

## Emergent Dualism and Personal Origin

According to Hasker (1999) the mind is an immaterial substance that emerges at a certain stage of development from the complex activity of physical simples organized into a human body. Hasker's view is fact a novel form of dualism. His view of the mind can be understood by analogy to a *field of force*. Hasker's argument depends on considerations based on the phenomenal unity of consciousness and reductionism. I analyze Hasker's central argument and evaluate the tenability of emergent dualism. Hasker's account requires that some physical objects cause immaterial souls to exist and, I argue, that souls must originate from specific physical simples. I also argue that, plausibly, Hasker must commit to Kripkean origin essentialism. Consequently, I point out, his immaterial souls could not be independently originated by an omnipotent being. I conclude by proposing physicalist emergentism as a more plausible emergentist view of personal origin.

### **Reductionism**

Composite objects, according to mereological reductionism, do not simply depend upon the parts that compose them. Mereological reductionists insist that composites are *nothing over and above* their simple parts. This entails that the properties of a composite object are trivially reducible to the properties of simples. Sellars offers the following characterization of the mereological principle of reducibility.

If an object is in the strict sense a system of objects, then every property of the object must consist in the fact that its constituents

have such and such qualities and stand in such and such relations, or roughly, every property of a system of objects consists of properties of, and relations between, its constituents.<sup>1</sup>

A strong version of Sellars principle can be reframed as an identity thesis.

(PR) If X and Y compose an object O in environment E, then O is identical to [X and Y] and the properties of O at any time *t* are identical to the intrinsic and relational properties of X and Y at *t*.

PR implies that a composite is, in the strongest sense, nothing but its parts.<sup>2</sup>

Endorsing the existence of a composite object, given PR is, as Merricks says, “as ontologically venturesome as endorsing the existence of Tully, given the uncontroversial existence of Cicero.”<sup>3</sup> Endorsing PR is equivalent to denying that composites exist in any more significant sense than collections of simples.

### ***The Unity of Consciousness***

Hasker’s metaphysic of persons is founded on PR, which constitutes a major premise in his best argument for emergent dualism. I formulate Hasker’s unity of conscious argument as follows:

- 1) My phenomenal awareness of my visual field is a complex state of phenomenal awareness  $S_2$  (premise)
- 2)  $S_2$  is a conjunctive state of individual phenomenal representations  $S_{1a}, S_{1b}, \dots, S_{1n}$  (def.)
- 3) Either a simple object or a composite object is the subject of  $S_2$  (necessary truth)
- 4) There are no composite objects (PR)
- 5) No material simple is a plausible candidate to be in  $S_2$  (premise)

Therefore,

- 6) The only plausible candidate for an object that is in  $S_2$  is an immaterial simple (from 3,4,5)

Therefore,

- 7) My phenomenal awareness of my visual field is the property of an immaterial simple (from 1,2, and 6)<sup>4</sup>

This unity of consciousness argument for dualism, if successful, shows that a complex state of awareness can only be experienced by an immaterial soul. Premise (4) seems to be the weakest in the argument. Its denial allows the attribution of  $S_2$  to a composite object, such as a human body. Premise (5) is true because it seems unlikely that a physical simple is the subject of a complex phenomenal awareness. For example, I am simultaneously pressing computer keys, watching text appear on the screen, and hearing tiny clicks. It seems unlikely that even one of these sensations is a property of a physical simple. Hasker argues that even if individual simples might be aware of some *portion* of his visual field, all of these simples being simultaneously aware of some portion of the field cannot constitute a unified awareness.

### **Emergentism**

Some find an appeal to emergent properties attractive as a solution to the Physicalist's problems with the unity of consciousness argument. They happily endorse emergent properties and/or substances. O'Connor defends the view that properties can arise due to the activity of a system of simples that are inexplicable in terms of the properties of the simples and their relations.<sup>5</sup> These emergent properties *depend upon* the activity of simples, without being trivially reducible to it. We can capture this thought in the following definition.

(E-property)      Property P is emergent iff P depends upon simples  $(x_1 \dots x_n)$  and some of the intrinsic and relational properties of  $(x_1 \dots x_n)$  for its existence, but is not logically (or trivially) reducible to any of the intrinsic or relational properties of  $(x_1 \dots x_n)$ .

PR is inconsistent with the existence of emergent properties as defined by E-property. Hasker attempts to resolve this tension, contending that consciousness represents an emergent property that belongs to an emergent immaterial substance. This immaterial soul originates due to the complex causal activity of the body at a certain stage of development. The soul requires the causal activity of the body (or a suitable substitute) for its continued existence. Once this soul arises it is supposed to exhibit a downward causal influence on the body that is inexplicable apart from agent causation.<sup>6</sup>

Hasker offers the magnetic field as a helpful analogy, saying, “as a magnet generates its magnetic field, so the brain generates its field of consciousness.”<sup>7</sup> The activity of a cluster of simples arranged in the proper way produces and sustains a magnetic field. However, we may imagine that a magnetic field exhibits an influence on those simples by arranging them in ways they would not otherwise be without the influence of the field.<sup>8</sup> A magnetic field can also exist (at least momentarily) if the magnet is removed or replaced. Likewise, it is possible for an emergent soul to exist apart from the body that causes it – perhaps if another body replaces the original, or perhaps through the causal activity of an omnipotent being.<sup>9</sup>

Hasker preserves PR because the existence of the soul supposedly remains entirely explicable in terms of the causal activity of simples. This explanation requires the existence of emergent laws that are unforeseeable until the proper complexity arises.<sup>10</sup> The causal powers of the simples, which the emergent law

describes, remain dormant until the proper complexity of physical simples arises. Hasker's proposal squares with the unity of consciousness because the immaterial soul, as a simple thing, can plausibly have unified awareness (S<sub>2</sub>). The soul, according is emergent because it is causally dependent upon the existence of a cluster of simples associated with the human body. However, despite existential dependence on the body, the soul itself is a new substance with unique causal powers.<sup>11</sup>

Mainline emergentists, who endorse composite objects, differ dramatically from Hasker. The unity of consciousness proves to be unproblematic for the emergentist who rejects PR. Merricks defends the view that a composite object exists if and only if there exists an E-property. More precisely, Merricks contends that composite objects are things that have "non-redundant causal powers," or properties that are not over-determined by the intrinsic and relational properties of any of their parts.<sup>12</sup>

If Merricks is correct in supposing that a system of physical objects can have an E-property, then PR is false and composites certainly exist. Persons seem to be the most plausible candidates for being composite because of the efficacy of the unity of consciousness argument. As Van Inwagen puts it, "...things cannot work together to think—or at least, things can work together to think only in the sense that they can compose, in the strict and mereological understanding of the word, an object that thinks." It seems reasonable for a physicalist to assume that persons exist, are identical or somehow realized by

their bodies, and have unified phenomenal consciousness. From premises of that sort it follows that persons are composite objects.

Some, such as Dennett, argue that the unity of consciousness argument is flawed, emphasizing the apparent disunity of conscious awareness.<sup>13</sup> The occasionally peculiar behavior of split-brain patients provides some evidence that the unity of consciousness can be undermined.<sup>14</sup> However, I assume here that the evidence does not disconfirm the unity of *phenomenal consciousness*, even if other sorts of awareness are sometimes disunified.<sup>15</sup> It seems plausible to me that: for any phenomenal states *x* and *y*, if there is something it is like to experience *x*, there is something it is like to experience *y*, and there is something it is like to experience *x* and *y* as phenomenally unified, then *x* and *y* are phenomenally unified when they are experienced simultaneously.

Shrader (2006) resists the unity of consciousness argument, suggesting that being in phenomenal state *x* and phenomenal state *y* does not necessitate being in the conjunctive, or unified state [*x* and *y*].<sup>16</sup> After all, Shrader argues, “having belief *p* and having belief *q* does not necessitate having the conjunctive belief [*p* and *q*].”<sup>17</sup> I contend that phenomenal consciousness and cognition are sufficiently dissimilar to make the inference at least questionable. While it is logically possible to believe a contradiction, I cannot really grasp the idea of phenomenally experiencing a contradiction. Phenomenal experiences are *presented* to the mind in a way that beliefs are not. So, I find it plausible that being in phenomenal states *x* and *y* simultaneously *entails* being in the unified

state [x and y].<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the friend of phenomenal unity must choose between rejecting the principle of reducibility and accepting the existence of immaterial substances.

### ***Composition and Vagueness***

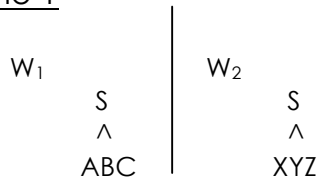
There is an influential argument that purports to show that if composition is restricted, then it is sometimes vague whether or not a composite exists. If all the parts of an object are sequentially removed, the vagueness argument states, no determinate point will show when the object ceases to exist. Thus, its existence sometimes becomes metaphysically vague.<sup>19</sup> But, it is assumed that existence is never vague because 'for any x, either x exists or x does not exist' is a necessary truth. Therefore, the vagueness argument concludes, composition is not restricted. Lewis, Van Inwagen, and Sider agree that this difficulty results from the inherent vagueness of organic parthood.<sup>20</sup>

Merricks, a friend of restricted composition, offers a skillful defense of the emergentist view of composite organisms. He argues that if a composite object has an E-property, such as consciousness, and it is not vague whether or not it has the E-property, then neither the composition of the object nor its existence, is vague. He offers a story in which composite objects emit, as an E-property, a loud whistling sound while non-composites remain silent.<sup>21</sup> Any time whistling occurs, a composite exists; if the composite ceases to exist, then the whistling stops. If organisms have an E-property relevantly similar to the whistling composites, then their existence is not vague.

## **Emergentism and Origin**

Emergentism and emergent dualism share an important feature: both views posit an asymmetric dependence between physical simples and a person. On Hasker's view, the existence of the immaterial soul depends causally upon the material simples associated with the body.<sup>22</sup> So, the soul cannot exist in the absence of this causal activity. It seems that Hasker is committed to the soul's emergence essentially depending upon the causal activity of specific material simples. To see this, consider possible worlds  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , which remain identical up until time  $t$ . In  $W_1$  Sam's soul  $S$  arises at a time  $t$  from the collective causal activity of the material simples  $ABC$  existing in environment  $E$ . In  $W_2$   $S$  arises at  $t$  from the causal activity of material simples  $XYZ$  in  $E$ .

### Scenario 1



If  $ABC$  is qualitatively identical to, but numerically distinct from,  $XYZ$ , then the two aggregates exemplify the same causal powers. Is it possible that  $ABC$  gives rise to Sam's soul, although  $XYZ$  could have given rise to Sam's soul? Is it possible on Hasker's view that Sam's soul possibly originates from distinct bodies? I think the answer must be "no". If Scenario 1 is logically possible, then it follows that there is a possible world  $W_3$ , which is identical to  $W_1$  and  $W_2$  up until time  $t$ , in which  $ABC$  causes a soul to emerge and  $XYZ$  causes a soul to emerge, and each soul holds equal claim on being identical to Sam's soul. Causal over-

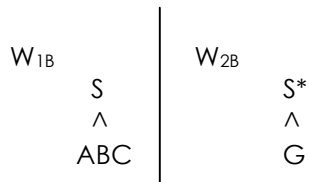


determination is impossible because Hasker contends that the soul is spatially co-extensive with at least some of the material simples upon which it depends.<sup>23</sup> None of ABC or XYZ spatially overlaps, therefore, ABC and XYZ give rise to spatially distinct souls. Spatial distinctness is sufficient for distinctness. It is impossible for Sam's soul to be identical to two distinct things, so  $W_3$  is impossible. Hence, Sam's soul necessarily emerges from the causal activity of a unique aggregate of material simples.

Kripke expresses a similar notion in *Naming and Necessity*: "If a material object has its origin from a certain hunk of matter, it could not have had its origin in any other matter."<sup>24</sup> For example, if a table is made of some particular hunk of wood, then it is impossible for that particular table to have been made from any other hunk of wood. Referring to Queen Elizabeth, Kripke also queries, "How could a person originating from different parents, from a totally different sperm and egg, be *this very woman*?"<sup>25</sup>

A Haskerian soul has its origin necessarily in the causal activity of a specific aggregate of material simples. So, it seems clear that it could not have had its origin in the activity of any other material simples. But perhaps the emergent dualist could argue that although no other material simples could have originated S, an immaterial omnipotent being could originate S. The previous argument against over-determination, which relies on spatial distinctness, fails to rule out God. Consider a scenario identical to Scenario 1, with the exception that God causes S\* to exist instead of XYZ.

## Scenario 2



Let a “D-substance” designate a substance that asymmetrically depends upon another substance for existence at some time during its career. Let “DD-substance” (double-dependent being) designate a substance that asymmetrically depends for its existence upon a D-substance at sometime during its career.

- D1. If God exists, then God is necessarily neither a D-substance nor a DD-substance
- D2. If God exists, then ABC are necessarily D-substances
- D3. If God exists, then S is necessarily a DD-substance
- D4. If God exists, then S\* is necessarily a D-substance

D1 is a necessary truth. D2 is true because God is able to cause ABC to exist or fail to exist. D3 is true because, S causally depends upon ABC at sometime during its existence and S depends upon God. D4 is true because S\* causally depends only upon God.

If the existence of a Haskerian soul is possibly causally over-determined, then there is some possible world  $W_{3B}$  in which ABC causes S to exist and God causes S\* to exist, and S and S\* are identical. However,

- D5. S and S\* have distinct essential properties, and so, are distinct.

It is not immediately clear that D5 is true. Although, I'm inclined to accept that being a D-substance or being a DD-substance are essential properties, the opponent of D5 might advocate the contingency of these dependency

relations. A proponent of the causal over-determination of the soul in  $W_{3B}$ , will want to claim exactly this: being a DD-substance is a *de re* contingent property of  $S$ . At this point, I think that full-blown Cartesian dualism becomes irresistible. If an emergent soul does not essentially depend on a physical body for its existence, then no essential difference exists between a Cartesian soul and an emergent soul. But, Hasker set out to avoid this consequence for fear that, as he puts it, "the siren song of Cartesian dualism once again echoes in our ears."<sup>26</sup>

I conclude that the emergent dualist commits to the existence of DD-substances with a necessary originating dependence relation upon physical substances. I know of no account of substance metaphysics that countenances the existence of DD-substances. Lowe's fairly standard explication of substance, states:

A substance may be defined to be an object which does not depend logically for its existence upon the existence of any object distinct from itself (other than its own proper parts, if it has any) and does not depend logically for its identity upon the identity of any object distinct from itself.<sup>27</sup>

Emergent dualism requires a non-standard conception of substance and lacks a persuasive argument for the existence of such non-standard substances.

### **Conclusion**

I am inclined to accept that substances possess necessary originating dependency relations, and that if DD-substances are possible, then an omnipotent being remains unable to create them without also creating the substance upon which they are dependent. Excepting its beginning or origin,

no point in time is essential to a thing's existence. Therefore, if a substance is an essentially DD-substance, its double dependency relation emerges at its origin. An omnipotent being could not generate a particular magnetic field without first creating a particular magnet. Likewise, God's attempt to create Sam's soul S without creating ABC would result in a counterfeit duplicate.

Kripke's insight, that the unique origin of a substance is necessary for its existence seems correct. But, even on this supposition, Hasker's emergent dualist proposal seems very doubtful. The implausibility of Hasker's proposal stems from the concession that an aggregate of physical objects possesses a creative causal power that an omnipotent being necessarily lacks. It seems unlikely that an aggregate of simples could hold the power to cause a substance to exist that not even an omnipotent being could independently create. We should not share incredulity to physicalist emergentism because it does not entail any *causal* dependency – but rather a mereological dependency – between emergent objects and material simple. On the mainline view, it is quite reasonable to hold that an omnipotent being could not create a person without creating the very simples that originated her. She *just is* a composite object that necessarily originates from a particular aggregate of material simples when they acquire an E-property.

If the mind necessarily asymmetrically depends upon the body for its origination, then mainline physicalist emergentism more plausibly accounts for it. If the friend of emergentism, and the unity of phenomenal consciousness, must

decide between taking all on all of the peculiarities and problems of emergent dualism or rejecting PR (as Merricks does), then rejecting PR is the best alternative.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sellars, Wilfrid. "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in *Science, Perception and Reality*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Merricks, Trenton. "Composition and Vagueness," *Mind* 114, no. 455 (July, 2005): 629.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> William Hasker offers a slightly more sophisticated version of the argument in *The Emergent Self*. Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1999. 139. Nothing will hang on my criticizing this version of the argument instead of his original version.

<sup>5</sup> O'Connor, Timothy and Jacobs, Jonathan D. "Emergent Individuals." *Philosophical Quarterly*. 53, no. 213. October, 2003. 540.

<sup>6</sup> Hasker. 181.

<sup>7</sup> Hasker.190.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 177.

<sup>9</sup> My goal will not be to question whether a soul could "survive" through the causal activity of another body or even by an omnipotent being's causal efficacy. My critique will apply to the necessity of origin. I am not willing to broach the topic of persistence conditions in this paper. How things persist through change and how things come to initially exist are separable issues.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Clearly, Hasker unapologetically runs roughshod over the principle of the causal closure of the physical.

<sup>12</sup> Merricks, Trenton. *Objects and Persons*. New York: Oxford Press, 2001. 122.

<sup>13</sup> Dennett, Daniel. "The Cartesian Theater and 'Filling In' the Stream of Consciousness." Reprinted in Eds. Block, Ned. Flanagan, Owen, Guzeldere, Guven. *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 83-88.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Bisiach, Edoardo. "Understanding Consciousness: Clues from Unilateral Neglect and Related Disorder. See also Nagel, Thomas. "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness." Reprinted in Ed. John Perry. *Personal Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975. 227-246.

<sup>15</sup> Brain-bisection patients display disunity in "affective consciousness," which prevents a unified response to conscious stimulus. See Chalmers, David and Bayne, Timothy. "What Is the Unity of Consciousness?" in Ed. Cleermans, A. *The Unity of Consciousness: Binding, Integration, Dissociation*. Oxford: Oxford Press, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Shrader, Warren. "The Unity of Consciousness: Trouble for the Materialist or the Emergent Dualist?" *Faith and Philosophy* vol. 23, no.1 (2006): 33-44.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> I also find it reasonable to hold that it is necessarily true that if a mind is in any phenomenal state of consciousness, then it is in a single conscious state, which is possibly a complex (conjunctive) state.

<sup>19</sup> Van Inwagen. *Material Beings*. Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1990. 278. "A borderline life is, by definition, an event of which it is not definitely true and not definitely false that it is a life; but, quite independently of this, there will (no doubt) be simples of which it is not definitely true and not definitely false that they are caught up in that event."

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, David. *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1986. 212. Sider, Theodore. *Four-Dimensionalism: an Ontology of Persistence and Time*. (Sider argues for restricted composition only on a four-dimensionalist view of time) Oxford: Oxford Press, 2001, 155.

---

<sup>21</sup> Merricks. "Composition and Vagueness." 628.

<sup>22</sup> It isn't clear just which material simples the mind is causally dependent upon. Candidates may include the brain, the nervous system, the body, or simples in the environment that causally interact with the body. I use "body" here for concision.

<sup>23</sup> Hasker. *Emergent Self*. 192. Hasker says, "the volume of space within which the emergent mind exists must be at least sufficient to encompass those parts of the brain with which the mind interacts."

<sup>24</sup> Kripke, Saul A. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Press, 1972. 114, ff 56.

<sup>25</sup> Kripke. *Naming and Necessity*. 113.

<sup>26</sup> Hasker. *Emergent Self*. 195.

<sup>27</sup> Lowe, E.J. "Primitive Substances." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 54, no. 3. (September, 1994): 534.