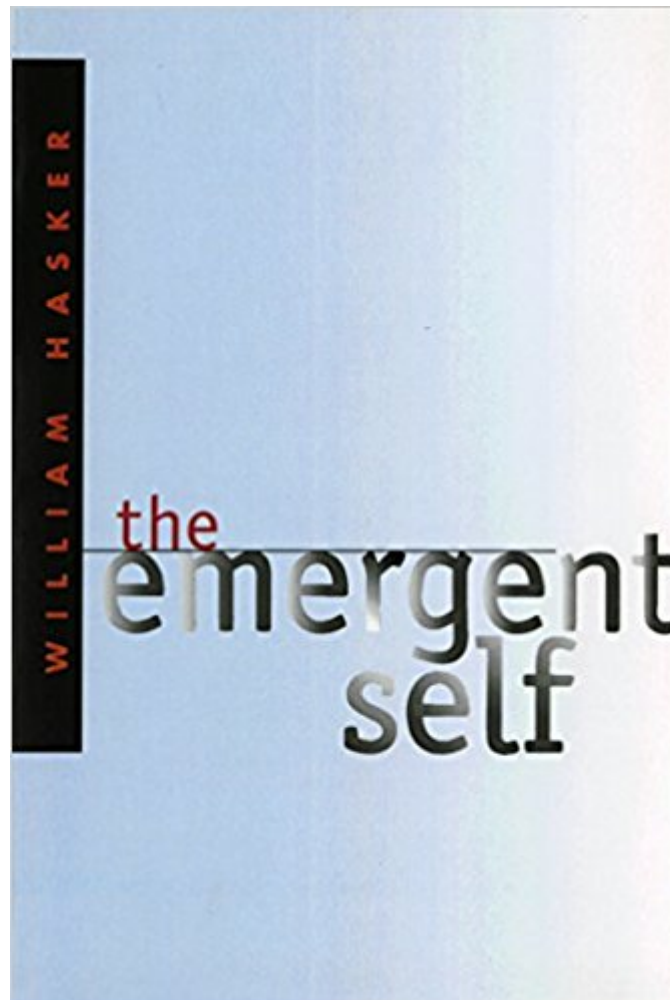




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The Emergent Self (Cornell Studies In The Philosophy Of Religion)



Synopsis

In *The Emergent Self*, William Hasker joins one of the most heated debates in analytic philosophy, that over the nature of mind. His provocative and clearly written book challenges physicalist views of human mental functioning and advances the concept of mind as an emergent individual. Hasker begins by mounting a compelling critique of the dominant paradigm in philosophy of mind, showing that contemporary forms of materialism are seriously deficient in confronting crucial aspects of experience. He further holds that popular attempts to explain the workings of mind in terms of mechanistic physics cannot succeed. He then criticizes the two versions of substance dualism most widely accepted today—“Cartesian and Thomistic”—and presents his own theory of emergent dualism. Unlike traditional substance dualisms, Hasker’s theory recognizes the critical role of the brain and nervous system for mental processes. It also avoids the mechanistic reductionism characteristic of recent materialism. Hasker concludes by addressing the topic of survival following bodily death. After demonstrating the failure of materialist views to offer a plausible and coherent account of that possibility, he considers the implications of emergentism for notions of resurrection and the afterlife.

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Customer Reviews

There was no question in my mind that this book deserved 5 stars. It is an important addition to the literature in philosophy of mind. As with many such works in philosophy, Hasker spends the first four fifths of his book examining other theories of mind including eliminativism, mind-brain identity, and various dualisms of both the substance and property variety. He explores their strengths, what motivates them, and their weaknesses. In doing this, he covers more ground and makes finer distinctions than many other recent entries in the field. He is also graciously fair. He takes pains to point out where and why incomplete or even incoherent theories appear reasonable in part. He examines other theories from their own internal viewpoint, what problems they try to solve, as well as in their relation to one another. He extends this fairness to his own theory offered in the last fifth of the book. He assesses not only its strengths compared to its competitors, but also its weaknesses. Along the way, Hasker understands that epistemological and phenomenological issues have metaphysical implications and he addresses these in some detail as the need arises. He goes a little off the deep end in his last chapter where he tries to show how each of the competing theories of mind might deal with the possibility of life-after-death. He recognizes that in the end, only theologically based theories (which he does not care to explore) can provide a metaphysical ground for some of the implications present in the qualities of mind. His own theory warrants a belief in the reality of libertarian free will agency (for example) but he admits in the end that any theory beginning with the assumption that the physical is the fundamental ground of everything cannot provide any metaphysical ground for it! To his greater credit he recognizes that reaching for quantum mechanics or information theory to provide that ground goes nowhere. He explores both of these moves commonly seen in the recent literature. I don't agree with Hasker's every conclusion but the depth and breadth of this exploration of recent work in the philosophy of mind is superbly done. Hasker writes well. His arguments are easy to follow. If you have any interest in this philosophical sub-discipline "The Emergent Self" should be a must read.

For theists looking for holes in physicalism, this book is about as good as it gets. Likewise, for people who find traditional cartesian dualism difficult to reconcile with empirical findings in neuroscience, but are not persuaded by physicalist theories of mind. The chapter on causal closure of the physical is especially good.

Solid and interesting.

great

As an amateur philosopher, I found this book extremely helpful in getting a handle on the different views and arguments about consciousness. It took a good look at materialism and dualism and explained why they are insufficient theories in both logical and prose form. The writing was very clear and, for the most part, concise. The author concludes with his own version of dualism which I didn't buy at all. But despite the ending, this book is worth buying for everything else.

I am giving this 2 stars because when I was reading the sample edition, it had text-to-speech. When I downloaded the full book - NO text-to-speech!

William Hasker's *The Emergent Self* is an excellent book on philosophy of mind. While the majority of philosophers in the field are gravitating towards forms of "physicalism" and "materialism" (even among Christians!), Hasker resists this trend with compelling arguments. This book is worth buying, if for no other reason, than its criticisms of a physicalist view of the mind. To date, I have not seen physicalists begin to answer the type of problems that Hasker brings to a point in this book. In addition to his devastating criticism of physicalism, Hasker's book is also truly innovative. He develops arguments in detail for a specific type of dualism--emergent dualism--that is significantly different from Cartesian dualists (like Swinburne) and Thomistic dualists (like Stump). Hasker's innovative philosophical work broadens the playing field for dualists, which many will welcome given the failures of physicalism and classical problems with traditional dualist views. Hasker shows that dualism is not a simple theory that fits one mold. Those only familiar with traditional dualisms will find new and significant ideas to engage in this articulate book. Hasker writes with lucidity, rigor, and wit that makes forging through the rough terrain of analytic philosophy of mind a delight, rather than a task. Those with an interest in physicalism, emergentism, dualism, or any general topic in the philosophy of mind will benefit from the work put into this book.

Lucid style, good argument. Rich and highly illuminative. Good for amateurs as well as for experts.

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