



TRANSCENDENTAL NATURALISM IS SUPERNATURALISM IN DISGUISE: A RESPONSE TO COLIN MCGINN

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Abstract

In this paper, an attempt shall be made to outline some arguments that render Colin McGinn's transcendental naturalism as a solution to the problem of consciousness untenable. McGinn argues that naturalism of consciousness is possible – it is in virtue of some natural property (of the brain) that organisms are conscious. On the contrary, he admits that whatever it is, it is forever unknowable. He argues that it is in the strength of its unknowability that naturalism is admissibly possible. He rejects any "supernatural" solution and argues that consciousness is largely a natural phenomenon. This is not only contradictory but also conflationary. It is this conflation evident in his insistence that we have to naturalize consciousness and his consequent admittance that we cannot come up with a natural solution to the consciousness problem because it contains a hidden structure that tends to support the argument of the paper: transcendental naturalism is supernaturalism in disguise. In this paper, it is shown that if we hold unto the hidden as the explanatory property for the emergence of consciousness, then McGinn fails in his quest for naturalism of consciousness. It is the position of this paper that McGinn's position is an offshoot of supernaturalism, or supernaturalism in disguise. To sustain McGinn's naturalistic position, the study proposes a rejection of the postulation of the *hidden* and exploration of the prospects of science of consciousness.

Keywords: Consciousness, Naturalism, Supernaturalism, Brain, Hidden Structure/Property, Science.

Introduction

Until the emergence of Colin McGinn's theory of transcendental naturalism (TN), the solution to the problem of consciousness has vacillated between two dominant camps: dualism and materialism. Every other theory of consciousness is a fellow-up or an offshoot of these two camps. Dualism is the assertion that there are two substances that are ontologically different. It claims that "mental states and processes are not merely states and processes of a purely physical system, but constitute a distinct kind of phenomenon that is essentially nonphysical in nature" (Churchland, 1984, p. 3). As to whether they interact or not or how they interact is dependent on the version of dualism one subscribes to. For instance, the Cartesian dualism holds that the mind and body interact through the operation of a pineal gland located in the

brain, and is called interactionism. The pre-established harmony of Leibniz invokes the role of a supernatural agent as the explanatory power of any possible interaction. The occasionalists such as Malebranche hold that mind and body do not interact as such. When one is hit by a hammer, one experiences painful sensation. This is an indication that there is an interaction between the physical and mental processes. But for the occasionalists it is not the case, rather, the sensation was caused not by the hammer and nerves but by God – a supernatural agent who uses the “occasion” of environmental occurrences to generate appropriate experiences. Whichever version of dualism one professes, the claims of the dualists are: [1] There is a mental realm. [2] The mental realm is fundamental. [3] There is a physical realm. [4] The physical realm is fundamental. [5] The two realms are ontologically separate (Foster, 1991, p. 1).

On the other hand, materialism is the acknowledgement that the mind is reducible to matter or “the view that one can fully account for mental phenomena in purely physical terms, such as behaviour or brain processes” (Jarocki, 2013, no p.). For Churchland (1984, p.3), “materialist theories of mind claim that what we call mental states and processes are merely sophisticated states and processes of a complex physical system: the brain.” What we call consciousness or mental phenomena are nothing but the operation of the brain. Remove brain, consciousness ceases to be. It is in this regard that it is not mistaken to refer to materialism as either physicalism or naturalism. Granted that there might be some variance among these three ‘isms’, in this study, they are treated as making one commitment. Colin McGinn aptly identifies himself as a naturalist. He holds the thesis that every property of mind can be explained in broadly physical terms (McGinn, 1991; McGinn, 2002). According to Klooger (2017), naturalism’s starting point is that nothing exists outside nature. It is an idea that nature exhausts reality. Nature is all that exists; and there is only one type of being, namely, the natural being. This being obeys and is ruled by one set of laws wherein natural science is equipped to discover the nature of this being and the precise laws that govern it. Supernaturalism, then, is a misguided approach to reality. Proponents of naturalism of consciousness such as Colin McGinn, Daniel Dennet, Owen Flanagan and Paul Churchland, affirm that the full picture of consciousness and all that we can know about it is presented through the brain. Not every naturalist makes the same commitment with respect to the possibility of the brain being fully capable of instantiating consciousness. Those who believe that we can specify the property of the brain as the basis of consciousness are called constructive naturalists (see Flanagan, 1992). Anti-constructive naturalists hold that, though naturalism is true, it is not the case that we can know everything about consciousness by making reference to the brain (McGinn, 1991). McGinn is an anti-constructive naturalist. He believes that humans cannot solve the problem of consciousness because they are ‘cognitively closed’. Anti-constructive naturalists are as well called mysterianists, believing that consciousness is a mystery.

The aim of this paper is to interrogate some arguments of McGinn’s transcendental naturalism – a theory of consciousness which insists on naturalism is possible and again what makes it possible is unknowable or transcendental. These arguments are the following: 1.) consciousness contains a hidden property inaccessible to the human mind; 2) the human mind is cognitively closed to consciousness, even when it is assisted; 3.) consciousness is an area of inquiry where we can legitimately ask questions without being able to proffer or grasp the answers; and so, 4.) naturalism is impossible, though it must be true. In this study, it shall be demonstrated that these sorts arguments render McGinn’s quest for naturalism untenable. It shall also articulate ways to overcome this.

Transcendental naturalism (TN) and acceptance of the hidden structure of consciousness

To overcome the glaring deficiencies of the traditional solutions of consciousness which are dualism and materialism, McGinn advanced the theory of transcendental naturalism (TN). TN is the thesis that consciousness, though a natural phenomenon, is unknowable especially how it interacts with the brain. McGinn held that there are two faculties involved in consciousness studies: perception and introspection. Perception is the process by which we become aware of the material world by means of the senses. According to him, the purpose of perception is to gain information about the external world (McGinn, 2020). On consciousness problem, perception gives credible knowledge about the brain, its nature, and properties. Therefore, perception enables us to encounter the brain and all its properties, including the property that is to account for the interaction mind and body. However, McGinn (1991) argued that perception weak because it is confined within the study of brain alone and cannot know anything about consciousness. He further argued that there is no way you will get to know that I am in pain or afraid or seeing the colour red just by perceiving the brain. When you perceive the brain, you confront nothing more than tissues and other materials such as nerve cells, which are similar to other parts of the body, and which other animals too possess. What then is so special about the human brain that it can embody consciousness? For McGinn we are “perceptually closed” with respect to the nature of consciousness.

Introspection is the second cognitive faculty. Through it we come to possess full knowledge of the mind/consciousness. It is “the name of the faculty through which we catch consciousness in all its vivid nakedness” (McGinn, 1991, p. 8). By possessing this cognitive faculty, we ascribe to ourselves concepts of consciousness such as having pain, being aware of the colour red, willing, thinking, and so on. Introspection, therefore, provides to us a kind of our immediate access to the properties of consciousness (Churchland, 1984; Njoku, 2010). One problem with introspection is that it does not reveal what consciousness is. But rather, it is only the properties of consciousness—say, having pain, having visual experience, and so on,—that it reveals. Another problem is that it does not tell us anything about the brain. McGinn then insisted that the property which should account for the interaction between the mind and the body is also closed to introspection. The two faculties of perception and introspection are inadequate because they are field-specific. This implies that they take different kinds of objects of apprehension – perception is confined to brain, while introspection is confined to consciousness (McGinn, 1991). They are used to detect different regions of reality. Perception detects that which is material and spatial, whereas introspection detects that which is immaterial and non-spatial. McGinn observed that:

The faculty through which we apprehend one term of the relation is necessarily distinct from the faculty through which we apprehend the other. And it is not possible to use one of faculties of perception and introspection to apprehend the psychophysical nexus. No single faculty will enable us ever apprehend the fact that consciousness depends upon the brain.... Neither perception alone nor introspection alone will ever enable us to witness the dependence” (McGinn, 1991, p. 14).

These faculties are unable to reveal to us every property of the brain and of consciousness. There is a particular property which they are unable to reveal, in their specific fields: it is the same property that must solve our mind-body or consciousness problem. McGinn calls it the property *P*. Since this *P* is not known, McGinn refers to it as the “Hidden Structure” [of consciousness] (McGinn, 1991, p. 59). It is on the basis of the above cognitive limitation humans

suffer that McGinn advances TN. It is the view that everything about consciousness is natural but we do not know how it relates to the brain. McGinn believed that due to the flaws of perception and introspection, there must be some property of brain and/or consciousness which is beyond our cognition. This is just the property that solve the problem of mind-body relationship. Though, this hidden property is as natural as every property of the brain or mind, it *transcends* our cognitive powers. There is some property of the brain, said McGinn, call it C* which explains how consciousness emerges from neural tissues. But we do not know C* inasmuch as we assume it has to be there (McGinn, 1999). How can this property be identified? Of course, it cannot be by introspection since introspection is confined to consciousness, neither can it be by perception since its target is the brain alone. In other words, TN is the view that we cannot solve the consciousness problem because what we are introspecting contains no material substrate in the brain. McGinn wrote that:

The solution, I suggest, is to recognize that conscious states possess a hidden natural (not logical) structure which mediates between their surface properties and the physical facts on which they constitutively depend. The surface properties are not enough on their own to link conscious states intelligibly to the physical world, so we need to postulate some deep properties to supply the necessary linkage. Some properties *must* exist to link consciousness intelligibly to the brain... my suggestion is that these properties belong to the hidden nature of consciousness (McGinn, 1991, p. 100).

The postulation of the hidden structure of consciousness, according to McGinn, is what is expected to solve the problem of mind-body relationship naturalistically. To accept the hidden is to accept something noumenal about the mind. Since our knowledge of mind and body is exhausted by the faculties of perception and introspection, it is this hidden that makes it possible for the mind to interact with the body. But the problem here is that we do not know the faculty with which to apprehend this hidden structure of consciousness. And we do not know how the interaction takes place through this hidden structure. To this, McGinn held that it is better to accept that there is something noumenal or transcendental about the mind and how it relates with the body than leaning on supernaturalism. For him, “noumenalism is preferable to denying the undeniable or wallowing in the supernatural” (McGinn, 1991, p. 122).

There are three distinct properties that TN possesses with respect to consciousness: (i) reality, (ii) naturalness, and (iii) epistemic inaccessibility (McGinn, 1991). The first one says that consciousness is real; it is not an illusion. The second has it that it does not refer to entities or properties that are intrinsically non-natural or supernatural. The third property implies that the nature of consciousness is beyond our cognitive capacity. Our inability to know how consciousness interacts with the brain does not make it unnatural. Rather, it reveals that we are not omniscient. Besides, it is a general characteristic ontological feature of evolved creatures to display features of “cognitive weaknesses or incapacity” which is a natural consequence of their biological constitution. (McGinn, 1993, p. 5).

McGinn insisted that why consciousness is unknowable is because there is a hidden property that has to account for the relation. The question one may ask is: is this hidden structure the property of the brain or that of consciousness? The simple answer is that part of what makes it a hidden property is that we cannot tell whether it is hidden in the brain or consciousness. Perception and introspection failed at the spot in which they were to reveal to us this property *P* - to show us the link between brain and consciousness. McGinn suggested that it is in consciousness that the structure is embedded. His reason is that it is consciousness that

refuses to be accounted for naturalistically. This is why McGinn used the expression “the hidden structure of consciousness,” instead of the “hidden structure of the brain.” After all there is nothing in the brain which can be hidden from perception and more so now that science of consciousness is gaining some prospect (Mogi 2024).

According to McGinn, the reason for locating *P* in consciousness and not in the brain is because it is consciousness that cries out for naturalistic explanation (McGinn, 1991). Consciousness is the anomalous thing; it is what threatens to import immaterial substances, occult forces, weird properties, that cannot be instantiated by physical objects. He thought that this occult importation should be shunned because there is something in consciousness that makes it possible to be located in the material world. Moreover, the brain too might harbour something that is hidden. After all, it is the same (hidden) property that is to account for the interaction between brain and mind. McGinn argued that this hidden property of consciousness must also be an aspect of the brain and hence “of a certain agglomeration of matter”, otherwise, how will it be able to link consciousness and brain together if it does not possess some material property (McGinn, 1991, p. 69)? McGinn opined that it is simply because there is something hidden in consciousness that it is why it is not “miraculous”. For him, naturalism in philosophy of mind requires that we own up to the hidden. But this seems contradictory how something which is natural can be hidden and why belief in the hidden, for McGinn, removes the sense of miracle about consciousness. Worthy of note is that this hidden cannot be revealed in any near future, rather, it is perpetually closed.

How can the properties of this hidden property be characterized? To this, McGinn argued that we do not have the properties that constitute the hidden structure or we do not know the characterization of such properties. It is on account of our ignorance of this hidden property that McGinn held that we could never solve the consciousness-brain problem – we could not naturalise consciousness. McGinn did not think that it does not exist. The property that links consciousness to brain is such a kind that is as natural as anything. But it is not given to us to understand the nature of its naturalness (McGinn, 1991). Inquiry into the nature of consciousness and how it interacts with the brain, McGinn submitted, is such that we are imbued to ask questions, but we cannot grasp the solution (McGinn, 1991; Kriegel, 2003; Perez, 2005).

Understanding a Problem and Not Knowing the Solution

The second argument advanced by McGinn in support of his TN is that consciousness is such a phenomenon that one might be able to appreciate a problem without being able to formulate (in principle) the solution to that problem (McGinn, 1991; Kriegel, 2003; Perez, 2005). In other words, we know how to ask the question of how the brain is the basis of conscious experience but we are not imbued with the cognitive capacity to arrive at the answer. Even when the answer to the problem of mind-body relationship is presented to us in a *plate*, McGinn would say that we cannot know it (McGinn, 1991; Gluck, 2007). It would strike us as astonishingly incredible how such a *thing* should be the basis of the interaction. He was of the opinion that it is in principle impossible for us to comprehend *P*. Kriegel (2003) faulted this line of thinking. For him, there is a strong connection between understanding a question and knowing its answer. As a matter of fact, it is wrong for one to think that there is a problem one can formulate, the answer of which one does not understand. This claim is in line with Lommel’s (2007) position that some scientists do not believe in question that cannot be answered. Certainly, there is a universal acknowledgement that the human knowing faculty cannot be immune from every form of limitation. However, Kriegel (2003) resisted McGinn’s idea of extreme “cognitive closure” or “information closure” of Froese (2024) by which human mind is eternally closed to the

solution of the consciousness problem. McGinn's insistence is that, for instance, if it is undeniable that rats' minds do not understand trigonometry, then it should be accepted that human mind cannot understand every (natural) phenomenon. Kriegel replied that trigonometric problems do not, in the first place, pose themselves to rats. That rats' minds do not understand trigonometry is precisely why it does not pose itself to rats. For rats to be posed with trigonometric problems means that rats' minds could understand a good deal of trigonometry. Again, a person cannot understand the question, "Does John love Mary?" without being able to understand its possible answers – namely, "John loves Mary" or "John does not love Mary." One cannot understand the question "What is John's weight?" if one does not understand the meaning of "John weighs 150 pounds." If this is true, it means that the thesis that there is a problem we can formulate without being able to grasp its solution is hereby flawed. We might not be cognitively closed as McGinn argued because "there is a conceptual connection between understanding a question and understanding its possible answers" (Kriegel, 2003, p. 184). One may be inclined to hold that there might be nothing too mysterious in consciousness that eludes our understanding; if we are given the *P* we could know it. Therefore, Kriegel established that when it comes to matters of consciousness, we can understand the solution if it were available.

Melanie Rosen (2009) did not agree with Kriegel. Rather she agreed with McGinn by insisting that it is possible to formulate and pose a question without being able to understand the solution. Rosen believed that TN is coherent. Her emphasis is that "Kriegel's examples are not wide ranging enough to be convincing" (Rosen, 2009, p. 7). Using the instance of weight, she showed that Kriegel's use of weight can be understood in different ways. One may not understand any measurement system but it is possible that one may use simpler, unsophisticated measurement system. What if one's answer is simply that "John is too heavy or light enough to carry"? She then concluded that given these varied ways of conceiving an answer we can admit that to understand a question may not be as simple as Kriegel assumed.

Again, Rosen noted that Kriegel did not take into cognizance that not every question is reducible to 'yes' or 'no' answer. His analysis does not take into consideration all types of questions. This is because for the 'how' and 'why' questions, answers can be far more complex and indeterminate. For instance, consider the question, "what is it like to see the colour ultra violet?" One is sure to understand the question, but one could not list all the possible answers to it. This is a more accurate portrayal of the question, "how does consciousness emerge from the brain?" Even if the answer is within our ability to comprehend (which McGinn did not think so), there may be such a wide range of possible answers that we may never be able to imagine all of them (Rosen, 2009). As forceful as Rosen's arguments might be in faulting Kriegel, one may insist that we are not radically cognitively closed to the solution of the consciousness problem. The paper argues that if property *P* is revealed to us, we could know it. The argument is not as simplistic as it appears. It is on the basis that humans know what it means for two things to interact. And they know the role that *P* should play in that interaction. McGinn failed to recognize that the human knowing faculty is as limited as he presupposed. There is no area of inquiry that humans can genuinely ask the question without being able to grasp the answer if it were available. Thus, it seems that by arguing that consciousness is an area of inquiry where we can ask question but cannot know the answer, McGinn is laying a good foundation for supernaturalism.

Supernaturalism as the basis of the unknown

The word supernaturalism is a coinage of two words: "super" and "naturalism." "Super" is literally translated as 'above', 'transcending', or 'beyond.' Naturalism is the philosophical

doctrine which holds that only the physical, tangible, perceptible phenomena exist. It proposes that reality and our knowledge of it is reducible only to the perceptible, empirical, physical and natural. It is problematic to determine what constitutes the natural. According to Drown (2011) our understanding of the supernatural is dependent on what nature is. He observed that the word “nature” is ambiguous because it can mean the created world or the totality of all existence or the physical universe or essence and character of something. Is the natural the entire universe, or all that exists whether they are (immediately) perceptible or not? Or is the natural that which is explainable by natural and behavioural sciences? Or that which is as God made it? Taking the first two questions into perspective, the answer is no. It is not correct that it is only that which is known and could pass through the scientific explanation that is natural. At least, within the field of astrophysics, there are what they call dark matters. These are phenomena which constitute about 70% of the universe that are unknown, or yet to be known (See Bhathe et al., 2021; Berezhiani, 2018; Ramanujan, 2018).

According to Bhathe et al (2021), there is a lot we do not know about the universe. Dark matter is one of them. They described dark matter as a mysterious substance which proves challenging for scientists to understand. Dark matter makes up approximately 80% of the total mass of galaxies, which is to say that there is four times more dark matter compared to regular matter. Yet they are unknown because we do not see them. For Berezhiani (2018, p.2), “the identity of dark matter is yet unknown.” Again, Ramanujan et al., (2018) observed that it is the expansion of the universe that leads to the conjecture that there must exist a kind of energy that is pushing galaxies away from each other despite the Newtonian attraction between them. Since the source of what is responsible for the expansion is still unknown, it is called Dark Energy. What can be deduced from this astronomical evidence is that nature is not cognitively exhaustive. That something is not perceptible or visible does not translate that it does not exist.

Drown (2011) believed that the same ambiguity characterizes supernaturalism. The supernatural may mean that which is above the created order of things. “It may mean the spiritual as distinct from the physical. It may mean the miraculous, considered as an event outside the course of nature, produced by divine action” (Drown, 2011, p. 144). According to Ashdown (2017, p. 87) supernaturalism is used to mean “the human assumption of an otherworldly reality that exists outside the observable universe and humanly appears to transcend the laws of nature.” Two key expressions could be highlighted from Ashdown about the character of supernaturalism, namely, “outside the observable universe” and “transcend (the laws of) nature.” This is in tandem with Dewey’s (2013, p. 49) observation that supernaturalism makes reference to “something beyond nature” and in adopting supernaturalist account man’s control over nature is but minimal. Petrus and Bogopa (2007, p. 2) defined supernaturalism as “all that is not natural, that which is regarded as extraordinary world, mysterious or unexplainable in ordinary terms.” Supernaturalism is often used interchangeably with the spiritual, or more technically the religious (Lohmann, 2003; Hunter, 2012; Dewey, 2013). Lohmann (2003, p. 75) was of the opinion that “the supernaturalistic cosmologies are at the heart of virtually all religions”. By holding this claim, Lohman advances a distinction between supernaturalism and naturalism. For him, the core of human existence lies in the former because it “depicts conscious will or volition as the ultimate cause of phenomena...It is an imagined dimension where volition can exist without brains, and control the physical world.” Many “idioms” have been offered to distinguish supernaturalism from naturalism: transcendent vs. tangible, illusory vs. real, sacred vs. profane, lifeless vs. living, ethereal vs. material, hidden vs. exposed, inside vs. outside, respectively (Lohmann, 2003).

It is in the nature of man to seek an explanation for the existence of certain phenomena in the universe because of his curiosity. Aristotle once observed in his *Metaphysics* Book I that “all men by nature desire to know.” The myths about existence, whether written or oral, are mere attempts by man to offer reasons why things exist or happen. McGinn (2002) ruled out the proof of God’s existence because the idea of universal causality would push one to ask who caused God – and this would lead to infinite regress. It is not in the nature of man to accept anything as a given; there must be a cause for every effect. That is why at the stage he runs empty of explanation he resorts to supernaturalism. For Ghiloni (2019, p. 76) “the supernatural is a sort of explanation for the unknown.” The supernatural world is a “hidden realm existing inside the material world” (Lohman 2003, p. 176). But it makes a claim to something real. Supernaturalism somehow is part of lived reality of some people.

According to Petrus and Bogopa (2007, p. 2), “the interaction between witchcraft and traditional healing...and the natural world...is an interaction between the ‘supernatural’ and the natural.” Ugwu (2022) hints that people tend to turn to supernaturalism when they are face to face with unbearable social conditions. Within the African traditional setting, and even in different societies across the globe people are wont to take recourse in the supernatural when faced with disempowering existential challenges. Dan Jordan Smith’s (2007) ethnographic report as cited by (Ugwu, 2022) on southeastern Nigeria in the mid- to late 1990s tells the story of how the citizens increasingly turn to “money ritual” which was accompanied by scary rumours of child kidnapping and thefts of body parts. It is not only in money ritual that people turn to supernatural powers. They seek supernatural interventions in almost all their life problems. And when you ask questions, say about the source of their wealth, they will answer “you won’t understand”. One would wonder what is so unintelligible about what they do. Is it actually the case that it is beyond human knowledge or that what they do must be held esoteric and kept from the public? This paper argues that it is actually the latter. But it is worthy of highlighting that in making reference to something beyond nature, it is possible that supernaturalism must admit inexplicability.

What then does supernaturalism say about consciousness?

Supernaturalism is the view that consciousness is a mysterious phenomenon. In advancing this claim, it offers a religious account of consciousness by holding that it is a product of miracle how consciousness came to be infused in a material universe. Like the occasionalists or the proponents of preestablished harmony, this theory admits that the only thing that makes consciousness intelligible is our acceptance of the role of a divine agent. How consciousness interacts with the brain is as astonishing as anything else that defiles human cognition. The central tenet of supernaturalism is that consciousness contains a property that is far and above *nature*, which is *hidden* and upon which the nature of consciousness is anchored. This property is a product of a divine agent. Therefore, supernaturalism offers a religious account of consciousness as a handiwork of God, because supernaturalistic explanations are at the heart of almost all religions (Lohmann, 2003; Hunter, 2012). In offering this sort of explanation, with respect to consciousness, the supernaturalists, like the (religious) dualists, make the following commitments that: a) the brain is not sufficient to account for consciousness; b) there is something hidden in consciousness that makes it impossible to give natural account of it; c) science has no say in matters of phenomenal consciousness; and so, d) giving up in the quest to naturalize consciousness is a legitimate display of intellectual humility.

As Ghiloni (2019) has observed, supernaturalism is a kind of explanation for the unknown. The mental states that characterize human beings such as pain, fear, will, and so on, are not the

kind of phenomena that the brain can guarantee. In this case, it is not known how the consciousness and brain interact. If conscious states are wholly given by the brain, as the naturalists would have us believe, why is it that human beings do not behave alike like programmed machines? Why do they enjoy the same mental states differently? To this Flanagan (1992) replied that there is evidence which shows that differences obtain in brain activity in persons who are in phenomenologically distinct mental activities. What this implies is that differences in brain activities may mean differences in conscious life which in turn establishes the fact that physical states can account for subjective states. However pungent Flanagan's claim is, it is still perplexing how the material substrates of the brain could generate subjective experiences.

By rendering the brain incapable of accounting for *qualia*, a supernaturalist makes a claim that is akin to McGinn's. One of the main claims of McGinn is that naturalism is impossible because it is not convincing how the material content of the brain – soggy grey matter – could give account of subjectivity (McGinn, 1991). How can the brain be the basis of volition, will, freedom, trauma, fear, and other subjective qualities? When one severs the brain, one only observes fibrous tissues, nerves, synapses, and so on. These materials, claimed McGinn, are the sorts that cannot generate consciousness. Then how is consciousness possible in the material world? As it is evident from the “idioms” the difference between the supernatural and the natural has become clearer. It is worthy of highlighting that to say that something is hidden does not mean readily that it is invisible, ethereal or non-empirical. A hidden thing can be revealed later on occasions. However, the hidden property of consciousness is the one that is forever hidden. For McGinn, why consciousness must remain terminally unknown is that the hidden property is terminally hidden. This section does not claim to show whether the supernatural is real or unreal, rather it is to point out that the supernatural makes references to the hidden and the transcendent. Epistemologically, the realms of the hidden and the transcendent are unknown. McGinn seemed to be offering a somewhat supernatural explanation of consciousness when he identified it with the hidden, the transcendent. His insistence that we have to shun the supernatural and look towards naturalism appears to be unfounded.

Transcendental naturalism: supernaturalism in disguise

It is worthy of highlighting at this point why most philosophers of mind discredit supernatural, religious account of consciousness. In the view of Churchland (1984), it is because religion being dogmatic had led humanity into an era of unprecedented falsehood, and even committed some social ills just to preserve these falsehoods. According to Churchland (1984, pp. 23-24):

That the stars are other suns, that the Earth is not the unmoving center of the universe, that the Earth is billions of years old, that life is a physico-chemical phenomenon; all of these crucial insights were strongly and sometimes viciously resisted because the dominant religion of the time happened to think otherwise. Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for teaching the first view; Galileo was forced by threat of torture in the Vatican's basement to recant the second view; the firm belief that disease was a punishment visited by demonic spirits permitted public health practices that brought chronic and deadly plagues to most of the cities of Europe.... For all these reasons, professional scientists and philosophers concerned with the nature of mind (or with any other topic) do their best to keep religious appeals out of the discussion entirely.

This corroborates the report of Warnes (2005) that in Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, disbelief in the supernatural is punished with beheading, teleportation into exile or madness. John Dewey was a well-known antagonist of supernaturalism. His problem with it was that it severed us from legitimate human relations. This is because what supernaturalism makes reference to, such as miracles, ghosts and mystical encounters, are sorts of things that are alien to nature. As a naturalist, Dewey observed that supernaturalism "stands in the way of effective realization of the sweep and depth of implications of natural human relations" and so, he advocated we turn towards a scientific explanation of events (Ghiloni, 2019, p. 71). Thus, supernaturalism has its enormous undoing. It is on account of this that McGinn, Churchland, Dennet, Flanagan and other naturalists insisted we seek a naturalistic account of consciousness. Therefore, McGinn did not believe that we need to import the idea of a divine element in order to solve the problem of mind-brain relationship. He ruled out the possibility of freewill because of his belief that all human actions are determined by the laws of nature. For him, it is the brain that determines the operations of the mind. And brain's actions are fixed by antecedent causes and laws and that human behavior is determined by a mixture of heredity and environment (McGinn 2002).

At the heart of McGinn's theory of consciousness is the immanent, unknowable, transcendent property of the mind located in a place that science cannot access. This is the same property identified as *P* which is to account for the interaction between mind and body. If we have made some success in naturalizing or understanding some phenomena such as "the movements of the planets," "the origin of life," "reproduction," "the weather," and so on, in naturalistic terms without importing the idea of supernaturalism, why can't we understand consciousness in naturalistic terms? But even if we cannot naturalize consciousness, it does not make it a non-natural phenomenon. It is better to acknowledge that there are shades of reality that we cannot understand instead of invoking the idea of the supernatural. It is a form of idealism, according to him, to insist that we are capable of naturalizing every phenomenon. To escape this idealism, McGinn introduced the hidden. One may argue that by accepting that consciousness is unnaturalizable because it harbours something that is hidden, McGinn is advancing a supernatural account. This is so because supernaturalism emphasis the transcendence and blocks off further inquiry into any phenomenon. TN of McGinn by insisting that consciousness harbours a proper that is permanently closed, is a herald of supernaturalistic account of consciousness.

Here one can see that this is a purely idealistic attempt to account for the *real*. But McGinn is not the first to postulate the hidden in order to account for the real. Plato did exactly this with his postulation of "world of forms." Kant did it too with his postulation of the "noumenal world." By these postulations, these philosophers earned for themselves the reputation of idealists. It is doubtful that McGinn would acknowledge himself as an idealist since he believed that the *P* must be a real thing. Hegel had dislodged Kant's unknowable things-in-themselves arguing that the real is knowable and the knowable is real. If something is identified as real because it is always known, otherwise it is not real, why does McGinn think that the real property that connects the mind and body is unknowable? The postulation of the unknowable property of consciousness by McGinn leaves his solution to lie at a metaphysical level. But the solution to naturalism of consciousness problem does not need a metaphysical approach. Even at that, how can we know this hidden, noumenal, property since it is assumed that a finite being can only produce a finite idea, not a transcendental one? (Agbakoba, 2001; Gentile, 1922). This study argues in line with Hegel that the real should be knowable otherwise it is not real. In the

same vein, McGinn's postulation of the hidden property does not offer a naturalistic account of consciousness. But rather it places his solution supernatural level.

The aim of importing the idea of the hidden, in McGinn's view, is simply to prove that everything about consciousness is natural. The question that was asked is: how hidden is this property; and how successful was McGinn in holding unto this *hidden* phenomenon? Why should the consciousness problem be spoken of as purely a natural problem if it harbours something that is forever undiscoverable? What are the characteristics of this hidden structure? In the words of Joad as cited by Aja (2004, p. 90), "things have no characteristics when they are not known...." Even the dark matter has what they call candidates which are avenues through which it somehow manifests itself. These candidates include weakly interactive massive particles (WIMP), supersymmetric particles or geons, primordial black holes, galaxy rotation curve, and so on. Dark matter though unknown possesses some characteristics through which it manifests itself. Here we retain the claim which Hegel espoused: the real is knowable and vice versa. The fundamental reason McGinn has to postulate this hidden property, *P*, is to demonstrate that we cannot in principle solve the problem of consciousness. To stretch it more, why we cannot solve the problem is because we cannot know *P*. Thus, perhaps the hidden becomes the *unhidden* anytime it is proved that consciousness problem is solvable. But McGinn and the mysterianists think that such time would never come because the mystery is a terminal one (Flanagan, 1992). If the hidden it is a real, natural thing, as McGinn held, then it will yield itself to science of consciousness with the passage of time. But if it is the case that that time would not come, then this is a supernaturalism at work and we have to admit it.

To answer the question about how *hidden* is the hidden structure, one is inclined to argue that it is not hidden the way McGinn presupposed. According to Flanagan (1997, p. 97), "part of the hidden structure of conscious mental states involves their neural realization". By this Flanagan wants to show that the hidden is nothing other than anything that enables the mental state to be realized in the brain, or the process through which brain activity that brings about some mental states. In either way, it is within the domain of science of consciousness to unravel this 'mystery'. If science of consciousness gains prospect, McGinn might be wrong to think there is something terminally lurking in consciousness. To prove McGinn wrong, one will point out that McGinn located the hidden in the wrong place. If it is consciousness that has a non-spatial character, then *P* (the hidden property) must also be a non-spatial character in order to make the psychophysical link possible. And if *P* has a non-spatial character, then there is no naturalist solution to the mind-body relationship (Işıkil, 2017).

It can be argued that the hidden cannot be the property of consciousness, inasmuch as it is consciousness that is proving tough to be explained in naturalistic terms. As it has been pointed out, the property which is to account for consciousness-brain relationship is to be an objective property of the brain not a subjective property of consciousness. If we are to identify the hidden with consciousness, we can never have an objective solution to the problem because consciousness is subjective. This is because if the property that should link brain and consciousness together should be the intersubjective, then we are likely to have different *P*'s since each psychophysical link is peculiar to the subject. We are looking for an objective answer to our problem but we do not have an objective access to conscious states. If so, why did McGinn think that our answer should lie there – in the hidden? Why should the hidden be a property of consciousness? The answer is that there is nothing that is hidden as such. At most, the hidden is but a postulation not a solution. And if there is anything hidden, one may argue that it is hidden in the brain not in the consciousness.

It is undeniable that there are some phenomena we can never get to know. For instance, I do not know anything that happened to the 20th generation of my forefathers or how they looked like. Events of the past would always be a good case in which we admit some degree of cognitive closure. But unlike transcendental naturalism, it can be argued that we are cognitively structured in such a way that if you tell me anything about my forebears, I would know it. The argument of this paper is that it is misguided for McGinn to claim that we cannot know the answer to the question we can pose. It is a mark of supernaturalism if a phenomenon is designed in such a manner that no human mind can know it.

Conclusion

Naturalising consciousness remains one of the difficult issues challenging philosophy of mind. Among most phenomena that were hitherto held to be mysterious, consciousness is the very last one that is proving difficult to be explained in naturalistic terms. Unarguably, it is difficult to offer a natural solution to the problem of consciousness. But unlike McGinn that is pessimistic, this study offers two optimistic solutions. First, we need some degree of intellectual humility in approaching some daunting philosophical problem. There is nothing in TN that satisfies the curious mind and stops it from worrying about the consciousness problem. It is not enough to tell someone that a problem is forever insoluble. Intellectual humility can offer us that satisfaction by insisting that with the passage of time what we think is insoluble will later cease to be. The second solution is akin to Flanagan's naturalistic method that is interdisciplinary. Flanagan faults McGinn in thinking that there is a need to explore what he calls the "methodological requirement," which presupposes the imagination of combining the two field-specific faculties – introspection and perception. TN upholds the view that no method is promising. But Flanagan offers the "natural method" that draws on three main approaches: phenomenology (and/or introspection), empirical psychology, empirical neuroscience (Flanagan 1992; Gulick 2017). In his later work Flanagan buttresses his natural method as follows:

Start by treating three different lines of analysis with equal respect. Give phenomenology its due. Listen carefully to what individuals have to say about how things seem. Also let the psychologists and cognitive scientists have their say. Listen carefully to their descriptions about how mental life works, and what jobs, if any, consciousness has in its overall economy. ... finally listen carefully to what the neuroscientist say [sic] about how conscious mental events of different sorts are realized, and examine the fit between their stories and the phenomenological and psychological stories (Flanagan 1997, p. 100).

It is not only one method that should be employed in solving the problem of consciousness but different methods drawn from various disciplines—philosophy, cognitive psychology, neurology, cognitive science, evolutionary biology, and so on. In his opinion, Flanagan says that any "source worth paying attention" would count in formulating a theory of naturalism of consciousness (Flanagan 1997). This is the basis of science of consciousness which most naturalists believe is the last place to look for in the quest to understand consciousness. Metzinger (2024) thinks that guided by science of consciousness, we can solve the old problem in new ways. After all, "consciousness science has made great progress during the last three decades. We have a lot of data and a much better understanding of the physical correlates of conscious experience" (Metzinger, 2024, p. xiv).

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