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SOME MUSINGS ABOUT WILLIAM HASKER'S PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

INTRODUCTION

It had been several years since I last read William Hasker's book *The Emergent Self* (HASKER 1999). Upon rereading it in preparation for writing this paper, I was once again impressed by just how good it is. It is a privilege to be able to interact with some of Professor Hasker's views in *The Emergent Self*. While he and I for the most part broadly agree in our opposition to much of the contemporary philosophical community concerning issues in the philosophy of mind that he discusses in his book, there are nevertheless *seemingly* some domestic disputes between him and me about certain matters.[1] In this paper, I will focus on two of these disagreements (I have expressed other domestic disagreements—for example, about what explains the reality of and our belief in the existence of the soul—in the book *In Search of the Soul* [GOETZ 2005]).The first disagreement concerns Hasker's treatment of what is widely known today as the argument from reason. The second is about his account of libertarian freedom.

SOME TERMINOLOGY

Before turning to Hasker's treatments of the argument from reason and libertarian freedom, it is helpful to set forth three background concepts that shape his discussions of these topics.

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[1] I say there are *seemingly* some domestic disputes because I might misunderstand Professor Hasker's views. If so, he can set me straight. From here on in the text, I omit "seemingly".

First, Hasker defines an intentional experience of a self/soul as an event (episode) such as a belief, desire, decision or choice which has content (1).[2] A belief, desire, or choice is about something distinct from the event itself (e.g., William Hasker's philosophical work) by way of its intentional content (1). For example, I can believe that I am writing about William Hasker's philosophical work, I can desire that I write about William Hasker's philosophical work, and I can choose (decide) that I write about William Hasker's philosophical work. Belief, desire, and choice are modes of experience, and "that I write about William Hasker's philosophical work" is the content of those modes. The content of a particular mode need not remain the same across modes. I might believe that I am writing about William Hasker's philosophical work, desire that I be watching the Super Bowl, and choose that I finish working on this paper for the time being in a few minutes.

Second, Hasker recognizes two contexts in which reasons do explanatory work. One context is reasons for belief (68–69). For example, as an instance of deductive reasoning, if I see or am aware (70, 73) and believe both that all books written by William Hasker are interesting and that *The Emergent Self* is written by William Hasker, and I do not die, lose consciousness, or have my awareness of the premises interrupted by a loud explosion, etc., then I cannot help but be aware of and inferentially believe the conclusion that *The Emergent Self* is interesting. The contents of the premises of which I am aware and believe are causally relevant as reasons for the causal production of my awareness of and belief in the conclusion by my awareness of and belief in the premises.

A second context in which reasons do explanatory work is reasons for action (94–95). For example, I might both have a reason for copying my friend's answers to the exam questions (the reason that I receive a passing grade) and a reason for not copying my friend's answers to the exam questions (the reason that I fulfill my moral obligations not to steal from another and lie about what is my work). I am free either to choose to copy my friend's answers to the exam questions for the reason that I receive a passing grade or to choose not to copy my friend's answers to the exam questions for the reason that I fulfill my moral obligations not to steal and lie.

Third, Hasker discusses the causal closure of the physical world according to which any physical event that has a cause (is an effect event) at time t has a physical cause at time t (69), where that physical cause completely or fully explains that physical effect event (50). What is it for a causal event to

[2] Numbers in parentheses refer to pages of *The Emergent Self*.

be physical? Hasker settles on the definition that a causal event that is physical is a mechanistic explanation of its effect, where an explanation that is mechanistic is fundamentally non-teleological (non-purposive) and non-intentional (63).

THE ARGUMENT FROM REASON

Consider again the following example of a deductive argument: All books written by William Hasker are interesting; *The Emergent Self* is written by William Hasker; therefore, *The Emergent Self* is interesting. Now, if I am aware of and believe both that all books written by William Hasker are interesting and that *The Emergent Self* is written by William Hasker, then, assuming I do not lose consciousness, die, or have my awareness interrupted by a loud explosion, etc., I cannot help but be aware of and believe that *The Emergent Self* is interesting. The contents of the premises of which I am aware and believe are causally relevant for my causally inferred awareness of and belief in the conclusion (69, 73). I cannot help but be aware of and believe in the conclusion because my awareness of and belief in the premises *fully* or *completely* explains, by causally producing, my awareness of and belief in the conclusion (69). In Hasker's terminology, this is an instance of intentional (mental)-to-intentional causation (50) in which one intentional event *qua* intentional causes another intentional event *qua* intentional.

What I find perplexing at this point is how this intentional-to-intentional causal sequence is teleological, which it seemingly must be if, given Hasker's account of what it is to be physical, it is not mechanistic in nature. Hasker recognizes that an event that is mechanistically caused can also have a true teleological explanation. He provides an example of a thermostat which turns a furnace on and off for the purpose that it maintain a constant temperature. In this example, Hasker contrasts the *proximate* mechanistic causal explanation, in which a strip of metal that is cooled by the ambient air becomes bent in a way that it closes an electrical circuit, with the non-proximate or *distant* teleological explanation of the design of the thermostat, which Hasker claims is a *cause* in the form of the human desire for a comfortable environment (63). Hasker further emphasizes the difference between the proximate mechanical cause of the thermostat's functioning and the proximate non-mechanistic, intentional cause that is operative in the causal sequence of awareness and belief in deductive reasoning from premises to

conclusion (64–75). But if the proximate explanation in deductive reasoning, though intentional and non-mechanistic, is still causal in nature, in what sense is it teleological?

Let us assume a teleological explanation is fundamentally and irreducibly different from a causal explanation. That is, a teleological explanation is fundamentally a non-causal form of explanation. Given this is the case, there is *prima facie* a way of carving up explanatory reality that better reflects the nature of things than that developed by Hasker. Given his conception of the intentional, it is plausible to think of what is physical as what is non-intentional, and a physical explanation as a non-intentional explanation. However, it is equally plausible to maintain that an intentional explanation is a genus of which there are two species. One species is intentional causal explanation, and a second species is intentional teleological explanation. With respect to the argument from reason, awareness-to-awareness/belief-to-belief causation is an instance of intentional causal, and not intentional teleological, explanation. That this intentional explanation is causal, and not teleological, in nature rightly captures the fact that we are *patients*, not *agents*, with respect to the inferential process that is our reasoning. We are *passive*, not *active*. Our being aware of and believing a certain content as a result of reasoning is something that happens to us, it is not something we do. It is because of our passivity that we cannot directly choose to believe anything whatever at the end of our reasoning. For example, while I am sometimes free to choose (an action) to direct my awareness onto certain contents as opposed to other contents, once I have directed my awareness onto those contents and believe them, then, provided I do not lose consciousness, die, have my awareness interrupted by a loud explosion, etc., I cannot help inferring what those contents imply. For example, once I am aware of and believe both that all books written by William Hasker are interesting and *The Emergent Self* is written by William Hasker, I am causally determined by the awareness and belief to be aware of and believe the conclusion that *The Emergent Self* is interesting. I cannot instead choose to believe as a conclusion that the pie tastes awful, the New York Jets won this year's Super Bowl, or George Washington is currently president of the United States.

Given the distinction between intentional causal and intentional teleological explanation, the argument from reason remains sound. According to that argument, we begin by recognizing that we do reason (if we cannot reason, then no one can argue for anything) and then ask whether the physicalist can provide an adequate account of it. The physicalist, as Hasker suggests, as-

sumes the causal closure of the physical world according to which any physical event that has a cause at a time *t* has a complete physical cause at *t*. The physicalist also assumes that each intentional event is either identical with or (strongly) supervenient on a physical event (67; Hasker, for the sake of discussion, accepts as the core idea of supervenience that a supervenient event is dependent on and determined by its subvenient base [40–41]). He argues, quite persuasively in my estimation, that given these physicalist assumptions there is no explanatory space for an intentional event. But rather than maintain, as Hasker does, that the argument from reason shows that physicalism must be false because there is an intentional *teleological* explanation of an intentional effect event when we reason, what the argument from reason shows is that physicalism must be false because there is an intentional *causal* explanation of an intentional effect event when we reason. As Hasker himself writes at the conclusion of his treatment of the argument from reason, "[c]onscious mental [intentional] states have to be recognized as causally effective precisely in virtue of their mental [intentional] content" (80).

What then about intentional teleological explanation? Is anything ever explained teleologically? Most definitely. Hasker's own example of creating a thermostat for a purpose is a good example of a teleological explanation. However, unlike awareness of and belief in intentional content as a result of an inference, creating a thermostat is an action. It is something we do. *Agents* create thermostats. Thus, Hasker rightly maintains (see the following section) that our actions are explained in terms of purposes. He also rightly believes that we have libertarian free will (again, see the following section) in which a choice is a *free* act with intentional content (for example, I choose that I raise my arm) that is made for a reason (for example, that I get the instructor's attention). In the next section, I examine what Hasker has to say about the topics of a purposeful explanation of an action and libertarian free will. I will argue that because he fails to understand the non-causal nature of teleological explanation he wrongly maintains that the explanation of a choice, like the explanation of a resultant awareness and belief of a conclusion in inferential reasoning, is causal in nature. The two kinds of explanation are closely related, as Hasker claims (68), but not in the way he maintains. Both kinds of explanation are related insofar as they involve intentionality. But they are unrelated insofar as one is causal, while the other is teleological, in nature.

FREE WILL AND AGENCY

Like other philosophers (Hasker quotes Thomas Nagel and John Searle [82–83]), Hasker believes it seems to us that we have libertarian free will; that is, it seems to us that we make undetermined choices in the sense that while we chose one way at a time *t* we could have chosen another way (otherwise) at *t* relative to the very same circumstances up until time *t* when we made the choice that we did. However, unlike many of these other philosophers (including Nagel and Searle), Hasker believes that the way it seems to us regarding our libertarian free will is the way it is. We genuinely have libertarian free will. After explaining why he believes Harry Frankfurt's argument against the existence of alternative possibilities (the freedom to choose otherwise at time *t*) fails, Hasker turns his attention to what he says might be the more difficult part of the free-will problem, namely "the task of giving an illuminating *positive characterization* of the nature of the act of free choice" (94). How can the libertarian adequately describe an undetermined free choice so that is does not end up being a random or chance event? If free will can be explained neither by chance nor by causal necessitation, how can it be explained (99)?

Hasker begins his answer to this question by pointing out that libertarians have traditionally appealed to the concept of agent causation in explicating libertarian free will, and he will do the same (99). In addition, he asks his readers to "keep in mind an example of a person's making a choice in accordance with reasons" (99). I would suggest that readers of this paper keep in mind that Hasker has, knowingly or unknowingly, put two kinds of explanation of a choice on the table. One, agent causation, which, as he says, is a variety of causation (100), and reasons, which are teleological or purposive in nature. But are both kinds of explanation needed for an adequate account of libertarian free will? And if they are needed, how are they related? These are questions that will guide my discussion of Hasker's account of libertarian free will in the rest of this section.

Hasker asserts that some form of a realist theory of causation is most consonant with agent causation, and he appeals to the idea of a causal power had by a substance (100–101). Both agent causation as causal power and event causation, which involves one effect event causally producing another effect event (101), occur in substances. In the case of agent causation, the agent, which is a substance, has different reasons to act and may choose for

one of those reasons to act in one of the alternative ways made possible by those reasons. Hasker summarizes the agent-causationist position as follows:

> A person finds herself in a situation where there is more than one thing that might be done; typically, she has reasons for selecting two or more of the (mutually incompatible) options that present themselves. She then *decides* which of those options to actualize; her decision is guided by her motivations and values, but is not determined by them, so that under exactly the same circumstances she might have chosen differently. (101)

Hasker goes on to add that "human action has to be understood as fundamentally teleological" in contrast with event-causal interactions among particles which are mechanistic in nature (101). And when an agent, as a *self* or *person*, makes a choice, "Only the self or person … is able to exercise free will and make the choice" (102). In sum, performing an action is a primitive and irreducible reality in the sense that it cannot be analyzed or explicated in terms of the behavior of impersonal or subpersonal entities (86).

According to Hasker, agent-causes produce their actions (104). Is the agent-causing of the action itself an action? Hasker maintains that though agent-causing is something done by an agent, it is not itself an action. Rather, it is an essential part of an action: "When I perform some action, such as lifting my hand, my agent-causing that action … is not a separate action distinct from the action of lifting my hand. Rather, it is an essential component of the action of lifting my hand" (105). What is immediately produced by the agent's agent-causing is an effective intention or volition (decision) that is a mental event (105).

Hasker says that although agent-causing an action is something done by an agent, it itself is not an action but a component of an action. But what someone who is considering agent causation might also ask is whether the agent-causing of an action is itself an *event* (as the discussion of believing intentional content in the previous section made clear, an occurrence can be an event without being an action). Presumably, Hasker would answer "No". But is "No" a plausible answer? He maintains that agent causation is rightly understood in terms of the concept of causal power (100–101). But it is plausible to think that a substance *exercises* its causal power when it (the substance) is active. For example, Hasker tells us that only a self or person is able to "exercise free will" (102). Therefore, because we supposedly need agent causation as causal power to understand free will, it seems eminently reasonable to think that agent causation is essentially the exercising of

causal power. However, an exercising of causal power most certainly seems to be an event, an occurrence, a happening. So why deny, as presumably Hasker does deny, that an instance of agent-causing is itself an event?

The answer to this question seems to be that if an instance of agent-causing is itself an event then, assuming it has an explanation, it must be caused to occur. But why think this is the case? Presumably because one believes either or both that every event has a cause or that if an event does not have a cause then it occurs by chance or randomly. But why think that either alternative is the case? After all, as I pointed out a few paragraphs back, Hasker himself has made clear that there are two kinds of explanations. There is causal explanation and teleological explanation. So why could not an uncaused exercising of a power be an event whose occurrence is not a matter of chance/random because it has a teleological explanation?

For the moment, let us assume for the sake of discussion that an instance of agent-causing is not an event. What, if anything, explains its "occurrence"? It seems odd to maintain that it has no explanation. That would imply that an agent just exercises its agent-causal power to cause an action, period, and any query for an explanation of the agent-causing would be analogous to asking what the color of agent-causing is. No, the question about the explanation of agent-causing seems appropriate because it is appropriate, and the obvious answer to it is that an instance of agent-causing has a teleological explanation. It is explained by a reason. But if that is the case, what is unacceptable about maintaining that an uncaused action, which is an event, has a teleological explanation in the form of a reason? But what is this uncaused action that is explained by a reason? Well, why not maintain that it is a choice, where a choice is an exercising of the power to choose? In other words, why not maintain that an agent, which is a substantial person or self, has the power to choose, and when it exercises its power to choose, which is an event, it does so for a reason?

Perhaps Hasker will respond that an agent must ultimately have direct control over its choice (91), and the only way this is possible is if it has ultimate, direct control over the agent-causing of its choice, where the agent-causing "occurs" for a reason. But why can it not be the case that an agent has ultimate, direct control over the exercising of its power to choose, where this exercising of power is an event whose occurrence is explained by a reason?

At this point, readers might plausibly wonder if this debate about the need for and the nature of agent causation is nothing more than a word game. After all, Hasker points out that when articulating a theory of agent causa-

tion there are choices to be made, and he concedes that other agent causationists might make them differently (99). Is it not the case that I am, in my advocacy of the reality of an uncaused teleologically explained choice, like Hasker, an agent causationist? Am I not simply articulating a different version of agent causation than that proposed by Hasker?

I sympathize with readers who wonder whether the debate about agent causation is not just a semantic tussle. But it is important to make clear that it is *agent causationists* who have maintained that an adequate libertarian account of freedom cannot include the idea of an uncaused choice (here, a reader should read the works of Roderick Chisholm, Richard Taylor, and, more recently, Timothy O'Connor). It is *agent causationists* who insist on introducing the idea that there are two kinds of causes, agents and events, and maintain that while it is plausible to claim that uncaused events are by nature random and uncontrolled because inexplicable, it is implausible to claim that uncaused agent-causings are also be nature random and inexplicable. Readers should pause and ask themselves whether it is plausible to insist that there really are two kinds of causation, agent causation and event causation. Why not instead think there is only one kind of causation, namely event causation, and maintain, as Hasker himself suggests, that there are two kinds of explanations, causal and teleological, and at least some events, namely choices, lack a causal explanation but have a teleological explanation (leaving aside the issue whether there are events with no explanation). Thus, contrary to what agent causationists would have us believe, a choice, as an event which lacks a causal explanation, is not inexplicable and thereby random. It is not random because it has a teleological explanation. One can, then, simply dispense with agent causation because it does no explanatory work. It is explanatorily superfluous.

As I have already mentioned, Hasker maintains that explaining an action in terms of a reason is a fundamentally teleological notion (101). Yet, when he discusses a case where "one's reasons may be so compelling as to literally 'leave one with no alternative'" he reverts to causal categories and describes the action performed in light of such reasons as "causally determined" (107). Hasker gives the example of being on a committee examining job applicants where it becomes clear that one of the three finalists far outranks the other two in terms of the qualities needed for the department. "It strikes me as plausible to say that at this point you … are *unable* to cast your vote for one of the other candidates, or to refrain from voting for the best candidate" (106). Given this is the case, what is unclear is why Hasker

apparently believes this inability to do otherwise is or must be a case of causal determinism. If, as he claims, reasons provide teleological explanations of actions, why not conclude that there are cases in which actions are teleologically determined?

A final court of appeal for the reality of, if not the need for, agent causation in explaining libertarian free will might be what it is of which we are aware when we choose and act. Are we aware of agent-causing our choices or actions? Hasker affirms that he has such an awareness (107–8). "Undeniably, it does seem to many of us that we *do* observe agent causation—that, for instance, I observe *that I lift my arm*, and not merely *that I will for my arm to rise, and subsequently it does rise*" (108). However, there is good reason to demur. While I, like Hasker, believe we have libertarian free will, I am not aware of agent-causing any of my actions. Hasker believes that when he chooses to raise his arm he agent-causes his choice, where the agent-causing of the choice to raise his arm is not itself a separate action that is distinct from the action of raising his arm (105). In my own case, I am aware of choosing to raise my arm but not aware of agent-causing my choosing to raise my arm. And my action of raising my arm seems to me to be a bodily action that is distinct from my choice to raise it (my choice is a mental action that is not a part of the chosen bodily action), where I am no more aware of agent-causing my raising of my arm than I am aware of agent-causing my choice to raise it.

As I mentioned over a decade ago in my book *Freedom, Teleology, and Evil* (GOETZ 2008, 1–2), I once asked Roderick Chisholm, the father of contemporary thought about agent causation, whether he was aware of agent-causing anything. To my surprise, he responded that he was not, and he went on to say that he had *invented* agent causation to solve the problem of randomness that he believed (wrongly, he concluded) accompanied an affirmation of uncaused actions. Thus, he ended up renouncing agent causation because he believed the problem he had invented it to solve no longer existed.

Finally, it is important to make clear that if we do move our physical bodies because of our choices to move them for reasons, then there is genuine intentional-to-physical causation. Thus, not only does the fact that we reason falsify the principle of causal closure, but also the fact that we move our physical bodies as we choose for reasons falsifies the causal closure principle.

CONCLUSION

The principle of causal closure has played an essential role in the contemporary development of arguments against the seemingly obvious fact that our reasoning and free choices explain the course of events in the physical world. William Hasker argues that there is no good reason to think that in this case what seems obvious is not as it seems. Like Hasker, I believe the person who accepts the obvious fact that there is intentional-to-intentional and intentional-to-physical explanation has no good reason to accept the principle of causal closure. And along with Hasker I believe this is good news for our ordinary view of ourselves which the contemporary philosophy of mind has relentlessly called into question.[3]

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S u m m a r y

While William Hasker and I for the most part broadly agree in our opposition to much of the contemporary philosophical community concerning issues in the philosophy of mind that he discusses in his book, there are nevertheless seemingly some domestic disputes between him and me about certain matters concerning the nature of events involving the self. In this paper, I will focus on two of these disagreements. The first disagreement concerns Hasker's treatment of what is widely known today as the argument from reason and whether the events involved in our reasoning are essentially causal or teleological in nature. The second disagreement is about Hasker's account of libertarian freedom, and whether agent causation is required to explain our free choices.

Keywords: agent causation; argument from reason; libertarian freedom; mental causation; physical causation; purposeful/teleological explanation.

[3] Thanks to J. P. Moreland for reading an early draft of this paper and offering several helpful suggestions.

KILKA PRZEMYŚLEŃ NA TEMAT FILOZOFII UMYSŁU WILLIAMA HASKERA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Pomimo tego, że autor zgadza się z Williamem Haskerem co do opozycji wobec wielu rozwiązań we współczesnej filozofii umysłu, istnieją między nimi pewne punkty sporne. W artykule autor omawia dwa z nich. Pierwszy dotyczy traktowania przez Haskera tego, co jest dziś powszechnie znane jako argument z rozumu, związany z zagadnieniem, czy rozumowania mają zasadniczo charakter przyczynowy czy teleologiczny. Drugi spór dotyczy poglądu Haskera na wolność libertariańską i tego, czy do wyjaśnienia naszych wolnych wyborów potrzebne jest odwołanie się do przyczynowości.

Słowa kluczowe: przyczynowe działanie osoby; argument z rozumu; wolność libertariańska; przyczynowość mentalna; przyczynowość fizyczna; wyjaśnienie celowościowe/teleologiczne.