

In this paper, I will defend McGinn's argument for mysterianism about the mind-body problem<sup>1</sup>.

McGinn's argument is as follows:

P1: Consciousness and the mind are caused in some way by the brain.

P2: Humans only have two possible methods for determining the means by which the brain causes mental states: Introspection and Perception.

P3: It is not possible to determine the means by which the brain causes mental states via perception.

P4: It is not possible to determine the means by which the brain causes mental states via introspection.

C: Humans have no way of determining the means by which the brain causes mental states.<sup>2</sup>

I will now defend each of these premises in order and explain how they entail the conclusion. P1 is possibly the most controversial of all the premises. This argument requires a physicalist view of the mind-body problem. Debates regarding this aspect of the mind-body are sadly outside of the scope of this two-page essay so the listener will have to accept that the brain is the cause of mental states in some way. P2 is in my opinion fairly self-explanatory. One can either look inward and attempt to study their own consciousness or use their outward perception to study the biology of the brain or whatever else one may fancy. These two attributes, introspection and perception, are the only means we have of studying the mind-body problem. Now we get into the substantive portion of this argument. P3 is true because consciousness is not a perceivable quality. Picture yourself staring at the brain of a living human or even some scans of their brain activity. Looking at this brain will not grant you insight into this person's conscious experience, no matter how many of its physical properties you document. It would be impossible to understand how physical phenomena cause consciousness without being able to observe consciousness itself thus perception cannot be used to understand *K*. P4 is another premise that is, in my opinion, self-explanatory. Introspection is the study of observing our mental states. Understanding how I am feeling will do little to help me understand how the brain causes these feelings. Thus I cannot gain insight into the physical aspect of *K* by engaging in introspective research. Therefore introspection cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Discussions regarding the exact relationship between the body and mind

<sup>2</sup> Henceforth referred to as *K* when convenient. I.E *K* is the means by which the brain causes mental states.

be used to understand *K*. C follows these premises quite simply. If there are only two modes of thought that could allow us to ascertain *K* and we can use neither of them to ascertain *K*, then it must be impossible to ascertain *K*.

Ok, so this paper is over right? We all believe I have defended these premises effectively? For more scientifically inclined readers P3 may seem a little far-fetched. After all, how could one claim that we can *never* find *K* without knowing the capabilities of science yet to be discovered? Believe it or not, I once posited a similar objection to P3: “Couldn’t we use AI to look at the electromagnetic activity in the brain to ascertain that person’s conscious experience? And wouldn’t such a discovery mean that we can use perception (although not our own) to understand *K*?” The answer to this question is no. *K* is the means by which activity in the brain causes mental states. Observing that certain activity in the brain causes certain mental states does not give us insight into *how* this activity causes those mental states. Understanding that there is a causal relationship between two things is not the same as understanding the means by which they cause one another. For example, one could comment that “Isaac scored a home run.” This sentence tells us that there is a causal relationship between Isaac and a home run being scored but without understanding the rules of baseball the reader has no insight into how Isaac scored that run. Using this AI experiment we can be almost certain that *K* exists but *K* itself remains a mystery. To be a tad reductionist for a moment, the AI is not detecting “consciousness particles” or some other third-party phenomenon that explains how electrical signals (a physical reality) are being converted into conscious experience (a mental reality). If the idea of “consciousness” particles sounds ridiculous to you that’s because it is. Attempting to explain *K* in any detail necessarily results in ridiculous terms like “consciousness particles.” This is because as humans we only have two means for processing phenomena. We can process mental phenomena through introspection and physical phenomena through perception. No matter what *physical* descriptions we can make about *K* we will not gain insight into how *K* converts physical information into mental states. Likewise, no matter how many *mental* descriptions we make about *K* we will not gain insight into how *K* converts mental information into physical states. Therefore the solution to the mind-body problem will remain mysterious to humankind in perpetuity.