

On Baker's Persons and Bodies

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Lynne Baker's *Persons and Bodies* is an impressive and thought-provoking work. Baker's development of her notion of constitution without identity is insightful and valuable, and her application of this notion to the relation I have to my body is provocative. Her challenges to opposing positions on the nature of constitution are strong, especially her criticisms of the contention that a concrete individual and any such individual wholly spatially coincident with it must be identical. The disagreements I have on these foundational issues are compatible with retention of her position as the right sort of foundation on which to build. Baker's application of this notion to the relation between me and my body requires, crucially, an answer to the question: What am I? Any substantive answer to this question will be controversial, and indeed Baker's does not disappoint on this score. I take issue with her position, but I am convinced that it is important and interesting, and that it has a serious chance of being right in its general conception.

1. Consider first Baker's definition of constitution. In her view, constitution is a relation between concrete individuals. Each concrete individual is fundamentally a member of exactly one *primary kind*. By definition, any concrete individual has its primary kind membership essentially, so that a concrete individual x 's ceasing to be a member of this kind entails that x ceases to exist. For example, *David's* primary kind is *statue*, *Piece's* primary kind is *piece of marble*. Suppose that x and y are concrete individuals; F^* designates the property of *having F as one's primary-kind*; F and G are not the same kind; individual x has F^* and individual y has G^* ; and D designates *G -favorable circumstances* -- "the milieu required for something to be a G " (39-42). Then,

(C) x constitutes y at t =_{df}

(a) x and y are spatially coincident at t ; and

(b) x is in D at t ; and

(c) it is necessary that: $\text{Az}[(F^*z \text{ at } t \ \& \ z \text{ is in } D \text{ at } t) \text{ implies } \text{Eu}(G^*u \text{ at } t \ \& \ u \text{ is spatially coincident with } z \text{ at } t)]$; and

(d) it is possible that: $(x \text{ exists at } t \ \& \ \sim \text{Ew}[G^*w \text{ at } t \ \& \ w \text{ is spatially coincident with } x \text{ at } t])$; and

(e) if y is immaterial, then x is also immaterial. (43)

According to the general position to which Baker is committed, when x constitutes y, x and y will (among other things) be spatially coincident but non-identical (30-1), and y will not constitute x -- constitution is asymmetric (44-5).

One problem for this definition concerns clause (d). Applied to her example of *Piece* and *David*, Baker's (d) cashes out as

It is possible that: *Piece* exists at t and no spatially coincident thing that has *being a statue* as its primary-kind property exists at t.

As it stands, (d) seems too strong. For first, there could be cases -- given Baker's general position -- where x constitutes y in which x could exist without being spatially coincident with y but not without x being spatially coincident with something of the same primary kind as y. Here is an example that assumes the externalism about belief individuation that Baker herself advocates. Plausibly, the primary kind of my token belief that water is wet is *belief*. It would seem that a token neural state constitutes my token belief that water is wet, but while that token neural state could exist without being spatially coincident with the belief that water is wet -- say, on Twin Earth -- nevertheless it must be that this neural state be spatially coincident with some belief or other -- on Twin Earth it would be spatially coincident with the belief that twin-water is wet. This sort of possibility would justify the following weakening of (d):

(d*) It is possible that: x exists at t and it is not the case that y is spatially coincident with x at t.

But even (d*) is too strong, for there could be cases in which x constitutes y but it is impossible for x to exist without being spatially coincident with something of y's primary kind -- or even with y itself -- although it is possible for y to exist without being spatially coincident with x. The definition of constitution should not preclude that my token sensation of blue, plausibly of the primary kind *sensation*, be constituted by this token neural state N, with which it is now spatially coincident. But it may be impossible for N to exist without being spatially coincident with some sensation -- perhaps it is even impossible for N to exist without being spatially coincident with this sensation of blue -- while it is possible for this sensation of blue to be spatially coincident with a neural state that is token-distinct from N, say, one that differs from N only in that it engages a few neural pathways that are token-distinct from but type-identical with those used by N. Accordingly, (d*) would have to be supplemented with

(d**) It is possible that: y exists at t and it is not the case that x is spatially coincident with y at t.

The underlying issue here is that there are cases of constitution in which non-identity is secured solely by multiple realizability.⁽¹⁾

Familiarly, (type-type) multiple realizability plays an important role in arguments against the identity of mental state types and physical state types. But token-token multiple

realizability can also sustain the contention that a token mental state is not identical to a token physical state.⁽²⁾

Baker clearly acknowledges this way of securing the non-identity component of constitution. In developing her claim that I am constituted by my body, she not only argues that my body can survive my death (96), but also that I might have had a different body -- in fact a body of a different sort from the one I actually have, for example, a bionic body. She contends: "My human body may go out of existence and be replaced by, say, a bionic body; since it is possible that I continue to exist with a bionic body, I am not identical to my body" (109).

When combined, conditions (d*) and (d**) result in the following substitution for Baker's (d):

(revised-d) Either it is possible that (x exists at t and it is not the case that y is spatially coincident with x at t), or it is possible that (y exists at t and it is not the case that x is spatially coincident with y at t).

2. This weakening revision of (d) is plausible, but it would undercut Baker's way of ensuring that constitution is asymmetrical (44-5). The claim that asymmetry is a feature of the notion of constitution that she seeks to characterize is controversial, but it does have an intuitive dimension. The idea is that a statue is constituted of a piece of marble and not vice versa, a person is constituted of a body and not vice versa. One worry here is that the asymmetry intuition derives from notions of constitution that are distinct from the relation that Baker intends to capture. In my view, besides the relation that holds between concrete individuals, there is the distinct constitution-relation that holds between a thing and the stuff it is made of, and the one that holds between a thing and its proper parts. It is indeed plausible that each of these is asymmetrical. Perhaps, then, the constitution-relation that holds between concrete individuals is symmetrical after all, while the intuition that it is asymmetrical results from conflating the other constitution-relations with the one Baker explores. But if she can cull asymmetry out of an independently plausible characterization of the constitution-relation that holds between concrete individuals, then the notion that it is in fact asymmetrical may have significant support.

Baker enlists her condition (d) to guarantee asymmetry when G^*y is constituted by a F^*x , but things with G^* are realizable only by things with F^* . In such cases it will be impossible for there to be a thing with G^* without a spatially coincident thing with F^* , and thus, by (d), F^*x cannot be constituted by G^*y . But as we have seen, (d) is too strong to do its job as identity-breaker, and when it is appropriately weakened, it can no longer secure asymmetry in these cases.

In addition, a problem can be raised for Baker's way of guaranteeing asymmetry by definition (C) when things with G^* are realizable by things other than those with F^* . She claims that in such cases "it is not necessary that for every G in F-favorable circumstances, there is a spatially coincident F. (For example, a statue may be in piece-

of-marble-favorable circumstances and yet be constituted by a piece of bronze...)" (45). Thus, in such cases the proposal that F*x is constituted by G*y will not meet her condition (c). But what would it be about piece-of-marble-favorable circumstances that allows the statue not to be constituted of a piece of marble when it is in those circumstances? Baker must hold that there are possible worlds in which a statue is in piece-of-marble-favorable circumstances in which it is not constituted by a piece of marble. But then what kinds of constraints does the condition place on the constitution of the statue -- what difference would it make for the statue to be in piece-of-marble favorable circumstances rather than not? If a statue can be a bronze statue even when it is in piece-of-marble-favorable circumstances, why can't a lump be a plant-pot even when it is in statue-favorable circumstances? And if this is possible, then the statue won't be constituted of the lump, by Baker's definition. I suspect that (C), especially if (d) is appropriately revised, will not have the consequence that the constitution-relation is asymmetrical.

Perhaps the definition can be revised so that it provides a non-question-begging account as to why the constitution-relation at issue is asymmetrical. If not, we may need to diminish our assessment of the asymmetry intuition.

3. Baker contends that I am constituted by a human body, a claim that is made especially interesting by a thesis about the primary kind that characterizes me. In her view, constitution is a relation between concrete individuals, and these individuals are most fundamentally characterized by primary kinds. Hence, what the primary kinds of things are will determine what constitution relations there are. The claim that I am constituted by a human body is therefore dependent on the thesis that the primary kind that characterizes me is not the same as the primary kind that characterizes a human body. Baker's proposal for my primary kind is *person*, which she argues is the capacity for the first-person perspective. For Baker this is the capacity to think of oneself in a way naturally expressible in the grammatical first-person as the bearer of first-person thoughts. A person can think "I wish I were tall," and not just, say, "I am not tall." Schematically, persons are characterized by the ability to think thoughts of the form 'I that I* ...,' where "I" is replaced by a linguistic or psychological verb, and 'I*... ' is replaced by a sentence containing first-person reference (65).

Even if one accepts that I am constituted by a human body, one need not agree that I am characterized by a primary kind specified in terms of Baker's capacity for the first person perspective. Suppose that due to a lesion in Joe's brain, the capacity to think 'I that I*...' - thoughts is lost, but the capacity for thinking merely the lower-order 'I that ...' - thoughts is retained, and the memories and intelligence compatible with this loss are preserved as well. It is not obvious to me that Joe ceases to exist due to the accident. Moreover, while there is good reason to doubt that my seventeen-month old daughter has Baker's capacity for the first-person perspective, I strongly believe that when she is 10 years and three months old, she can truly say, without qualification, "I existed nine years ago." In her argument against Eric Olson⁽³⁾

Baker points out that, from the ordinary point of view, when Mary of "William and Mary" fame was five-months pregnant, there was no new heir because there was at that time no new person (205-6). However, Baker's capacity for the first-person perspective is quite sophisticated, and it is likely not yet present until some time beyond the first year. But hardly anyone thinks that, say, a 9-month old cannot be an heir.⁽⁴⁾

In my view, none of this demonstrates that Baker is mistaken, but rather indicates at least that she may have to countenance unintuitive consequences similar to those she attributes to her opposition.

Baker contends that primary kinds not only provide the essential property and persistence conditions of a concrete individual *x*, but also supply the grounds for the distinction between *x*'s merely acquiring a property and *x*'s coming to constitute a new individual. Indeed, this claim is important for establishing her contention that acquiring the first-person perspective is not mere property-acquisition, but the coming-to-be of a new individual. Baker argues that in cases of mere property-acquisition an individual fails to gain new kinds of causal properties, while in coming to constitute a new individual, new kinds of causal properties are acquired, and thus a new primary kind comes into play (41). Hence, since the acquisition of Baker's capacity for the first-person perspective adds new kinds of causal powers, a new primary kind arrives on the scene, and a new individual is constituted.

But more needs to be said here, since it is plausible that individuals can acquire new kinds of causal properties while remaining the same individual, and without a new individual being constituted. Consider the kinds of causal properties that someone might add between the ages, say, of ten and thirty. During this interval, Mary acquires capacities for intimate romantic relationships, to bear and nurse children, and the psychological ability to care for them. She acquires intellectual causal properties -- she receives her education in engineering, and as a result she acquires an understanding of high-level mathematics and physics, and the ability to design highways and bridges. She also gains causal properties in the social area -- she develops the capacity to assume leadership roles in her firm and in her community. Yet I trust that Baker would affirm that Mary at thirty is identical to the ten-year-old. But then the distinction between merely adding properties and coming to constitute a new thing must not be marked simply by the addition of new kinds of causal properties, unless of course by 'new kinds of causal properties' is meant 'causal properties that determine a new primary kind'; but then we're no further ahead if we're unclear about what the primary kinds are.

Moreover, Baker's conception inspires the view that we are constituted of more kinds of things than one might find plausible. One can imagine a type of intelligent being that cannot think 'I that I* ...' thoughts, but nevertheless has the capacity to represent some of its mental states. By extension, this capacity would be pivotal to its primary kind, especially since acquiring the capacity to represent mental states plausibly confers new kinds of causal powers. Call such entities *mind-representers*. A further type of being cannot represent its mental states, but can represent the world egocentrically.

Analogously, this capacity would be crucial to its primary kind -- call such beings *world-representers*.

Perhaps worms would be world-representers. When Lowly the worm dies, the reasons to think that he does not survive his death are virtually as strong as in the human case, and there is no less reason to think that the worm-body nevertheless can persist for a time. Lowly would then be constituted by his body. For similar reasons, the monkey Curious George, a mind-representer, would also be constituted by his body. But George is also constituted by a world-representer, since if he loses his ability to represent his mental states he will cease to exist, but a world-representer could remain, which would in turn be constituted by his body. I, then, would be constituted by a mind-representer -- since I could lose my capacity for Baker's first-person perspective while retaining the ability to represent my mental states -- which in turn would be constituted by a world-representer, which would be constituted by my body.

Now Baker might simply accept this sort of result. But avoidance of unintuitive conclusions is an important desideratum, and it is at least somewhat unintuitive, from the point of view of common sense, to think that there are mind-representers and world-representers that are not identical to us but still constitute us. One might try to diminish this unintuitiveness by identifying me with something characterized by a less sophisticated primary-kind property. Perhaps I am really a mind-representer, so that I can survive the loss of my capacities for the first-person perspective and apperception. There is, after all, some pull in the direction of thinking that Smith survives the car accident supposing his mental capacities are reduced to those of a mind-representer. Thus even if we agree with Baker that her capacity for the first-person makes possible much of what matters to us (147-164), it may yet be possible for me to survive its loss.

Epistemically, whether this capacity for the first-person perspective is my primary kind would depend on intuitions about the relevant examples. In particular, it would depend on what we think about the permanent impairment cases, but, in addition, since our intuitions about them might be unduly influenced by attitudes grounded in abilities that precede impairment, they are best balanced by intuitions about cases of impairment from birth, and by what we think about our identity with fetuses, infants, and toddlers. In the last analysis it is not obvious that Baker is wrong about my persistence conditions, but it may be more likely that I am a mind- or even a world-representer than that the permanent loss of Baker's first-person perspective alone would entail my non-existence. In addition, it may also be that particular sorts of intelligence, as well as affective capacities such as the emotional abilities required for the kinds of interpersonal relationships we value should play a more explicit role in specifying our primary kind. Baker's proposal does not ignore practical capacities generally, but they turn out to have a role in specifying what we are only by way of her more cognitively oriented capacity for the first-person perspective (159-61). Finally, in my view, any answer to the question: What am I? will have at least some unintuitive consequences, and I doubt that anything I've said establishes that Baker's proposal isn't right after all.⁽⁵⁾

Notes

1. See Michael Rea's discussion of his *The Principle of Alternative Compositional Possibilities*, in his introduction to *Material Constitution*, Rea, ed., (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), pp. xxii-xxiii.
2. Derk Pereboom and Hilary Kornblith, "The Metaphysics of Irreducibility," *Philosophical Studies* 63, pp. 125-45, at 131-2.
3. Eric Olson, "Was I Ever a Fetus," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997), pp. 95-110.
4. Whether children at 9-months even attribute intentional states to themselves and others is seriously in doubt. Alison Gopnik and Andrew Meltzoff, who are not at all disinclined to attribute sophisticated levels of understanding to young children -- one of their books is entitled *The Scientist in the Crib* (by Alison Gopnik, Andrew N. Meltzoff, and Patricia K. Kuhl, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1999) -- are skeptical about the proposal that 9-month-old children attribute such states:

If these states are intentional, however, they are so in a rather different way than the more sophisticated states of desire and belief that children attribute later in development. Nothing in the 9-month-old's behavior suggests that they think internal states are separable from action, let alone think that these states are representational. (Alison Gopnik and Andrew N. Meltzoff, *Words, Thoughts, and Theories* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1997), p. 145.; cf.
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