

## Can the Emergent Self Reemerge? An Exploration of Emergent Dualism and Phenomena of Unconsciousness

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In his book *The Emergent Self*, William Hasker outlines his theory of emergent dualism. Here, I will attempt to prove that Hasker's emergent dualism and certain phenomena involving hiatuses in consciousness are inconsistent. As I will show, even the best resolution of this inconsistency is highly problematic and calls into question the coherence of Hasker's emergent dualism.

According to Hasker, emergent dualism “requires us to maintain, along with the materialists, that the potentiality for conscious life and experience really does exist in the nature of matter itself” (194). However, this constraint requires Hasker to address two apparent features of consciousness for which materialism does not allow: unity and free will (190). In regard to the former, Hasker claims that consciousness cannot be based solely in physical matter due to the unity-of-consciousness argument; because the physical is ever changing, materialism implies that an “individual” is actually a series of distinct individuals, each created by continual alteration of the physical constituents of the brain (144, 190). Hasker, therefore, concludes that there must exist an immaterial, unified subject of experience (190). By that same token, the deterministic nature of the physical and the apparent existence of libertarian free will associated with consciousness are incompatible: “It seems clear that [libertarian free will] cannot be a property that consists of the properties of, and relations between, the parts that make up a system of objects...It seems we shall need to recognize persons, or minds, or souls, as unitary subjects, not analyzable as complexes of parts” (178).

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To account for both unity-of-consciousness and free will, Hasker posits that an emergent, immaterial individual constitutes the mind:

A conscious experience simply is a unity, and to decompose it into a collection of separate parts is to falsify it... [W]hat is needed is an *emergent individual*, a new individual entity which comes into existence as a result of a certain functional configuration of the material constituents of the brain and nervous system. Endowed, as we take it to be, with libertarian freedom, this individual is able, in Searle's words, to "cause things that could not be explained by the causal behavior of the neurons." (190)

Hasker's account of the emergent individual seems to be consistent with the unity-of-consciousness, especially when taking for granted Hasker's claim that the emergent individual does not consist of "previously existing stuff" (196). He further accounts for the indeterministic nature of the emergent individual by claiming that, while brain-brain and brain-mind (emergent individual) interactions may be deterministic, mind-mind interactions are the source of free will (due to the mind's immaterial nature) (200). Hasker explains:

Given that the field of consciousness is "in place," the effects of brain on mind should also be viewed deterministically, but with this qualification: the resulting conscious state depends not only on the brain-state but on the mind's own internal evolution, so that one can't say in general that a given brain input inevitably produces a certain mental effect. (200)

In the above passage, Hasker seems to be claiming not only that his theory of the field of consciousness solves the unity-of-consciousness and free will problems which bedevil materialists, but that the field of consciousness is the criterion of personal identity. Hasker confirms that this is indeed his claim during his later discussion of survival of death and resurrection. "But is the emergent soul-field...the sort of thing that can possess self-identity over time? Clearly the answer assumed here is Yes" (233).

Since Hasker holds that the emergent individual, or "field of consciousness," is the criterion for personal identity, he claims that the sustaining or reembodying of the field of consciousness subsequent to bodily death would amount to personal "survival" or "resurrection." Hasker claims that given the logical possibility that a field of consciousness is sustainable without any physical base (a brain and body), an omnipotent God could create a resurrection body for a given field of consciousness (235).

Hasker offers an analogy to explain the origin and nature of “fields of consciousness.” He firmly rejects Cartesian substance dualism and stresses “that *the human mind is produced by the human brain and is not a separate element ‘added to’ the brain from outside*” (189). The emergent properties of the field of consciousness “manifest themselves when the appropriate material constituents are placed in special, highly complex relationships” (189–90). He gives the following analogy:

A magnetic field, for example, is a real, existing, concrete entity, distinct from the magnet which produces it . . . . The field is “generated” by the magnet in virtue of the fact that the magnet’s material constituents are arranged in a certain way . . . . But once generated, the field exerts a causality of its own, on the magnet itself as well as on other objects in the vicinity . . . . Keeping all this in mind, we can say that as *a magnet generates its magnetic field, so the brain generates its field of consciousness.* (190)

Let us examine the characteristics of fields of consciousness through the magnet analogy, especially as they pertain to identity. In physics, a magnetic field is characterized by its mathematical properties, e.g., the force the field exerts on a moving charged particle per unit charge and per unit mass. However, the mathematical properties of a magnetic field (analogous to qualitative properties of the mind) are *not* the criteria for the *numerical identity* of a magnetic field, for we must maintain that both magnetic fields and minds *can* maintain their numerical identity despite qualitative changes. This is clear when one considers the possibility of two magnetic fields which are qualitatively identical. For example, two magnetic fields may be generated by two qualitatively identical coils of wire with the same amount of current running through each, thereby producing mathematically identical fields (with all of the same quantitative properties). However, like two qualitatively identical brains producing two qualitatively identical fields of consciousness, the two magnetic fields are not one and the same field, i.e., they are *numerically* unique. In this case, the only distinguishing factors between the two magnetic fields—and thereby their only claims to unique identity—are their locations in space and the numerical difference between their generating coils.

Given the above numerical identity characterization of magnetic fields, I will now show that (1) a given magnetic field cannot “survive” a hiatus in existence and that (2) Hasker agrees with this claim. Hasker posits, and I agree, that there is a logical possibility that magnetic fields and fields of consciousness can persist (and maintain their numerical identities) in the absence of their generating bodies. Hasker explains this phenomenon by claiming that “[God] could directly sustain the field by his own power,

without the need for a material ‘generator’ of any kind”<sup>1</sup> (233). (In the case of the magnetic field, the coil of wire through which current flows is the generator; in the case of the field of consciousness, the brain is the generator.) Therefore, it is possible that God could destroy a coil of wire through which current was flowing yet preserve the magnetic field which the coil had produced.

Given this possibility, let us consider the case in which the current flowing through a coil of wire experiences a hiatus. In this scenario, the magnetic field produced before the hiatus is preserved by God after the current ceases to flow. When the hiatus ends and precisely the same amount of current once again flows through the coil, it produces a magnetic field qualitatively identical to the first. However, while the newly-generated magnetic field and the original magnetic field preserved by God are *qualitatively* identical, it is apparent that they are not *numerically* identical.

Given this logical possibility, it is clear that a magnetic field produced by a coil of wire cannot “survive” a hiatus in the current flow. The magnetic field produced *after* the current flow resumes is, in fact, a new individual, distinct from the original magnetic field that existed *before* the hiatus. The numerical identity of the second magnetic field cannot be contingent upon God failing to preserve the first; if it is *at all possible* that the first and second magnetic fields are numerically nonidentical, then they *must* be numerically nonidentical<sup>2</sup> (Hasker 220).

Now, I will offer an analogous thought experiment which calls into question Hasker’s field of consciousness as the criterion for identity. Suppose a person, Will, dies. His original field of consciousness departs from his body but is sustained by God disembodied. Will’s body is then resuscitated by means of artificially restarting the heart. Since Will’s brain and body have been reanimated, a new field of consciousness will be spontaneously and necessarily produced, for this is inherent in a living human being. This new field of consciousness is connected with Will’s body, and we have no apparent reason to doubt that Will is the same person that existed previously. Even Hasker would agree: “Certainly we show little inclination to question the identity of persons whose hearts are restarted by artificial means after they are ‘clinically dead’” (223). However, it seems that the original field of consciousness (sustained by God) should be the criterion

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Corcoran suggests that perhaps God could not preserve the identity of a field in this way, for the identity of a field may depend upon the identity of the generating body. Though I later suggest that accepting a similar claim is an option for Hasker if he is to avoid a contradiction in his account, my objection is distinct from Corcoran’s. Here, I side with Hasker in rejecting Corcoran’s claim. See Hasker’s footnote 69 on page 233.

<sup>2</sup> As shown by a formal proof of the necessity of identity by J. J. MacIntosh (Hasker 220).

of identity for Will, for it is the Will we originally knew. Since both the original and the new fields of consciousness cannot be Will, which one actually is Will? Hasker has given us reasons to believe either one could be Will!<sup>3</sup>

Hasker has thought of a comparable situation:

Suppose, finally, that the brain and nervous system of a living body were to enter a state of suspension in which the generation of the conscious field stops altogether. This might be the result of a profound coma or the cryonic suspension of a still-living body. If the cessation is irreversible, it may be plausible to identify this as the moment of death. But if reversal is possible, we should want to say that, during the cessation, the field has a “virtual existence” in the physical system which has supported it in the past and may do so again. Were reversal actually to occur, there is little doubt we would in practice acknowledge the same person to be in existence after the hiatus. (234–5)

The case in which the cessation of the field is irreversible does not present a problem if we do take this to be the true moment of death.<sup>4</sup> However, the case in which the field is said to have a virtual existence may entail a contradiction in claiming that numerical identity is retained across the hiatus and uncovers serious issues in Hasker’s account. Even if a person

<sup>3</sup> One may argue that this could not occur unless Will were brain dead and that, if this were the case, he could not be resuscitated. However, if technology has thus far allowed for the restarting of hearts, the restarting of brains does not seem to be farfetched, especially if the brain were reanimated soon enough as to prevent severe brain damage.

<sup>4</sup> Hasker’s accounts of resuscitation and resurrection potentially present a much more serious problem if we take “death” as a relative rather than an absolute term in the light of continually advancing medical technology. Hasker draws the distinction between reversible and irreversible cessation of the production of the field of consciousness based on the physical condition of the brain. However, at different points in history, the line between reversible and irreversible “brain trauma” (to use the term loosely) has been drawn at dramatically different points. We may have a distinct idea of what constitutes the difference between reversible and irreversible states now, but in the future, medical advancement may allow for the reversal of severe brain damage that we never thought possible. So where do we actually draw the line: between what is reversible and irreversible now in actuality, or what is reversible and irreversible in theory in the future? The former would presumably entail that the field of consciousness ceases “virtual existence” in accordance with the context of medical technology at the time, which seems to conflict with Hasker’s attempt to give an account of the field of consciousness in naturalistic terms. The latter would require us to answer the question as to where this line is drawn, or more importantly, whether it can be drawn. Would all damage and decay of the brain become “reversible in theory” on this account? This may seem preposterous, but it seems almost equally preposterous to draw the line at a distinct point in the degeneration of the brain. How would death ever separate a field of consciousness from the body for resurrection? In any case, in light of these unanswered questions, the following argument may apply to a much larger range of cases than indicated by the discussion that follows.

underwent cryonic suspension and it were possible that he would be reanimated one day, this does not ensure that he would ever actually be revived. In that case, when would the virtually-existent conscious field depart from the body to be resurrected? It seems implausible to think either that his conscious field would be lost forever or that God would choose an arbitrary time to resurrect the conscious field in the afterlife. Alternatively, if the conscious field departs from the human body to be resurrected immediately after cryonic suspension, any field produced in the reanimated corpse would be qualitatively similar but numerically distinguished from the original, departed field which exists elsewhere as a resurrected body. Whichever account Hasker prefers, a problem still remains concerning the necessity of identity. Since these two conscious fields could simultaneously exist, Hasker's claims about resurrection and resuscitation are incompatible with one another and fail to show which field of consciousness is numerically identical with the individual who existed before the cryonic freezing.

Hasker is left with one of two choices. (1) The field of consciousness is not the criterion for identity, and instead, the brain is ultimately the criterion for identity; in other words, the resuscitated Will is the true Will. Or (2) an individual cannot survive a hiatus in his field of consciousness's existence, that is, the resurrected Will is the true Will (Choice (2) is analogous to the case of the magnetic field, which cannot "survive" a hiatus in its existence). If Hasker adopts option (1), the only possible route to survival of death and subsequent resurrection would be Inwagen's body-switching<sup>5</sup> (231). However, while Hasker concedes that body-switching is logically possible, he believes that it "leaves much to be desired," requiring a world which "would seem to be 'massively irregular'" (223–24). If Hasker were to choose option (2), which I believe is more likely, Hasker would have to maintain that an individual's identity cannot be preserved in association with his earthly body after a hiatus in the field of consciousness's existence. Therefore, if I undergo cryonic freezing and my field of consciousness ceases to be generated, and then my body is revived, generating a new field of consciousness—that bodily individual is not me! I either no longer exist

<sup>5</sup> Van Inwagen holds that no immaterial soul exists but that a resurrection consistent with materialism is possible (Hasker 222). He theorizes that God "switches" an individual's actual, once-living body for a qualitatively identical, "fake" body upon the individual's death. (Therefore, the individual's corpse is not the same body which once lived.) God then resuscitates the "real" body, which is numerically identical with the once-living individual. Personal identity is maintained through the transition. Hasker shows that body-switching is the only coherent account of resurrection consistent with materialism (231). Since option (1) entails that the brain is the criterion for personal identity, a resurrection consistent with materialism is required.

(albeit my corpse is generating a new individual) or God is sustaining my field elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

Hasker may attempt to solve this problem by claiming that God maintains an individual's field of consciousness while the brain is in an idle state (i.e., when the brain is not currently producing and maintaining a field of consciousness). Then, God would "replace" the original field of consciousness when the individual's body is awakened or resuscitated. Thus, identity is maintained and the individual "survives" the hiatus.

However, this rebuttal conflicts with a legitimate concern which Edwin Hui raises in the context of reembodiment, with which Hasker conditionally sympathizes:

Wouldn't the newly formed resurrection body generate its *own* field of consciousness, and thus be unavailable to the self in need of reembodiment? It seems that this would indeed be the case, if we suppose that the body is first created, with its vital functions energized, *before* the "infusion" of the disembodied self. Rather, we must imagine the new body created from the very beginning *as the body of this very soul*; the renewed self must be "in charge" of the resurrection body right from the start. (235)

If the production of a field of consciousness is inherent and spontaneous when matter is sufficiently arranged, it seems that a new field of consciousness would be produced despite the fact that the old one was "in charge" from the start. It may be that, in the case of resurrection, God suspends the laws of nature so that the resurrection body will not produce its own field of consciousness and will only maintain one after it is infused with its intended soul. Perhaps the resurrection body is made of a different sort of matter that does not have this field-producing property.

However, in the case of resuscitation, would Hasker be willing to admit that God suspends this law of nature (which states that matter arranged sufficiently will produce a field of consciousness) every time someone's field of consciousness ceases to be generated? Considering that Hasker conditionally agrees with Hui and objects to the account of body-switching because it entails substantial irregularities, I think not. This sounds suspiciously like Cartesian substance dualism, which Hasker

<sup>6</sup> This also poses the following problem: what besides cryonic freezing or a profound coma causes a cessation in the generation of the field of consciousness? Every phenomenon which is ordinarily considered unconsciousness would entail either (1) the persistence of an "unconscious" field of consciousness or (2) a hiatus in the field of consciousness. (1) is a bizarre and seemingly incoherent account. (2) would result in the annihilation of the previous field of consciousness and the creation of a subsequent field. Personal identity would not be maintained across the hiatus in the field's existence. For example, if the phenomenon of dreamless sleep entailed (2), one would awake as a different individual than the one who tucked oneself in.

thoroughly rejects due to the interaction problem and other difficulties: “In rejecting [Cartesian substance dualism], we implicitly affirm that the human mind is produced by the human brain and is not a separate element ‘added to’ the brain from outside” (189). However, this would be the case if the aforementioned “replacement” of fields of consciousness is the method by which God maintains the identity of individuals in association with their bodies across hiatuses.

To reiterate, I see three possible ways to amend Hasker’s account of emergent dualism in order to account for these hiatuses, each of which entails rejecting one of his conflicting claims: (1) Ultimately, the brain is the criterion for identity, not the field of consciousness, and body-switching is the only possible route to resurrection; (2) Identity is not maintained across a hiatus in the field of consciousness, and for phenomena of unconsciousness which constitute hiatuses, we must maintain, contrary to intuition, that numerically distinct individuals exist before and after a given hiatus; (3) Identity is maintained across hiatuses by God’s intervention, entailing seemingly unacceptable irregularities in the physical world and a Cartesian dualism-type interaction problem. In choosing option (1), Hasker retains his explanation for unity-of-consciousness and free will, but not resurrection. Option (2) allows Hasker to retain his account of resurrection as well, but forces him to reject his claim that a field of consciousness can retain numerical identity through a virtual existence, and yields the bizarre result that numerically distinct individuals can occupy the same body, not simultaneously but over time. Option (3) allows Hasker to salvage his entire account of emergent dualism from the field’s origin to a hiatus in the field of consciousness, at which point Hasker would have to retract his insistent claim that the mind is not “added to” the brain from outside. I am inclined to say that Hasker would amend his account in accordance with option (2) or (3) since these allow him to give up substantially less of his story. However, each option yields results which are highly undesirable for Hasker’s purposes; this trilemma reveals a serious flaw in Hasker’s account of emergent dualism.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank Joel Pust for his helpful suggestions and comments on multiple drafts of this paper.



## Works Cited

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