, McGinn does not address the scientific concepts related to the working system of the brain during his defence of cognitive closure thesis. In order to defend a claim that the solution of any problem is cognitively closed to us, it needs to be proved that the problem is surveyable neither by our current scientific tools, nor by any possible future science. McGinn himself also describes P providing the link between the brain and consciousness as a natural denizen of the objective space. Then if our scientific knowledge of space can be adequately advanced, the seemingly non-spatial

consciousness can be unproblematically surveyable as a physical subject of future science. Even our current scientific studies, both in quantum physics and developments in information theories, are considerably promising for the future in revealing that consciousness can be explainable on a physical basis.

4. References

Brueckner, A. and Beroukhim, E. A. (2003). "McGinn on Consciousness and the Mind Body Problem." In Q. Smith, A. Jokic (eds.), *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Chomsky, N. (1976). "Problems and Mysteries in the Study of Human Language." In Asa Kasher (ed.), *Language in Focus: Foundations, Methods and Systems. Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 43*: 281-357.

Chomsky, N. (1998). *On Language.* London, New York: The New Press.

Chomsky, N. (2013). "What Can We Understand?" *The Journal of Philosophy, 110*: 663-684.

Demircioglu, E. (2016). "Against McGinn's Mysterianism." *Cilicia Journal of Philosophy, 1*: 1-10.

Dennett, D. (1991). *Review of McGinn's The Problem of Consciousness*. The Times Literary Supplement.

Dennett, D. (1995). *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*. London: Penguin Books.

Flanagan, O. J. (1993). *Consciousness Reconsidered*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Hanson, P. (1993). "McGinn's Cognitive Closure." *Dialogue, 32*(3): 579-585.

Işıkgil, S. (2017). "An Analysis on McGinn's Mysterianism: Reply to Erhan Demircioglu." *Cilicia Journal of Philosophy, 1*: 11-18.

Kriegel, U. (2003). "The New Mysterianism and The Thesis of Cognitive Closure." *Acta Analytica, 18*: 177-191.

Kriegel, U. (2009). "Mysterianism." In T. Bayne, A. Cleermans, & P. Wilken (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Consciousness.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McGinn, C. (1989). "Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?" *Mind, 98*(391): 349-366.

McGinn, C. (1991). *The Problem of Consciousness: Essays toward a Resolution*. Oxford: Blackwell.

McGinn, C. (1993). *Problems in Philosophy: The Limits of Inquiry*. Oxford: Blackwell.

McGinn, C. (1994). "The Problem of Philosophy." *Philosophical Studies*, 76(2-3): 133-156.

McGinn, C. (1995). "Consciousness and Space." In T. Metzinger (ed.), *Consciouss Experience*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.

McGinn, C. (1996). *The Character of Mind: An Introduction to the Philosophy of* Mind (Second Edition). New York: Oxford University Press.

McGinn, C. (1999). *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World*. New York: Basic Books.

McGinn, C. (2003). "What Constitutes the Mind-Body Problem?" *Philosophical Issues, 13*: 148-162.

McGinn, C. (2004). *Consciousness and its objects*. New York: Oxford University Press

Perez, D. I. (2005). "Mysteries and Scandals. Transcendental Naturalism and the Future of Philosophy." *Critica*, 37(110): 35-52.

Whiteley, C. H. (1990). "McGinn on the Mind-Body Problem." *Mind*, 99: 289.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank