



The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World

By Colin McGinn

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In recent years the nature of consciousness—our immediately known experiences—has taken its place as the most profound problem that science faces. Now in this brilliant and thoroughly accessible new book Colin McGinn takes a provocative position on this perplexing problem. Arguing that we can never truly "know" consciousness—that the human intellect is simply not equipped to unravel this mystery—he demonstrates that accepting this limitation in fact opens up a whole new field of investigation. In elegant prose, McGinn explores the implications of this Mysterian position—such as the new value it gives to the power of dreams and introspection—and challenges the reader with intriguing questions about the very nature of our minds and brains.

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The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World By Colin McGinn Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

You have a piece of meat in your head called a brain. You also have perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas, which scientists assert are related in some fashion to that piece of meat. How can this be? Philosopher Colin McGinn looks at this question in depth in *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World*, a slim, accessible book that presents a novel answer: we'll never know. We can look at the brain from outside, and look at our consciousness from within, but never the twain shall meet.

Not at all defeatist in tone, *The Mysterious Flame* rejects strict materialism and dualism, which seek to solve the mind-body problem in fairly unsatisfactory ways, and claims instead that our intelligence is not an appropriate tool to use for understanding the interface between subjective experience and material reality. (And, unfortunately, we don't have anything better.) Instead of bemoaning our fate, McGinn turns the traditional questions around and asks "What can we know about ourselves?" This is just as interesting as any question being asked by philosophers of the mind, and in fact seems to merit a higher priority. Whether McGinn's arguments will succeed in the marketplace of ideas is an open question, but they certainly deserve the attention of anyone interested in the nature of human thought. --*Rob Lightner*

From Publishers Weekly

Although its roots reach back to ancient Greece, the mind-body problem has bedeviled Western philosophers particularly since the time of the rationalist suppositions of Descartes in the 17th century. As knowledge of neurophysiology and brain function increase, questions about the nature of human consciousness also multiply. McGinn (Ethics, Evil and Fiction), a philosophy professor at Rutgers University, explores the relationship between the brain and the mind in a witty style. The authors analysis of the classical philosophical answers and conundrums emanating from this problem (dualism, epiphenomenalism, materialism, supernaturalism) are made easy to understand for the lay reader. Pushing reason, logic and experience to their limits, McGinn concludes that, ultimately, the essence of mind and the meaning of consciousness lie beyond the capability of the minds trying to define and comprehend them. Yet, he says, in accepting the limitations of thought about thought, we may find unlikely intellectual solace in inexplicable mystery. This is no pessimistic tract. McGinn asserts that acknowledging the frustrating boundaries of reason about reason frees the thinker to explore those areas of human intelligence that are open to our understanding. Except for his distracting habit of defaulting the third-person personal pronoun to the feminine, McGinn makes his case eloquently, with literary examples drawn from areas as diverse as biology, astrophysics and science fiction. Susan Rabiner Literary Agency.

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From Scientific American

McGinn, a professor of philosophy at Rutgers University, asks several deep questions about consciousness and then answers them in clear and entertaining prose. "What is consciousness? Where does it come from? ... What does the activity of the brain have to do with it?" His answer: "My thesis is that consciousness depends upon an unknowable natural property of the brain." The inability of the human intellect to resolve the mind-body problem arises because "our minds are not equipped to solve it, rather as the cat's mind is not up to discovering relativity theory." McGinn supposes that brains capable of understanding consciousness might be developed by breeding advanced thinkers or by a "genetically engineered super-mind," but he warns that one must consider what such a superbrained person might lose as the cost of what he gains. "As they say, be careful what you wish for!"

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ellen Jorge:

Reading a e-book can be one of a lot of action that everyone in the world adores. Do you like reading book therefore. There are a lot of reasons why people fantastic. First reading a e-book will give you a lot of new information. When you read a e-book you will get new information due to the fact book is one of many ways to share the information or maybe their idea. Second, studying a book will make you more imaginative. When you examining a book especially fiction book the author will bring that you imagine the story how the personas do it anything. Third, you may share your knowledge to some others. When you read this The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World, you can tells your family, friends in addition to soon about yours reserve. Your knowledge can inspire average, make them reading a guide.

Jean Spence:

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them loved ones or their friend. Are you aware? Many a lot of people spent that they free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you need to try to find a new activity that's look different you can read any book. It is really fun for you. If you enjoy the book that you simply read you can spent all day every day to reading a e-book. The book The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World it is extremely good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. If you did not have enough space to create this book you can buy the e-book. You can m0ore effortlessly to read this book from the smart phone. The price is not to fund but this book provides high quality.

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Audrey Mack:

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