

24.09 Minds and Machines

spring 2007

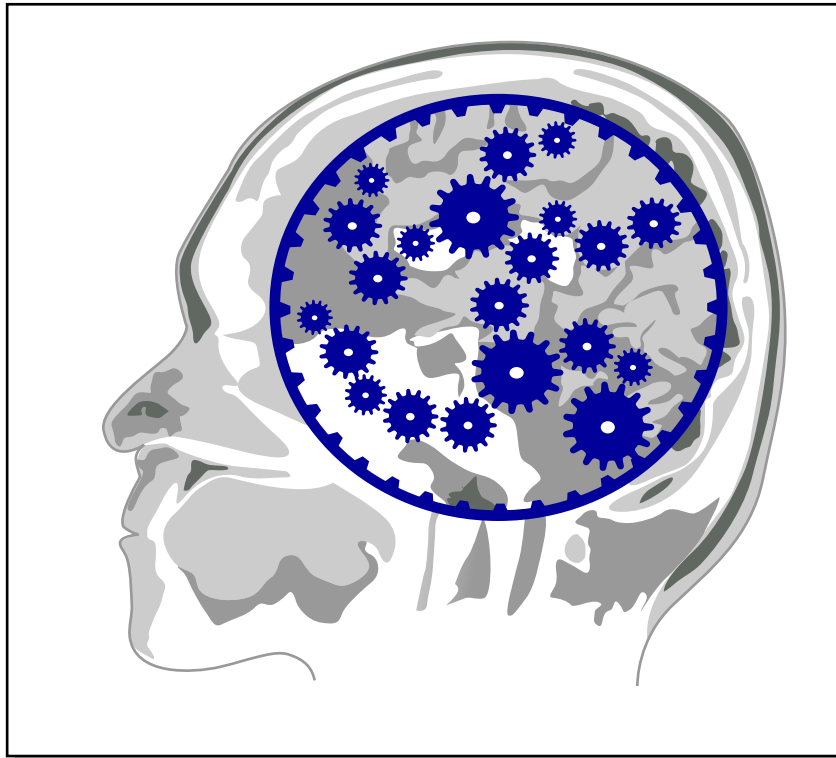


Figure by MIT OCW.

- McGinn's mysterianism

the final exam (may 24)

- closed-book, closed notes
- first third:
 - quote identification, plus a sentence or two explaining the significance or point of the quote
 - multiple choice questions
 - short answer questions
- last two thirds:
 - two essay questions drawn from a list of four distributed in advance (last week of term)

“Can we solve the mind-body problem?”

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.
Aladdin rubbing an oil lamp.

“How it is that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as a result of initiating nerve tissue, is just as unaccountable as the appearance of the Djinn, where Aladdin rubbed his lamp in the story”
(Julian Huxley)

Image removed due to copyright restrictions
A genie's head.

McGinn's mysterianism

- McGinn argues that although there is a solution to the mind-body problem, impoverished minds like ours (at least) are incapable of grasping it

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

	physicalism?	can <u>we</u> solve the problem?
Nagel	probably	prospect of an "objective phenomenology"
Stoljar	yes and no	yes and no
McGinn	??	nope

- 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)

Image removed due to copyright restrictions
A picture of an ape.

the argument



Figure by MIT OCW.

1. brains do not give rise to consciousness by magic, by the power of God, etc. Consciousness is a natural phenomenon (396); therefore:
2. there is some brain property P in virtue of which the brain is the basis of consciousness (equivalently, there's a theory T , referring to P , which fully explains the dependence of conscious states on brain states) (396-7)
3. there are two ways we might grasp P : by investigating consciousness directly (this includes introspection and also conceptual analysis); by studying the brain (397)



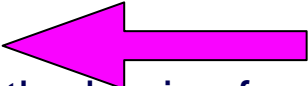

Figure by MIT OCW.

4. we can't grasp P by introspection, or by conceptual analysis (397)
5. if we can grasp P by studying the brain, then either P is a perceptible property of the brain, or else a property we could introduce to explain perceptible properties of the brain (398)
6. P is not a perceptible property of the brain (398-9)
7. P could not be introduced as part of an explanation of perceptible properties of the brain (399-400); therefore:



Figure by MIT OCW.

- 8 we can't grasp P (that is, human minds are cognitively closed with respect to P); therefore (from 2, 8)
- 9 the mind-body problem has a solution, but we are constitutionally incapable of understanding it

1. brains do not give rise to consciousness by magic, by the power of God, etc. Consciousness is a natural phenomenon; therefore: 
2. there is some brain property P in virtue of which the brain is the basis of consciousness (equivalently, there's a theory T, referring to P, which fully explains the dependence of conscious states on brain states)
3. there are two ways we might grasp P: by investigating consciousness directly (this includes introspection and also conceptual analysis); by studying the brain
4. we can't grasp P by introspection, or by conceptual analysis
5. if we can grasp P by studying the brain, then either P is a perceptible property of the brain, or else a property we could introduce to explain perceptible properties of the brain
6. P is not a perceptible property of the brain
7. P could not be introduced as part of an explanation of perceptible properties of the brain; therefore:
8.  we can't grasp P (that is, human minds are cognitively closed with respect to P); therefore (from 2, 8):
9. the mind-body problem has a solution, but we are constitutionally incapable of understanding it

- consider part of McGinn's argument for (7):

[I]t seems to me that even a more unconstrained conception of inference to the best explanation would still not do what is required: it would no more serve to introduce P than it serves to introduce the property of consciousness itself. 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 the data. Since we do not need consciousness to explain those data, we do not need the property that explains consciousness...No concept needed to explain the workings of the physical world will suffice to explain how the physical world produces consciousness.



Figure by MIT OCW.

- but suppose that we include, in our “data”, facts about consciousness and mentation in general, in addition to physical facts about the brain
- McGinn’s line of argument apparently does not work against the view that we might one day need to introduce P to explain such psychophysical data



Figure by MIT OCW.

- 3 There are (only) two ways we might grasp P: (i) by investigating consciousness directly (this includes introspection and also conceptual analysis); (ii) by studying the brain [as a purely physical system]
- read this way, as McGinn seems to intend, (3) is false
 - there is a third way we might grasp P—P could be introduced as part of an explanation of the psychophysical features of the brain
 - what is McGinn's argument against this third way?

Minds and Machines

spring 2007

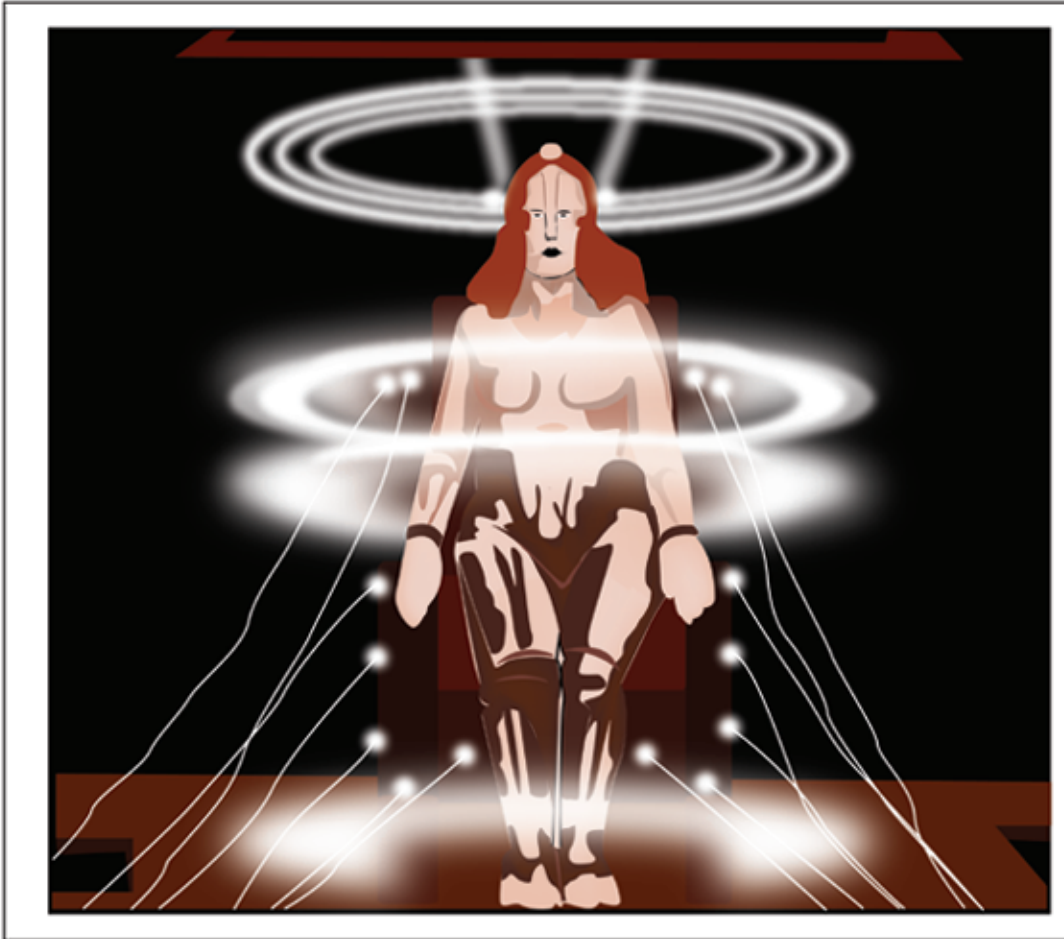


Figure by MIT OCW.

- read Tye, 'Visual qualia...'