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Souls Without Thisnesses: A Rejoinder to Joshua Farris

William Hasker
Philosophy Department
Huntington University
Huntington, Indiana
whasker@huntington.edu

Abstract: In his latest response, Joshua Farris states that I have failed to account for the particularity, the individual existence, of human souls. I show how this feature can be accounted for by emergent dualists, without invoking thisnesses or haecceities.

In his latest response¹ Joshua Farris states, reasonably enough, that he cannot respond to all of the points made in my previous papers.² I would point out that, in particular, he fails to respond to my complaint that he does not, as advertised, provide a plausible account of “animal-human continuity in biological evolution.”³ Indeed, the present response provides additional evidence of his failure in this respect.⁴ Instead, he focuses on my failure to “offer any account of the soul’s particularity.” That is a fair challenge, and I shall attempt to respond to it.

In my paper I claimed that a thisness of the sort presupposed by Farris’s objection cannot possibly exist. And because of this, his objection posed no threat to my position. Apparently he agrees with me, with regard to the understanding of “thisness” I attributed to him; but this is not, he says, the way he understands that notion. I was assuming (admittedly, without clear proof from his article) that for him “The soul’s thisness is subjectively apprehended by the subject as ‘what it is like to be me.’”

¹ Joshua R. Farris, “A Response to Hasker’s Emergent Dualism and Emergent Creationism”: <https://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=415>

² “What has CERN to Do with Jerusalem?” and “Emergent Dualism and Emergent Creationism: A Response to Joshua Farris,” *Philosophia Christi* 20:1 (2018), pp. 53-60 and 93-97.

³ Joshua R. Farris, “Souls, Emergent and Created: Why Mere Emergent Dualism is Insufficient,” *Philosophia Christi* 20:1 (2018), 83-92; 85.

⁴ In estimating the number of souls to date at 7 billion, he clearly is thinking only of human souls. Apparently, dogs, dolphins, apes, and other animals are either without souls entirely, or else their souls, unlike those of human beings, do not require “thisnesses” in order to exist.

My objection was that such an apprehension on my part is a “suchness” and not a “thisness,” and is therefore not a candidate for the role of a thisness. Farris agrees that such a subjective state cannot qualify as a thisness. He says, “the . . . notion that there is a sense of self would not itself account for my being *myself*.” It is good that we agree on this point. But in that case I have difficulty understanding his reason for saying that the mind’s “particularity . . . becomes apparent to the individual that has an inside perspective to her thoughts.”⁵ How can the particularity become apparent from an inside perspective, when any such perspective will simply be another suchness that cannot account for the particularity?

Be that as it may, Farris wants me to account for the particularity, the individual existence, of the self, a topic he finds that I have failed to address in earlier writings. So I shall attempt to respond to his concern. In brief, it is my view that *there are no thisnesses or haecceities; there is no philosophical need for them, nor any reason to think there are such things*. Readers will be aware that that this topic has been extensively discussed, and I cannot review that discussion in this short reply.⁶ I will however try to address the reasons why Farris thinks they are indispensable.

According to Farris, my rejection of thisnesses leaves a serious hole in my position. In brief, it means that I lack any metaphysical basis for distinguishing one soul from another. He writes, “it is conceivable that another mind could exist in a possible world instantiating all the same properties I instantiate in this world.” Well, there are many other possible worlds in which *I myself* exist; most and perhaps all of those worlds are worlds which share with the actual world an initial segment up to and including the time of my coming into existence. No doubt there are also logically possible worlds with such duplicate minds which are *not* me; if so, Farris wonders how I can distinguish such “not-me” doubles from myself. To make the example more graphic, let’s suppose that one of these doubles – call him “Bill2” – has been brought to life and installed as a denizen of this, our actual world. Farris sees here an opportunity to press his point; he confronts me and Bill2 with a challenge: “Since both of you are emergent dualists, and you reject the existence of thisnesses, how do you account for the fact that there are two of you and not just one? How does each of you account, metaphysically, for the difference between *his own* soul and that of his counterpart?”

⁵ “Souls, Emergent and Created,” p. 87.

⁶ Richard Swinburne makes an interesting case for thisnesses for souls in *Mind Brain, and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 33-38; unfortunately his argument is too complex to discuss here.

To which one of us replies (it doesn't matter which one), "My own soul is the soul of *this* body (pointing to himself); it was initially generated, and has been sustained ever since, by *this* body, brain, and nervous system, something that is not true of any other soul in this or any other world."

Very likely Farris will not be satisfied with this answer, but why not? It might be that he will now demand an account of the metaphysical basis for distinguishing one's own body from *its* duplicates, either in this world or another. This however is not his position; he makes it clear that he does not think material things have, or need to have, thisnesses. Or, he might think that, whereas the ordinary ways of identifying objects suffice in the physical domain, something more robust, more fundamental, is needed for immaterial souls. To this, my reply is that the identity of a stone or a bulldozer seems to be quite robust and metaphysically satisfying, even if these entities do not possess some of the more interesting properties that inhere in souls. A final possibility is that he might think that souls are not in fact metaphysically tied to the bodies that generate them, in such way that the souls can be identified by their relation to those bodies. He might think, for example, that any or all of me, Bill2, or Farris himself could have been born in a different body in a different time and place -- say, in ancient Mesopotamia. If he does think this, then he might well also think thisnesses are needed in order to individuate such souls and distinguish them from others. (I believe this line of thought does influence Swinburne's insistence on thisnesses for souls.) Bill2 and I, however, being emergent dualists, do not countenance this possibility, so we have no need to provide for it.⁷

It may be helpful for me to state here concisely my agreements and disagreements with Farris. I agree with him that thisnesses cannot plausibly be explained by natural laws, and so they are not available to emergent dualists. But I disagree about the need for thisnesses. He states that in the case of two individuals with an identical sense of self, "there are two subjects quite apart from the identical senses they may have of themselves. Rather, this helps make the case that there exists primitive thisnesses independent from one's spatial location, the body one has, and the properties one comes to have." I agree that there are two subjects, but I think the difference between the subjects is derived from the different bodies each subject originates from.

⁷ But one might ask, what about angels and other non-embodied intelligences? The traditional view is that each angel is a distinct species, which means that their individuality is already given. Others have held that there is a kind of "spiritual matter," so that a hylomorphic view is applicable here. I am content to leave this question to those with a better knowledge of angelic metaphysics than my own.

This of course is impossible if the same soul could have been bestowed on any number of different bodies, and it seems that this must be what Farris believes. This assumption, however, begs the question against emergent dualism, and I see no reason to accept it.

William Hasker (Ph.D., Edinburgh) is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Huntington University, where he taught from 1966 until 2000.