

DOWNLOAD PDF THE MYSTERIOUS FLAME CONSCIOUS MINDS IN A MATERIAL WORLD

Chapter 1 : Recommended Reading

*The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World [Colin McGinn] on racedaydvl.com *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. In recent years the nature of consciousnessâ€”our immediately known experiencesâ€”has taken its place as the most profound problem that science faces.*

Rather, in a big chunk of his book he indulges in scientific speculation about the properties that nature must have in order to bring forth consciousness, most ludicrously when positing structure in the "universe before the big-bang". In fact there may be a good question to be asked about consciousness but this book fails to rub it in. To me the most disturbing facet of the book is its sloppiness and downright errors: He states that we shall never understand the mind and it appears that he thinks that science is about grasping some deep truth about nature. In fact science is not about understanding nature, it is about finding ways to describe and therefore predict nature. When Schrodinger discovered the wave function of matter he did not write down an equation that expressed what he "understood" about the nature of matter. Rather he wrote down an equation that seemed to correctly compute experimental results. In fact, many years later there is still discussion going on about how to "interpret" it. The fact that nobody really understands quantum mechanics may show some limitation of our intelligence but does not prove that matter has a "mysterious" nature. True understanding is goal of philosophy not of science. Scientists grow confident working with successful theories and that is all there is. He claims that computers cannot have a mind, because even if programmed to speak Italian fluently and in an intelligent manner, they will never "really" understand Italian. This is like saying that a painting is merely a agglomeration of colourful molecules. In fact, the value and meaning of the painting lies in its higher level structure: If a thinker concentrates exclusively on the low level structure then he or she will fail to perceive the meaning of complex objects. Most scientists today believe that the higher functions of our brain can be represented only on higher levels of organization read the excellent "Goedel Escher Bach" about this matter. McGinn fails to see that complexity has the power to transform. He states that "a roomful" of interconnected calculators cannot be "any nearer" to consciousness than one calculator. In the same vein one can argue that a "skullful" of brain cells cannot be any nearer to consciousness than one single brain cell. Actually, McGill may believe that just one brain cell is somehow conscious but then we may be excused for claiming that one calculator too is somehow a little conscious. He states that "acting in a certain way is not sufficient for being in a certain way". To science, if something looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it is a duck by definition. This is especially clear with information processing systems. We do not yet have computers that display general intelligence - when we do have them it will be silly to claim that these computers do not "really" have any understanding even though they compose great music or make scientific discoveries. Today we do have computers that play good chess and there are some people who claim that these computers do not "really" play good chess, because they do not "really" understand the game - after all they only push symbols around, which is a task a human could in principle emulate with equal success without having any notion about chess. If in the future a scientist finds a way to operate on our consciousness, expanding our mind repairing injury in our brains or connecting our consciousness to that of other human beings or even transforming our minds including a fourth basic colour in our visual perception , it would then be silly to claim that, for some philosophical reason, this scientist does not "really" understand human minds. In many cases what seems, is. He seems to confuse these two very distinct concepts. Intelligence is not identical to consciousness - after all we can imagine a being that is intelligent but not conscious as well as a being that is conscious but not intelligent. He dedicates a whole chapter to "the Turing Test", which is a test designed to measure general intelligence, as if it were a test to measure consciousness. He states that this test "does not provide a necessary condition for consciousness" because a cat would not pass it. Of course, a cat does not pass the test, simply because a cat does not have general humanlike intelligence. This confusion is best seen in his use of the word "mind": For example, when trying to show that consciousness is produced by

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the brain he criticizes dualism a philosophical theory that states that consciousness and matter operate in different realms and asks "Why does brain damage obliterate mental faculties? From the context of the chapter the discussion of dualism one must assume that by "mental" he means conscious. On the other hand the sentence itself makes sense only when "mental faculty" is understood as "intelligence". Undoubtedly, the brain is the mechanism that produces intelligence, but McGinn does not really explain why he thinks that the "brain produces consciousness", even though almost his entire book is based on that assumption.

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Chapter 2 : The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds In A Material World by Colin McGinn

Treats the major problems of the mind-body dichotomy and consciousness. What Gilbert Ryle called the ghost in the machine. McGinn recognizes the problem in its guises but holds that the human mind may not be designed to figure out the nature of consciousness.

What Gilbert Ryle called the ghost in the machine. McGinn recognizes the problem in its guises but holds that the human mind may not be designed to figure out the nature of consciousness. Like chimpanzees trying to figure Calculus some problems may be beyond human capacity. Even if you disagree with this pessimistic assessment McGinn lays out the contours of the problem fairly succinctly. Jun 04, C rated it really liked it If naturalism is true, or at least the best metaphysical structure for going about solving certain perennial problems, or if we recognize at least that naturalism is superior to theism it is , then this is probably the best book on the mind-body problem and its necessary intractability. The only current answer, and most likely indefinite answer, is agnosticism coupled with r If naturalism is true, or at least the best metaphysical structure for going about solving certain perennial problems, or if we recognize at least that naturalism is superior to theism it is , then this is probably the best book on the mind-body problem and its necessary intractability. The only current answer, and most likely indefinite answer, is agnosticism coupled with ruthless skepticism as McGinn argues. We do not know now, and probably never can. McGinn is a mysterian, and I am also a mysterian, though I take issue with McGinn over some of the detail of his mysterianism. One difference between us is this: McGinn thinks we are cognitively closed to the mind-body problem because our intelligence is not suited to Colin McGinn is, I think, the only person in the philosophical and scientific community to have understood just how hard the mind-body problem really is, and to have seen that there is virtually no chance that we will ever solve it. McGinn thinks we are cognitively closed to the mind-body problem because our intelligence is not suited to the task of solving it. I think it is simply because we do not have access to the facts we need to solve it. To be fair, McGinn sometimes puts it that way too. He is not always very clear about where he is placing the blame. One difficulty with the theory that our intelligence is to blame is that it is unverifiable in principle and probably unfalsifiable in practice. If human intelligence is not up to solving the problem, then it is probably also not up to the task of understanding why, so we cannot verify the theory. The theory is in principle falsifiable, but only if we solve the mind-body problem first, which is not much help. This leads me to conclude that putting the blame on human intelligence is rather like blaming God for earthquakes: In any case, I see no reason to put the blame on human intelligence when there is a more obvious culprit to hand: Ontically speaking, there are two possibilities: If it is an illusion idealism , then the mind-body problem evaporates, because there is no body. McGinn mentions idealism only once, and does not consider at all whether it might be true. From a completist point of view this is slightly irritating, but McGinn is probably right to ignore idealism, because while it solves the mind-body problem, it does so at too high a price: This is why idealists tend to have a prior belief in God: But philosophers ought to be sceptical and we ought all to be philosophers! So I am with McGinn in ruling out idealism, though I would rather prefer it to be done explicitly rather than silently as he does. If, on the other hand, the physical world is real, then we have to look at the evidence and see where it points: This is where lack of data comes in. Consciousness is private, and yet is apparently generated by something public - a lump of organic matter. We have a way of accessing data about private stuff - introspection - and we have a way of accessing data about public stuff - observation, either directly or using scientific instruments. What we do not have is a way of accessing what the publicly accessible brain is doing when it generates the privately accessible stuff in phenomenal consciousness. If you think about it, this is hardly surprising. Observation is never going to give us access to the process by which the brain generates private experiences: All we can say about these properties, vacuously, is that they are properties such as can enable a brain to generate consciousness. Which gets us no closer to solving the problem. Here I seem to disagree again with McGinn, who thinks that introspection only gives us access to the

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surface of consciousness, and that the stuff that would enable us to understand how consciousness emerges from the brain is below the surface, like the part of an iceberg that is below the waterline. Personally I do not understand how consciousness can contain anything hidden from introspection. The more important point is that introspection gives us access only to our private phenomenal data, and that that data is the result of evolution. There is not going to be any evolutionary value in an organism having phenomenal data relating to the generation of said phenomenal data by the brain - this is just going to get in the way in the battle for survival and reproduction. What organisms need to survive and reproduce is phenomenal data relating to external threats and opportunities, and so that is what we get. Well, perhaps not entirely. One of the things McGinn says that I strongly disagree with is that we are cognitively closed to the true nature of space. His reason for saying this is that, like number, consciousness is necessarily non-spatial: I have the advantage over McGinn here of having had "suffered" might be a better word an experience late one night in when, for half an hour or so, I had, subjectively, two phenomenal selves - two subjective centres of consciousness - instead of the normal single centre. The reason why I had this experience is not important, and in any case was never identified, though I have my suspicions. The interesting thing about this otherwise very unpleasant experience, as far as the present discussion is concerned, is that these two selves did have subjectively apparent spatial properties: I was conscious of one as being spatially to the left of the other, and I was conscious of the one to the left being spatially wider than the one to the right. So McGinn is wrong to hold that consciousness necessarily cannot have spatial properties. What else is there to say about this book? There is an excellent chapter on robots: McGinn sees clearly that consciousness and intelligence are quite different, and that while we know how to give robots the latter, we have no idea how to give them the former, and probably never will have. He demolishes panpsychism in short order good. He has some interesting thoughts on the self and on free will - he thinks we are cognitively closed to both of these. I think McGinn is a little too inclined to see cognitive closure in relation to issues which are merely difficult. In sum, an excellent and thought-provoking book by one of the most original philosophers around.

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Chapter 3 : The mysterious flame: conscious minds in a material world - Colin McGinn - Google Books

The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World by Colin McGinn In recent years the nature of consciousnessâ€”our immediately known experiencesâ€”has taken its place as the most profound problem that science faces.

Conscious minds in a material world Book review by Anthony Campbell. The review is licensed under a Creative Commons License. Colin McGinn is a leading representative of the so-called Mysterians, who take the view that the problem of consciousness is so difficult that we are simply unable to solve it. In this book he presents his view for a non-professional audience. In his first chapter McGinn looks at the main solutions that have been offered. Materialism says that the mind is the brain, so there is really no problem to be solved. McGinn finds that this is just plain false; the mind is not the brain. Then there is dualism, which is more or less what common sense thinks: There are two main difficulties with this. One is that it seems possible, as a thought experiment, to remove the mind while leaving the brain intact, thus producing what philosophers call a zombie. The second problem is the converse of this: But there are many difficulties with this idea, at least from a scientific standpoint. Since neither of these approaches works, McGinn concludes, we need a fresh and radically different way of thinking if we are to solve the mind--brain problem. Unfortunately, we are unable to think in this way. The rest of the book explains why he holds this opinion. McGinn has an interesting discussion of the place of consciousness in evolution. Some people see it as the ultimate achievement of the Darwinian process but McGinn thinks that it is biologically primitive and simple. He is even willing to accept that many insects may have it to some degree. If consciousness is so simple, why is it hard to understand? The reason, McGinn says, is the way our minds are constructed. There must be something about the brain that we are blind to. Unfortunately he cannot tell us what this is, otherwise he would have done what he says it is impossible for us to do. But he can tell us what a solution would look like if it were possible. It would have to approach what McGinn calls the hidden structure of consciousness and it would require a revision in our idea of the nature of space. There are chapters on both of these matters. It would also have to show that there is a necessary reason why consciousness arises from the brain. To find a solution of this kind we would need enhanced mental capacity; McGinn speculates that this might be achievable by genetic engineering. But I suppose that if these super-intelligent philosophers gave us the solution we would be unable to understand it. This is a stimulating book and reading the writings of some of those who claim to have solved the problem I sometimes suspect that McGinn and those who think like him may be right.

Chapter 4 : Book Review by Anthony Campbell: The Mysterious Flame, by Colin McGinn

Is consciousness nothing more than brain tissue, as Daniel Dennett argues in his best-selling Consciousness Explained? Or, as others claim, is it a fundamental reality like space, time, and matter?

Chapter 5 : Colin McGinn - Wikipedia

The Mysterious Flame Conscious Minds in a Material World The world was all just physical objects and physical forces, devoid of life and mind. Unconscious.

Chapter 6 : The Mysterious Flame - Colin McGinn

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It is difficult to escape from your own consciousness--your perceptions, feelings, thoughts, desires. Once your consciousness vanishes, so do you.