

Three emergentist theories of consciousness

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Abstract

The notion of emergence was first formulated by the so-called “British emergentists” in the 19th and 20th centuries to justify the differences between physical phenomena and vital or mental ones. Emergentism represented an alternative to vitalism and mechanism in rejecting both substantial dualism and the complete deducibility of the nature and behaviour of complex phenomena such as the mind from their physical components.

In this talk, after a brief introduction about how emergent phenomena can be described, I examine two significant contemporary emergentist theories of phenomenal consciousness. The first, formulated by David Chalmers, recognises consciousness as a strongly emergent phenomenon in virtue of its fundamental qualitative novelty. The second, offered by Jessica Wilson, sees in consciousness an instance of weak – but still metaphysical – emergence in virtue of its novel causal profile.