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**A Critique of Colin Mcginn: Human Cognition & Shifting the Paradigms**

Before I begin this critique I want to make one thing explicitly clear. I have nothing but the utmost respect for Colin McGinn as a Philosopher. His book, The Making of a Philosopher: My Journey Through Twentieth Century Philosophy was a source of great inspiration for me as I was becoming increasingly intimate with the field at the time of reading. If that were not enough, I also have had the honor of establishing a correspondence with Professor McGinn where we talked about our Atheist beliefs, the writings I was working on, as well as me consistently inquiring to him for advice about how to have a presence in this already massive field of study. He is like a mentor to me and he will never know the affect he had on me as it pertains to me pursuing Philosophy. I am truly indebted to him for the warmth and wisdom he bestowed upon me as a mere student of the game.

Where my critique of Colin McGinn comes in is actually in regards to one of his most notable contributions during his career. As Colin McGinn was working on the mind-body problem and toiling away at solutions that would either support the prospect of dualism, monism, or give rise to a new concept entirely. Then a muse struck McGinn; What if the mind-body problem *could not* be solved? In fact, what if problems of a profound Metaphysical nature such as the nature of self, meaning, free will, etc. all lie outside the grasp of the mind? What if our cognitive abilities have boundaries that we are just incapable of crossing? McGinn’s assertion angered many philosophers but it seemed this anger stemmed more from egoism than anything else. To them, saying that the human mind had limits was a grave insult as well as being a quitter’s stance. For the longest time however I actually agreed and submitted to this assertion from McGinn. After all philosophical problems such as the meaning of life, God’s existence, and the nature of morality all seemed to be nothing more than a ceaseless run around a circle. That is until very recently when I thought about something I never had before. What if the answer lied not in the boundaries of human cognition but rather, how human cognition was applied when confronting these problems? To put it succinctly, what if ascertaining the answers merely lied in shifting the paradigms of these problems?

To illustrate what I mean let me start with an elementary example in the form of an essay I read titled Fruitful Questions by James Sollisch while in my first semester of college. The essay dealt with a mother observing her three children engaging in shifting the paradigms. The scenario was that a mother was playing with her three children ages nine, six, and four a game of what did not belong. She showed them three pictures that consisted of an orange, a tomato, and a strawberry. The oldest child asserted that the tomato did not belong because the strawberry and orange are both fruits. The four year old contended this by responding that the strawberry did not belong because the orange and tomato were both round and the strawberry was not. The last child retorted that the orange did not belong because the tomato and strawberry were red. The oldest child then spoke again and replied that it could be the orange not solely because of the color but also because the tomato and the strawberry both grow on vines. (Sollisch 109-110).

Do you see what the children did here? In its simplest form, they took three pictures and had to arrive at which one did not belong and came up with a multitude of correct answers by observingthem from *different* vantage points. The mother was ready to award the game to the oldest child when he asserted that the tomato was a vegetable whereas the strawberry and orange were both fruits. He was observing and deriving information from the pictures while examining them from a perspective of classification. The four year old examined the picture from a simpler perspective that being the perspective of shape when he observed that the strawberry was not round as opposed to both the orange and tomato. In total, the game yielded five different answers (I only listed four.) all of which were correct in one sense or another. What this essay clearly illustrates is that not all answers need to be derived from uncovering new information but examining information we already possess from different angles. This is a technique in which our cognitive abilities possess amazing capability.

So we examined a very simplistic model of what it means to shift the paradigms. Now the question obviously becomes; how does three children examining three different pictures tie into the contention that our cognitive skills *can* solve these Metaphysical problems in Philosophy? The answer to that question can be found in my next illustration of someone shifting the paradigms of already existing information. One day while I was searching topics of potential interest on this Philosophy forum I belong to I stumbled across a post by a user named Darshan titled Earthellism. Darshan asserted that Earthellism was a new Philosophy that finally explained the nature and existence of God. Here is Earthellism in a nutshell as explained by Darshan.

Earthellism is a philosophy (not a religion) that uses the new science of astrobiology to explain all the events Mankind has experienced. The book: The Life and Death of Planet Earth is the foundation of this philosophy. Its central thought is based on a discovery in 2001 that our earth will be completed incinerated by our sun when it becomes a red giant in 6-7 billion years. Earthellism uses this central concept to form the idea that all planets that have liquid water also are close enough to their respective star so that they are cremated when their star dies; thus all life in the universe is recycled. Earthellism also is based on the idea that there is no hell below us but that the surface of earth is the location of hell (confirmed by astrobiology). By locating hell on the surface of planet earth, the "problem of Evil" as it relates to the presence of a God is finally explained. Earthellism states that the surface of earth is hell and God is not omnipotent here but only omnibenevolent in that God compensates for all innocent suffering and death. Thus God cannot stop evil acts, death and suffering here on earth but fully compensates all innocent pain and suffering with heaven. Earthellism solves the problem of atheism and closet atheism by explaining that this is hell and God's powers here are very limited but his indirect powers to compensate innocent pain and suffering is unlimited. Earthellism will allow atheist to believe in a God and allow closet atheist to solve the problem of the presence of evil and the presence of a just, loving and humane God. Earthellism explains that human devils are among us as people, and human devils can commit terrible acts on us and their acts do not prove God does not exist. Finally Earthellism ties all the scriptures together by explaining that eternity means only earth's eternity and in 6-7 billion years all our molecules will be incinerated to help form a new solar system. (Darshan <http://onlinephilosophyclub.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=8126&p=122200#p122200>).

This is precisely what I mean when I talk about effectively shifting the paradigms in a way that brings us closer to resolutions with these types of problems. There were two significant ways that Darshan shifted the paradigms that I wish to discuss. The first significant shift was Darshan’s postulation of Hell. He effectively takes the mysticism out of the idea of Hell and replaces it with scientific research and logical thinking. By saying that Hell is located on the surface of Earth because the Sun will incinerate the Earth in 6-7 billion years as well as the fact that terrible acts are perpetrated on the Earth’s surface, makes the proposition seem sensible. The second significant shift occurs when Darshan discusses the very ontology of God. Theologians have always widely accepted the postulation that God was omnipotent. Darshan contends however, that God is omnibenevolent. This means that while God’s knowledge and wisdom is finite and prone to error, his compassion is not. This would explain why evil acts go unpunished while perpetrated on Earth, but also maintains that the innocent people that suffer are compensated upon entering Heaven. Now to be clear, while I feel that Earthellism has its own weaknesses, I do also believe that Darshan may have brought us much closer to the answer of God’s existence with his observations especially when it comes to his propositions on Hell. We always associate Hell with scorching heat and suffering, Darshan fulfilled both of those criterions by taking the mysticism out of Hell and instead depicting it as Earth’s surface. He took pre-existing notions and information in regards to Hell and merely examined them from a different vantage point.

When I look at Earthellism I also see the very fallacy in McGinn’s philosophy. The problem does not lie within the cognitive abilities of the human being. The problem lies in how this very ability is applied to these Metaphysical problems. To put it one way, we are always looking to invent the newest version of the “wheel” when perhaps what we should be doing is looking at older versions and finding new applications of it. At its core this very sentiment is precisely how I feel as it relates to our pursuit and view of information. We feel that the solution to these problems lies in ascertaining ideas never before thought of in the human mind when the answer in fact might be taking thoughts already put forth and looking at them from a different point of view.