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Abstract

Emergentism and the Process Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead

The subject of this dissertation is to analyse the features of emergentism and the conditions of emergence, and to examine how they coincide with and can be fulfilled by Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. The analyses carried out in this thesis focus on exploring the possibility that Whitehead's process philosophy can fulfil the basic features of emergence which are supervenience, irreducibility and downward causation. While the first two points are open to various interpretations and discussion of the possibility of their fulfilment, the issue of downward causality in Whitehead's philosophy is excluded. Whitehead, moreover, never described himself as an emergentist. However, it is important to note their intermingling and interaction. Thus, if one looks for emergentism in Whitehead's philosophy, it is a very specific emergentism. In his descriptions, Whitehead repeatedly refers to the higher grades and the phenomena characteristic of them, as well as to features and elements characteristic of them, somehow activated when the relevant conditions are met. This specifically Whiteheadian emergentism is not just an epistemological aspect of the world, but becomes a strong ontological structure.

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