



Cartesian Libertarianism 'Intrinsic Autonomy' and the Need for Other-Worldly Substance¹

Joshua R. Farris 

Professor of Theology of Science, Research Faculty, Ruhr Universität Bochum, Catholic
Faculty, Bochum, Germany. Joshua.Farris@ruhr-uni-bochum.de

Abstract

Research Article



“You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men!” (The Great Dictator, Charlie Chaplin) Contemporary discussions on freedom have recently drawn attention to the implications of the mind-body relation. Historically, the notion of freedom has centered on various naturalistic options, compatibilism, and weaker notions of libertarian freedom. This leaves strong agent-causal libertarianism as a minority position. Entering these discussions, we seek to establish the relation between a particular mind-body view and strong agent-causal libertarianism. We make two claims upon characterizing strong agent-causal libertarianism. First, we argue that strong agent-causal libertarianism requires some version of substance dualism (or immaterialist agency). Second, we argue that strong agent-causal libertarianism probably requires something like classical or Cartesian substance dualism. Drawing from the philosopher John Foster in *The Immaterial Self*, we show that the central defining feature of the sort of libertarian agency under investigation is ‘intrinsic autonomy’. While we recognize that Cartesianism is unpopular in contemporary discussions, we agree with Foster that it is probably what is entailed if we are going to ground something like a strong agent-causal libertarianism. The substance needed to explain this robust form of freedom begins to look like something not of this world and more like the substance described early on by Rene Descartes.

Keywords

Cartesian, libertarian, intrinsic autonomy, primitive, Thomist, emergentism.

Received: 2024/05/28 ; Received in revised form: 2024/06/18 ; Accepted: 2024/06/25 ; Published online: 2024/07/02

▣ Farris, J.R. (2024). Cartesian Libertarianism ‘Intrinsic Autonomy’ and the Need for Other-Worldly Substance. *Journal of Philosophical Theological Research*, 26(3), 25-46. <https://doi.org/10.22091/jptr.2024.10807.3068>

▣ Copyright © The Author



Introduction

There exists a growing body of literature exploring the relationship between mind-body constitution and freedom (e.g., Koons and Bealer, 2010; Farris and Taliaferro, 2017; Baker and Goetz, 2010; Rickabaugh and Moreland, 2023; Timpe, Griffith, and Levy, 2016; Gocke, 2012).¹ It is not unsurprising that this same literature has often noted a distinctive intuition that if one desires a robust form of freedom (i.e., namely some version of libertarian freedom), then it will likely require substance dualism (or a similar view of the subject like idealist-immaterialism). I concur with this intuition and argue that what I will call “strong agent” causal libertarianism likely requires a classical form of substance dualism. There is one under-appreciated philosopher, John Foster, who I believe develops this intuition in a way that demands additional attention in this discussion. In other words, if I want a strong agent of causal libertarianism, then it probably requires Cartesian dualism because something like what is captured in Foster’s notion of ‘intrinsic autonomy’ is the defining feature of such freedom. And, if this is the case, it rules out naturalistic agency, emergentism, panpsychism, and some versions of substance dualism.² More than this, what I do not see at the intersection of the philosophy of mind literature and freedom literature is just how radical the notion of freedom is and the type of agency that is required. Unfortunately, Foster’s notion of ‘intrinsic autonomy’ demands additional reflection at the intersection of the unity of agent consciousness because it goes beyond satisfying the various features often discussed in the literature, namely ‘control’, ‘responsibility’, and a singular feature making the agent a source (i.e source libertarianism), or agent-involved event (as with event-causal libertarianism), but even more than the fact that a distinct substance is required (agent-causal libertarianism). Something more is required than the type of substances often described, so here I find the unique contribution of the Cartesian account. I wish to highlight the radically distinct substance, which prioritizes the ‘other-worldly’ nature

1. A special thank you to Jerry L. Walls for his comments and suggestions.

2. In what follows, I use the following terms somewhat interchangeably, albeit recognizing their respective uses in different contexts. These include subject and agent, soul and self or mind (although I recognize the respective differences in Thomas Aquinas’s anthropology and emergentism), material object for body, and consciousness for phenomenal experience. We will use ‘natural’ in two different senses. One that I take to be an epistemic term fitting with the common sense of what is intuitive to believe about certain entities in relation (i.e., natural, common, and intuitive are used in nearly synonymous ways) against ‘natural’ as referring to the ontological definition within metaphysics for entities.

of the substance that is often ignored or insufficiently highlighted when considering the nature of substance-consciousness. Cartesianism is the only option that possibly meets the sufficiency condition for strong agent-causal libertarianism given 'intrinsic autonomy' and the unity of agent condition.

The basic argument

The basic argument or set of arguments I will work through to arrive at a conclusion that robust freedom probably depends on Cartesian anthropology is set out below.

1) Premise 1:

a. P1: Physical objects (substance physicalism) do not have strong agent libertarianism.

b. P2: Humans have strong agent libertarianism (SAL).

c. Conclusion: Therefore, humans are not physical objects.

2) Premise 2:

a. P1: SAL depends on a metaphysically simple substance.

b. P2: Emergentism and panpsychism do not provide a metaphysically simple substance.

c. Conclusion: Therefore, humans are not objects characterized by emergentism or panpsychism.

3) Premise 3:

a. P1: SAL depends on Subject unity of consciousness with intrinsic autonomy and primitive punctiliar substance.

b. P2: Emergent dualism and Thomist dualism probably do not supply intrinsic autonomy and punctiliar substance.

c. Conclusion: Therefore, emergent dualism and Thomist dualism are probably insufficient anthropologies for the type of Subject unity of consciousness.

4) Premise 4:

a. P1: SAL meets an epistemic condition and a metaphysical condition that material things do not.

b. P2: Panpsychism does not meet the epistemic condition or metaphysical condition due to its commitments on material things.

c. Conclusion: Cartesianism is the only option that likely meets both the epistemic condition and the metaphysical condition.

Although unpopular in the present dialectic, what is required is not just

a soul (characterized by substance dualism) but a soul not of this world (characterized by classical or Cartesian dualism). But before I make an explicit case for Cartesian dualism, let me describe robust freedom and its entailment of substance dualism generally.

Robust freedom or strong agent-causal libertarianism

Let us first consider a formal or systematic characterization of what I will call robust freedom, which we take to be strong agent libertarianism. There are a variety of ways that libertarianism has been described as it pertains to consciousness and the subject of consciousness, and in this way, the metaphysics of consciousness intersects with the metaphysics of freedom. However, what I advocate for is the strongest form of libertarianism that many construe as unviable and highly improbable. But this is for the reason that many are committed to naturalism, even weak notions of naturalism.

Strong agent libertarianism is characterized by at least four propositions:

1. Enduring subject
2. Actions are not causal chains but originated by a subject that has a sui generis power
3. Categorical power
4. Rational principle: subjects act for reasons

These four features give us a good sense of what is intended by agent-causal libertarianism, and upon explaining these features I will come back around to add two more, which I argue leads us first to the conclusion of substance dualism or some brand of idealist immaterialism (yet not of an emergentist sort of substance dualism) and, more, to classical or Cartesian dualism.

The first characterization of the subject of free choices is that s/he is an enduring subject. What this means is that the self, substance, and subject is the selfsame subject that persists through time even amidst changes in time, changes to the body, and even changes to psychological conditioning. The selfsame subject is required across time because it presumes the same subject has the operative control at a time and across time. So, the subject must have synchronic sameness for freedom of the relevant libertarian sort because there is something about the subject that makes it *that* subject. Furthermore, it must have diachronic sameness for freedom because it is the selfsame subject that exists prior to the relevant choice being made at a time. In this way, the future self is relevantly related to previous selves as an enduring subject. For if it were not the same self/subject, then it could be relevantly argued that the subject making a choice is wholly distinct from the previous self and the future

self. The choice would be affected by chance and the choice would be the result of previous selves.

The second characterization of the subject of free choices is that s/he is the causal originator of choices made. This is why libertarianism described along the lines as event-causally related to previous events is insufficient. In other words, power is a novelty in nature and one that is descriptive solely of persons/selves as subjects of free choices. These choices are made by the subjects that act as the terminus of the causal chain they are enacting.

The third characterization is that the power of a subject is categorical. In other words, the power is descriptive of persons alone and the causes persons bring about are ultimately unconditioned by anything else. Choices are not the products, then, of biological laws (i.e., neural laws) or psychological laws.

The fourth characterization is that subjects act according to reasons that are purposive. This is important for articulating the rationale of free choice which shows these choices are not arbitrary and fall into incoherence. Of course, this is the famous charge made historically by A. J. Ayer, which I describe below.

Searle argues for a version of biological individuality that fits within naturalistic constraints where selves/minds are natural products (Searle, 2008; Searle, 1997). According to Searle, while we experience our choices, the real problem is how to make sense of conscious experiences as the 'realizers' of neuronal events. He opts for making sense of conscious experience and free will as a fact of neuroscience. But there are several problems with this account that we can only summarize in this context.

Searle cannot avoid the dualism or the implicit dualism that is present even in neuroscience. For when we examine the work of neuroscientists, there exists content internalism that yields a form of implicit dualism. Content internalism is the notion that there exist properties of qualia that are instantiated, but the properties instantiated are distinct from the properties of the brain as observed on a brain map. In other words, while property x (this mental state) is related causally or correlated to this property y (brain state), x does not exist in the same way as y (Manzotti and Moderato, 2014, pp. 83-7). Further, if our experiences have any reality apart from naturalistic processes, then it is inconceivable that these agents would come about as a product of biological processes, which are deterministically explained (or explained by chance). This is a version of the causal reduction of mental events to physical or biological events, but how this can 'save the appearances' as facts crucial to consciousness is beyond conceivable. That said, it seems to amount to a form of epiphenomenalism that renders mental events causally inefficacious.

So much for his view being able to account for features 1-4 above. It is dubious that the biological subject is the kind of subject that endures through time. It is dubious that this kind of subject would not be ‘subject’ (no pun intended) to the biological constraints found in nature. In fact, that is what one should expect, and I will argue below that based on Jaegwon Kim’s causal exclusion principle, there would not exist causal power distinct from the biological causes. At best, there might exist an indeterminate point where a causal event is enacted as random, but this would not satisfy the third characterization of a ‘categorical’ power. Finally, and related to feature three, it is difficult to see how an agent of biological complexity would act for reasons (i.e., purposefully) as is required for the kind of agent described. In fact, some unique subject is required to ground this categorical power.

To the point about naturalistic processes giving rise to a subject sufficient to occupy the role of categorical power, we must consider Kim’s objection to the kind of non-reductive physicalism advanced by Searle. For on Searle’s account, we are left not with atomistic agents, *per se*, but a holistic agent that has a new power in the sense that the agent’s power is more than the sum of the parts. In other words, on naturalism, we have two potential options either atomism or holism of mereological aggregates. Atomism explains events by way of the parts and their intrinsic powers, whereas holism explains larger objects by way of the parts interacting. Consider for instance a tornado acting as a whole of which the effects would not be explained by its constituent parts that comprise it. Or take as another example of holism H₂O, which is composed of hydrogen and oxygen that is not reducible to the parts or the powers of each part individually. Indeed there is something more on holism, but that more remains insufficient for accounting for the kind of subject of consciousness sufficient for agency as described above.

Holistic notions of the conscious subject are implausible given naturalism on Kim’s exclusion argument. Which shows us that on naturalistic accounts of subjects/agents we are left with no reason to believe that mental events, reasons have any role to play in causal producing or contributing to natural events. According to Kim: “Any physical event that has a cause at time *t* has a physical cause at time *t* (Kim, 2005, pp. 15-7).” This is basically one form of causal closure and it presumes that all of the physical world is explained by physical laws that are reducible to the physical constituents of the world. There is, according to this principle, no need for a mental cause. And, further corroborating evidence in favor of it suggests that we can explain things in the natural world by considering the physical causes themselves. A physical

object, according to Kim, is explained by physical causes and effects, whether explained atomistically or holistically, and whatever might be left would be epiphenomenal in nature. If this is right, and we believe it is, then a biological object characterized by holism (e.g., Searle) is not sufficient for the type of subject of consciousness for agency described already. This is the case because, in fact, there is something distinct from the physical constituents that a physicalist ontology does not satisfy.

What we, in fact, have is a causal power that is distinct and causally efficacious. This raises the question about the various aspects of the mind that are present in the world from experiential qualia, intentionality, privacy of the mind, etc. Are these real? Do they have any causal efficacy in the natural world? I believe they are and we have good reasons for believing that they are from a basic experiential standpoint. In fact, if there is such a domain of reason and mental events that is real, then we are confronted with something like a substance of conscious experiences.

The views that attempt to accommodate naturalism with libertarian freedom confront significant problems. These libertarian accounts offer two criteria that need to be met, namely: (a) the principle of alternative possibilities and (b) incompatibilism that would render free choice libertarianly free. In other words, someone like Robert Kane would say that the feature that is most important is that agents are ultimately responsible for their actions (Kane, 1998, pp. 119-24). Agents, then, are the originitive causes and maintaining causes of choices, which still leaves open the possibility that choices are causally conditioned in some way by antecedent psychological events. There are other similar accounts that recoil against strong notions of libertarian agency that are compatible with naturalism and seek to situate responsibility in the subject/agent as, in some cases, having the power to satisfy the principle of alternative possibilities (i.e., PAP) and incompatibilism. They not only confront the challenge of being implausible in light of naturalism or, at a minimum, are unlikely to account for the ostensible experience of libertarianism but more, they fail to satisfy the underlying condition that is basic and directly transparent to our conscious experience, of which we have immediate acquaintance, namely a categorical power that acts for reasons, hence criteria 3 and 4 (Hasker, 2001, pp. 58-81). If this is the case, naturalism seems inadequate to give us the types of substances of consciousness for agency, once again, described earlier. And, in fact, this is what the physicalist Jaegwon Kim argues when he objects to the possibility of something like non-reductive physicalist agent powers that are more than epiphenomenal realities.

According to Kim, categorical power that acts for reasons is necessarily excluded from the causal story found in naturalism.

Categorical power is unlikely to find an accounting in naturalism given the causal exclusion argument given by Kim and favors something like substance dualism that demands a rejection of the causal closure or causal exclusion principle so at home with naturalism (Kim, 2005). But more than that, if the present account of our phenomenal experience is accurate then something more is required. In fact, this is why Kim recoils from the term non-reductive physicalism on subjects of consciousness (Hasker, 2001, pp. 59-81). Relatedly, this is the reason why Susan Schneider has argued quite convincingly that property dualists must reject substance physicalism precisely because such an ontology introduces ontological categories not found in substance physicalism due to the causal exclusion problem (Schneider, 2012, pp. 61-76).

What I have just described is commonly called the common-sense position of freedom. It is the common-sense view in the sense that it requires no tutoring. It is that which we naturally, intuitively believe to be true based upon the phenomenal givens of our own experiences in the world. In other words, it is not conditioned upon our believing in some way that we are biological objects or psychological events. It presumes that actions reside in the subject and that the subject has the ability to choose otherwise unconstrained by previous conditioning or mechanisms. It is how we experience our world as we are confronted with choices, whether it be the choice to make coffee in the morning or to go for a jog. Both are options presented to us and we are free from our own volitional conditioning (as a developed power). Instead, we make unconstrained choices (albeit contra-causal choices) based upon a reason to choose one or the other. And, this is how we experience the world in which we live.

Furthermore, it is how we experience others. It is presumed in the fact that we hold subjects morally accountable for their choices. We presume that when an agent makes a decision it is not because of previous events biologically determining the fact of this or that choice or some psychological set of conditions determining this outcome. Instead, while there may be psychological pre-dispositions this way or that way, the assumption is that that is ultimately non-determinative of choices.

In this way, the common-sense position is the libertarian position and these are quite naturally at home with Cartesianism or substance dualism generally. I will argue in a moment that Cartesianism is more natural in a way that likely rules out the other dualist options. Cartesianism is naturally hospitable to these

views precisely because the nature of the subject is the type of thing that is utterly unique in the world and, in one sense, not of this world. In other words, it is not the natural product of biological evolution or the psychological mechanisms that are given rise to from biological evolution. It is something wholly different. And it is here where choices reside in the subject unconstrained by complexity or mechanism.

We might feel as if this is the case, but it could also be an illusion or a fiction written on the hearts of humans through some form of evolutionary adaptation. But, this is true of consciousness as well. Should we take the appearances as real and reliable predictors that are truth-conducive or not? If we have good reason to do so then we should trust our experiences that we are free in this ultimate sense. In this way, responsibility resides with the individual subject and not the events that it is predicated upon.

A. J. Ayer famously lays out the dilemma for libertarian freedom, which will help us to gain a grasp of what precisely is going on in libertarian freedom and how it is that a radically unique subject (i.e., probably a Cartesian subject) is required.

What he [the libertarian] wishes to imply is that my actions are the result of my own free choice: and it is because they are the result of my own free choice that I am held to be morally responsible for them. But now we must ask how it is that I come to make my choice. Either it is an accident, then it is a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise; and if it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise, it is surely irrational to hold me morally responsible for choosing as I did. But if it is not an accident that I choose to do one thing rather than another, then presumably there is some causal explanation of my choice: and in that case we are led back to determinism. (Ayer, 1954, p. 275)

Ayer seems to think that we are left with either accidental action in which case it is arbitrary, or determinism in which case it is causally conditioned by previous causes—whether biological or psychological. However, it seems he misses that it could be causally undetermined and rational in that it is I that causes it and I do so for varying reasons. As I am writing this paper, I experience it as directly under our control so not causally determined by what I have done before.

Some will adopt a version of compatibilism, which Ayer is inclined to do. By following something like the position described by Hume where freedom is a liberty as “a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will” (Hume, 1975, p. 65). But it is clear that this is consistent with

determinism in that it depends on our having a ‘capacity’ or ‘power’ as a volition that is conditioned by previous states. This may satisfy the criterion of ‘ownership’ of one’s own actions, decisions, and choices, but it lacks the kind of control that we experience to be the case.

Our experience to do otherwise has been termed by some as ‘contra-determinism’ or anti-determinism. By contra-determinism, we and others are not suggesting that agents of robust freedom somehow break up causal patterns otherwise determined by preceding causes, but rather that there exists something other than the causally determined pattern originating in the author of actions. It is as if the notion is more like self-determinism that is rooted in a deeper causal reality that is sourced and made by the agent herself. Assuming this is the case, then, this opens up two other features we wish to add to the four features given above that characterize SAL, which aids in seeing why substance dualism (or some version of immaterialism) is required, and probably classical or Cartesian dualism.

There are two other features entailed by the four features given above.

5. The power is characterized by ‘intrinsic autonomy’

6. The power is a pluripotent reality originated by a singular, simple substance

This of course raises the question about the possibility of emergentism, as a *sui generis* power, within a naturalistic framework. Rather this would require a stronger version of emergentism than the one intimated already: one that takes it that there are higher-order holistic states of biology (John Searle) as the realizers of those states/systems level emergence (Kevin Timpe, 2008; and Timothy O’Connor, 2003 & 2010), but something akin to William Hasker’s version of emergent dualism. Emergent dualism affirms a strong version of emergence of libertarian agency rooted in first-person consciousness that not only demands new powers but that new powers are explained by a novel, *sui generis*, substance. Hasker has defined it as an individual thisness suitable for a novel power unlike alternative objects of the natural world (Hasker, 2001, pp. 81-99). Hasker is right to press for an appropriate substance or subject of consciousness suitable for libertarian freedom judiciously described thus far, but there are concerns that his assay of the substance is inadequate.

The notion of intrinsic autonomy cannot be accounted for on versions of emergentism, even those advocated for by the likes of William Hasker because the subject is, arguably, something characteristic not of natural entities readily observable through a third-person approach but an altogether distinct entity for two reasons. First, the powers thusly described depend on a metaphysical

simple (not simply a novel phenomenal unity), and second the notion of intrinsic autonomy—more on that below. Before analyzing further Hasker’s notion of substance, let us flesh out more adequately the notions of ‘intrinsic autonomy’ and a metaphysically simple substance because both of these are required for the robust freedom described.

On the first, intrinsic autonomy is one important feature that explains the robust form of freedom we advance and seems to follow as explanatorily relevant to the first four features listed above. “Intrinsic autonomy” is the important concept at stake here as defined by John Foster. He defines it as the following:

He [the libertarian] could say that for an event to be an event of subject-agency is just for it to be mental and intrinsically autonomous. This would avoid any circularity, since intrinsic autonomy is defined solely in terms of concepts which can be grasped independently of the notions of agency and the subject’s causal responsibility. In describing an event as an intrinsically autonomous, we are merely saying that its intrinsic nature excludes the possibility that either it or any of its components is causally determined by prior conditions. (Foster, 1991, p. 277)

In other words, the substance of consciousness is the sole originator of some causal events, and these are unexplained by physical events. Further, the notion of ‘intrinsic autonomy’ gives expression to the notion of categorical power as being latent within the substance itself without any causal antecedent constitutive of it (thereby surpassing even versions of event libertarianism or source libertarianism listed earlier). But, this would seem to require some form of radical substance dualism whereby the substance is wholly distinct from the substance described in physicalism. With Foster, I will argue that this not only requires an immaterial substance, but something akin to a Cartesian subject. It is important to point out that Foster affirms a version of idealist immaterialism, yet the focus of the argument concerns the immaterial substance as the bearer of free will, so in this way, the essay given concerning the Cartesian subject is what is relevant (rather than specifying idealism explicitly in contrast with substance dualism). This immaterial substance/subject describes a unity that is not only uncharacteristic of naturalistic objects but a subject unified and unconstrained by external factors as well as preceding psychological causes.

This may even require something beyond substance dualism generally. Although it may come close, Thomistic dualism is often construed as a natural entity—a product of this world (Moreland & Rickabaugh, 2023, p. 257). In fact, given the radically autonomous nature of subjects of choices described by

Cartesians like John Foster, this is precisely what is required and any version of naturalism or pseudo-naturalistic agency would be insufficient. In order to derive a metaphysically sufficient account of freedom already described, we need a sufficiently unified subject of that consciousness—subject unity for unified consciousness (Farris, 2023a, 211-35).

The above characterization of robust freedom necessarily depends on ‘intrinsic autonomy’, which I argue rules out variants of substance dualism leaving us with a different type of substance, a substance not of this world, hence a Cartesian subject/substance of consciousness.

The necessity of Foster’s ‘intrinsic autonomy’

The characteristic or defining feature of strong agent-causal libertarianism depends on intrinsic autonomy.

Assuming one were to affirm the fact of embodiment, one would likely affirm a functionalist account of the mental. And, as such, one would be granted the right of place to affirm that the mind is conditioned in some way by biological conditions in a similar way as all physical and biological objects. Furthermore, the laws that govern biological objects also would, presumably, govern the psychological events of those biological objects. Whatever one makes of this view, the fact of a functionalist embodiment account would lend itself quite naturally to this belief. And one would be hard-pressed to argue otherwise against it because of the ways that biological objects are governed. And, if our minds are ultimately biological objects, then the mind is governed in the ways that biological objects are governed.

However, there is a distinct way of considering freedom as unconstrained by the biological as well as by previous psychological causes. This type of freedom is not explained by way of mechanisms governed by physical laws. It is unconstrained by previous biological or psychological events. In fact, it is the type of event that is solely owned by the subject and controlled by that same subject. And, given this, the subject must be of a certain type or constitution to make sense of this novelty in the world.

This is where it is commonly supposed of the Cartesian subject that it is free in the matter described already. The type of causation present here is totally unique and inexplicable by mechanisms or biological conditioning or, even, psychological conditioning. On this account, humans are subjects of moral accountability and whatever choice is made regarding moral oughts, that subject is ultimately responsible because s/he is ultimately in control.

This is the uniqueness of the Cartesian position that exemplifies human or

personal freedom as utterly unique in the world. Descartes gives the following apt description: “It is the greatest perfection in man to be able to act by its [the will’s] means, that is freely, and by doing so we are in a peculiar way masters of our actions and thereby merit praise or blame (Descartes, 1931, pp. 233-4).” Undoubtedly, there is a body of literature defending a compatibilist interpretation of Descartes on the topic of freedom. That said, there is a body of literature that defends the notion that Descartes is a libertarian. With that said, a Cartesian account offers us the best chance at accounting for a strong agent-causal libertarianism. Yet, everything, once again, that we know about the substance demands something that is not of this world, but another (see Newman, 2023). Ultimately, this feature is required to make sense of both PAP and responsibility for actions rooted in a categorical power defined by intrinsic autonomy.

You might rightly describe this as an order that exists outside of the causal nexus of physical, biological, or natural causes altogether—something altogether different and causally originative. That said, many who affirm libertarianism, both those who affirm a broad conception of naturalism or reject naturalism, are not so comfortable with this way of cashing out the notion of freedom. But it is this more radical notion of libertarianism that accurately represents our conscious experience as subjects or agents of those conscious experiences.

John Foster scratches at a definition that helps us to understand our own experiences rightly as they are given to us. He states: “Admittedly, we could take the notion of causation-by-a-subject as primitive and claim it is only perplexing when we try to reduce it to something else (Foster, 1991, p. 274).” This is not to suggest that the causal feature that is present is some psychological state of the subject, but it is literally the subject—as mysterious as that may sound. While this ‘mystery’ is, in fact, not incoherent if we refrain from reducing it to some biological, psychological state or power, it remains mysterious insofar as it appears to posit an entity that is, arguably, not of this world.

And, the subject acting is ‘actively’ involved in the causal production of the bringing about of an event. In other words, s/he is the terminus of the causal chain. S/he is not passive in the operation as one who merely provides some feature, character, or condition to the causal event, but s/he is deeply active, which takes us beyond other accounts that seek to secure the place of libertarian freedom in a power or some naturally recognizable entity. In other words, the account given here, with Foster as our guide, is more radical than

occupying pride of place in ‘control’ and in furnishing some ‘thin’ account of ownership.

What this means, further, is that there are no previous conditions that are operative in or factor in the actual event of a subject acting freely. If the act of the subject is passively determined by some feature, then it is not the kind of event that is undetermined but is rather determined by previous conditions. Rather what I have here delineated is an active event that solely originates in, obtains by, and, in this way, is more than owned by the agent under investigation.

If it is the case that something like a soul is required for robust freedom, it follows that a further feature implicit in ‘intrinsic autonomy’ is entailed in the type of subject of consciousness for which it rests. This is where the ‘out of this world’ character is habitable in Cartesianism.

Intrinsic autonomy depends on the unity of subject consciousness

There is one feature implicit in Foster’s notion of intrinsic autonomy that is not only at home with alternative dualist options but may require something akin to a Cartesian subject: *punctiliar* consciousness, or a *primitive haecceity* of subjects. Elsewhere one of us argues from the unity of consciousness, one aspect undergirding the metaphysics of a strong libertarian freedom, that seems to require something like a Cartesian soul that is unaccounted for on versions of substance dualism (Farris, 2023b).

Several instances of substance dualism depend on an account of emergentism where the immaterial substance is given rise to as the logical outcome from a sufficiently complex brain and central nervous system. This sort of account certainly gives us a clean story of soul-body integration without jeopardizing the metaphysical necessity of a distinct substance that is the bearer of a novel property—thisness characterizing souls. What it also gives us is a totalizing, unified field of awareness as an uncomposed singular mental substance, but it does not give us the kind of unified subject necessary for the unity of consciousness (Hasker, 2001).

Emergence does not give us a sufficient account of each individual mental subject, but only the generalizable features describing the substance in question, namely and literally a metaphysically simple soul (not simply a phenomenal unity). While versions of emergent dualism are an improvement on physicalist theories of consciousness and freedom, they do not go far enough. What seems to be required rather is a *particularizing* feature that is the totalizing metaphysical feature of each individual soul. The particularizing

feature comprehensively explains what it is that is distinctively individual. What is given to us on accounts of emergent dualism often leaves this feature unaccounted for, namely a brute. Against William Hasker, the fact of *my* soul that underlies the generality of souls is that my soul is just my soul as a primitive that makes me *me*. And, presumably, your soul, too, is a primitive—and not just a primitive of souls in general but a primitive of your individually particular mental subject. In other words, it is not sufficient, arguably, that what merely differentiates souls is that this soul is a distinct instantiation than another soul's instantiation. Instead, there exists something more primitive than the properties. There remains another concern for Hasker's subject of consciousness, related but distinct.

One aspect of the unified field that differentiates it from brains is that there is no single part of a brain that acts as the terminus for the entirety of a phenomenal field. Furthermore, an emergent account of consciousness that takes it that brains are sufficient for consciousness fails to give an account for the fact that there is no localized place for each conscious instant (or phenomenal state say of tasting chocolate or in hearing a sound in the ears). This is something one would expect from such an account that takes the brain seriously as instantiating certain properties that correlate with mental states. Finally, the emergent dualist account of consciousness gives us a picture of consciousness that phenomenal states are more like an overlapping point at every place in the physical substrate.

In other words, the emergent substance is more like a flip book that has an overlapping feature(s) at every moment of phenomenal experience making the experience across the pages of the flip book continuous by overlapping moments. Instead, what is needed for consciousness and the type of freedom on which it depends is a *punctiliar* point-like substance that exists on every page (metaphorically describing the phenomenal features of consciousness). More than that, the substance must exist across all the pages as a point-like structure that stands behind or below them, above them, and over them.

It is no wonder that the characteristic description of freedom given here begins to look more like an other-worldly substance rather than the substances of which we are commonly familiar in the objects of observation. By our accounts, there is nothing in the natural world that furnishes us with a sufficient analogy for the richness of first-person consciousness and the agent of free choices. In every respect, given the detailed description advanced, what is descriptive of robust freedom is something altogether different from natural causation. Accordingly, to ascribe these features of a natural entity that is

wholly distinct seems to miss the radically unique nature of freedom, given the account provided.

There is a further objection that needs addressing. The objection is related to Peter van Inwagen's 'No-choice' principle. Peter van Inwagen argues that libertarian freedom and the nature of the subject required for it are 'inexplicable' along with other things in the natural world like a superposition of particles and bent space (van Inwagen, 1983). All of these features are, then, features of the natural world. The problem, however, with this principle is that it presumes an equivalence between unknown features of the world that are 'mysterious' and inexplicable according to laws of which we are familiar. The difference of some physical feature that is, at the moment, unknown to us is not equivalent to what is, arguably, known. The argument thus far has advanced is based on what we know about free-willing selves according to a strong agent causal libertarianism in contrast to what we know positively about physical things like our bodies. But, this raises the question about the mystery of matter advanced by Galen Strawson in *Selves*.

Galen Strawson argues that we know very little about material bodies and, instead, adopts a view of matter consistent with his panpsychism, which takes it that material is fundamentally conscious (Strawson, 2011). Yet, here is the problem. Actually, there are two problems with his panpsychism account that fails to meet the conditions of 'intrinsic autonomy' and the unity of consciousness that depends on the type of agency that is a punctiliar point-like substance. The first problem is epistemic. At best, Strawson gets us to a kind of agnosticism regarding the nature of physical bodies. We have no evidence that the material parts that comprise bodies are conscious. In fact, the evidence suggests otherwise. If the evidence presumes a fundamentally distinct property dualism, then the type of panpsychist material being advanced not only has an epistemic problem but a metaphysical problem. That is the second problem. The primitive nature of the type of agency demanding a point-like substance is the foundational ground by which we come to know the properties of material things. The 'mystery' and inexplicability (using Inwagen's terms) are not equivalent, rather they are different. And, they are different because we already know something about the type of substance that implicitly presumes the property dualist distinction of material things and phenomenal things. Assuming we know this, goes some way in forcing us to reconcile a picture of the 'this-world' 'mysteries' or unknowns with what is known, and what is known is radically different from the things of this world that we know implicitly from our foundational epistemic vantage points (Fumerton, 2023, pp. 130-43,

pp. 227-30, and p. 258).

Why classical (or Cartesian) dualism provides the adequate basis for robust Freedom

Again to sum up our investigation, this likely requires Cartesian dualism. In Cartesian dualism, the integrity of the distinct substances (body and soul) is independent. The nature of the soul as substance is the type of substance that is not of this world because it carries a radically unique type of power that fails to map onto the substances that fit within a causal story found in the world.

This, of course, raises questions about other versions of substance dualism. We have given some reasons why emergent dualism of the sort advocated by William Hasker seems inadequate for the type of freedom described, the type of freedom that we seem to be deeply acquainted with in our phenomenal experience. The type of substance of consciousness of the Fosterian account seems to be just the type of substance sufficient for a robust form of agency. But, again, this looks more and more like a substance of another world—a Cartesian-type substance. But, there remains one type of substance dualism that fits in what could be categorized as a classical form of substance dualism (broadly construed). This type of substance dualism, intimated at above, has been advocated by what some have called Thomist substance dualism (following the likes of J. P. Moreland). On Thomist dualism, the substances are characterized as this-worldly because the respective soulish structure is described as somehow intrinsic to the material substance rather than extrinsically related (as with Cartesianism). Further, the 'natural' entity is the type of substance that exists in a part-whole relation that instantiates a novel power—namely a categorical power that acts for reasons. In this way, Moreland-esque dualism is construed as this-worldly rather than other-worldly. But to this, there are three points to lay out in response to this form of substance dualism that we believe, potentially, favors Cartesian dualism.

First, given the description of agency, everything about the entity that explains this radical form of agency is unlike what we observe and experience in the natural world. The respective entities relevant to the notion of 'intrinsic autonomy' are so unlike natural entities that what we, in fact, *do* observe are fundamentally distinct. This is why Foster describes the type of power not simply as categorical, but as a *primitive* power, not even an emergent power depending on the respective part-whole relations so common to Thomistic-dualism.

Second, the primitive power I described is an individual concrete particular

distinct and not the type of property that can be cashed out as a universal that can be determined by part-whole relations. Instead, it is rooted in a singular differentiated substance that gives rise to a set of powers—the pluripotent feature listed earlier.

Third, and this is important to the differentiation of the type of substance of consciousness required for ‘intrinsic autonomy’ is the fact of subject primitive thisness. In other words, what is required is not simply a thisness of souls concretely, generally explained, but a particular that is not ultimately explained by part-whole relations or the generables (i.e., universals) that it comes into relation with. The primitive nature of this type of entity while giving rise to generables shared by other souls is not sufficiently explained by those generables. In other words, the radically different nature necessary to individual mental substances is something that fails to explain the kind of ‘intrinsic autonomy’ (as well as a differentiated singular substance that has pluripotency) advocated for by the likes of those substance dualists that stop short of giving an assay of agency as a primitive mental subject. In other words, you just are your soul as a substance that is not without properties, but the respective individuality-derived powers are not finally explained by the universals themselves. Sartre is often described as affirming some form of substance dualism of the sort characterizing Descartes’s view. However, this is not correct. He does not affirm a version of substance dualism and explicitly criticizes Descartes’s view of substance ontology that differentiates between a soul and a body. The version of dualism he may affirm yields a dualism of the liberty of spontaneity and inertia, but not of the substance that is being discussed above. That said, if Sartre’s critique of Descartes and substance ontology is correct, then the discussion above is undermined, but I do not think it is correct. The discussion above presumes that there is something of a substance (with third-person properties) that characterizes the objects in the world and this must be the case when we describe the capacities and powers of things and persons. The advantage, it seems to me, of Descartes’s view or some similar view that grants privileged predicates to the immaterial or mental substance is that it gives us an assay of an actual thing or substance along with an account of the first-person predicates. For these reasons, it is difficult to take seriously Sartre’s understanding of freedom without properly identifying the type of substance necessary to explain it (Sartre, 1946).

For these reasons and against the present dialectical trend occurring in the philosophy of mind, I advocate for a more radical form of classical dualism, namely Cartesian dualism. The dialectic presently dominant recoils against the

sort of Cartesian dualism that appears to have little to no place in the metaphysical frameworks dominated by natural entities. Accordingly, even Thomistic dualism, while sharing much in terms of the first four features given above with Cartesianism, comes short of an assertion that the substance is a natural entity and fails to give an overwhelming reason why one should agree. All that has been spelled out here, in fact, suggests otherwise. What it suggests is more radical still, that we are subjects of another world.

Conflict of Interests

The author has no competing interests.

References

- Ayer, A. J. (1954). *Philosophical essays*. Macmillan.
- Baker, M., & Goetz, S. (Eds.) (2010). *The soul hypothesis*. T&T Clark.
- Farris J. R., & Taliaferro, C. (Eds.) (2017). *The Ashgate research companion to theological anthropology*. Routledge.
- Farris, J. R. (2023a). *The creation of self: a case for the soul*. Iff publishers.
- Farris, J. R. (2023b). Subject unity and subject consciousness. In A. Menuge, B. Krouse, & R. Marks (Eds), *Minding the brain*. Discovery Press.
- Fumerton, R. (2013). *Knowledge, thought, and the case for dualism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gocke, B. P. (2012). *After physicalism*. Notre Dame Press.
- Hasker, W. (2001). *The emergent self*. Cornell University Press.
- Hume, D. (1975). *An enquiry concerning human understanding*, 2nd ed. (L. A. Selby-Bigge, Ed.). Clarendon.
- Kane, R. (1998). *The significance of free will*. Oxford University Press.
- Kim, J. (2005). *Physicalism or something near enough*. Princeton University Press.
- Koons, R., & Bealer, G. (Eds.). (2010). *The waning of materialism*. Oxford University Press.
- Manzotti, R., & Moderato, P. (2014). Neuroscience: dualism in disguise. In A. Lavazza & H. Robinson (Eds.), *Contemporary Dualism*. Routledge.
- Newman, L. (2023). Defense of a bibertarian interpretation of Descartes's theory of judgment. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 104(3).
- O'Connor, T., & Jacobs, J. (2003). Emergent individuals. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 53(213), 540-555.
- O'Connor, T., & Jacobs, J. (2010). Emergent individuals and the resurrection. *European Journal of Philosophy of Religion*, 2.
- Rickabaugh, B., & Moreland, J. P. (2023). *The substance of consciousness*. Blackwell.
- Sartre, J. P. (1946). *La liberte Cartesienne*. Marinotti.
- Schneider, S. (2012). Why property dualists must reject substance physicalism. *Philosophical Studies*, 157, 61-76.
- Searle, J. (1997). *The mystery of consciousness*. New York Review of Books.
- Searle, J. (2008). *Freedom and neurobiology: reflections on free will, language, and*

political power. Columbia University Press.

Strawson, G. (2011). *Selves: an essay in revisionary metaphysics*. Oxford University Press.

Timpe, K. (2008). *Free will: sourcehood and its alternatives*. Continuum.

Timpe, K., Griffith, M., & Levy, N. (Eds.). (2016). *The Routledge companion to free will*. Routledge.

Van Inwagen, P. (1983). *An essay on free will*. Clarendon Press.