

# Baker on constitution and the afterlife

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## 1 Immaterialism and animalism

Baker thinks that the view that we have to choose between the view that we are immaterial souls (what she calls ‘Immaterialism’) and the view that we are human organisms (what she calls ‘Animalism’) is false. There is a third view, which avoids the problems with each.

The main problem with animalism, she thinks, is that it has a hard time making sense of life after death. As she says,

“The Christian view is that there will be a general resurrection at the end of time at some point indefinitely in the future. Even assuming that the organism was not obliterated at death, the many different things that can happen to human organisms after death — burning or, at best, decay — do not leave one sanguine about the possibility that thousands of years after the death of an organism, that very organism could live again. No doubt God could reassemble all the atoms that once made up a living human animal and ‘breathe life’ back into them. But would such a reassembled organism be the same one that had been destroyed? . . . Not even God could make it the case that the later-assembled organism was identical to the decayed or burned organism.”

An argument for this conclusion, based on the idea that we are made up of different atoms at different times.

Baker thinks that, if we can find a view that makes room for the resurrection without immaterial souls, we should prefer it. Her reasons here are by now familiar ones having to do with the difficulties in making sense of interactions between an immaterial soul and the material world.

## 2 Constitution

But it is hard to see how there could be a middle ground between animalism and immaterialism. One seems to say that we are identical to our bodies; the other seems to say that we are things which are separate from our bodies. Where is the middle ground? Baker suggests that the middle ground is that we are neither identical to nor things wholly distinct from our bodies, but rather are *constituted* by our bodies. But what does ‘constituted by’ mean?

“Constitution is a relation intermediate between identity and separate existence. ... According to the Constitution View, the relation between a human person and her body is exactly the same as the relation between a statue and the piece of marble that makes it up, or between a river and all the aggregates of molecules that make it up. ... The underlying idea of the general relation of constitution is this: when a thing of a certain kind is in certain circumstances, then a new thing of a different kind comes into being. For example, when a piece of plastic of a certain kind is imprinted in a certain way during a government-sanctioned process, then a new thing, an Australian twenty-dollar bill, comes into existence.”

But why should we think that constitution is anything other than identity — i.e., why should we think that the Constitution View is anything other than animalism? Baker argues as follows that constitution cannot be identity:

“Here is an example that illustrates the fact that constitution is not identity. ... Consider Betsy Ross’s first U.S. flag; call it ‘Flag 1.’ It was made by Ms. Ross out of a particular piece of cloth; call that piece of cloth, ‘Cloth 1.’ No national flag could exist in a world without certain intentions and political conventions. ... So, Flag 1 could not exist in a world without certain intentions and political conventions. But something that is a piece of cloth could exist in a world without the intentions and political conventions necessary for something to be a flag. Since there is a world in which Cloth 1 exists but Flag 1 does not, Cloth 1 is not identical to Flag 1.”

Here are two ways to view the argument that constitution is not identity. The first way makes the argument similar to Descartes’ argument for dualism, in that it makes use of the necessity of identity:

1. It is possible for Cloth 1 to exist without there being the intentions and conventions required for national flags to exist.
  2. It is possible for Cloth 1 to exist without Flag 1 existing. (1)
  3. It is possible for Cloth 1  $\neq$  Flag 1. (2)
  4. If  $x = y$ , then necessarily  $x = y$ . (Necessity of identity)
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- C. Cloth 1  $\neq$  Flag 1. (3,4)

A second way of viewing the argument uses Leibniz's Law rather than the necessity of identity:

1. Cloth 1 has the property of possibly existing without there being the conventions and intentions required for flags to exist.
  2. Flag 1 does not have the property of possibly existing without there being the conventions and intentions required for flags to exist.
  3. If  $x$  has some property which  $y$  does not have, then  $x \neq y$ . (Leibniz's Law)
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- C. Cloth 1  $\neq$  Flag 1. (1,2,3)

Are these arguments convincing? Can you think of any parallel arguments which might not work?

These arguments explain why she thinks that constitution is not identity; and so these arguments explain why she thinks that the Constitution View is not a version of animalism. But, if constitution is not identity, then she must think that persons are not identical to their bodies. And isn't this just what the dualist thinks? So why not think that the Constitution View is a version of immaterialism? Baker says,

“Even though constitution is not identity, it is a relation of genuine unity. It is not just a fluke that  $x$  and  $y$  are at the same places at the same times when they are constitutionally related. The unity is so tight — as tight as possible short of identity — that if  $x$  constitutes  $y$  ... then each derives or borrows properties from the other ...”

Another way to distance the Constitution View from dualism is to note that the relationship between, e.g., your driver's license and the plastic which constitutes it seems to be quite different from the relationship posited by the dualist between an immaterial soul and its body.

### 3 Persons and the first-person perspective

This only gets us halfway to an account of persons, which we could then test for consistency with the possibility of life after death. After all, even if we know that, e.g. statues are constituted by the clay of which they are made, we can still ask: what does it take for some clay to constitute a statue? (After all, not all lumps of clay are statues.) Just so, we can ask: what does it take for an organism to constitute a person? Baker says,

“... what makes it the case that something is a person is a first-person perspective ... So, the circumstances under which an organism constitutes a person are the organismic and environmental conditions conducive to development and maintenance of a first-person perspective. ...

A first-person perspective is the ability to conceive of oneself as oneself. ... In English, this ability is manifested in the use of a first-person pronoun embedded in a clause introduced by a psychological ... verb in a first-person sentence. For example, ‘I wish that I were a movie star ... or ‘I wonder how I’ll die’ illustrate a first-person perspective. The second occurrence of ‘I’ in each of those sentences shows that the speaker is conceiving of herself in the first person ...”

To see what Baker is getting at, consider the sentences (uttered by me), ‘I wonder when I will die’ and ‘I wonder when Jeff Speaks will die’. Can you imagine any situation in which these might seem to differ in meaning? Examples of seeing oneself in a mirror, and Perry’s example of the supermarket.

If a person is something with a first-person perspective, what is a human person?

“Any being whatever with the ability to think of itself as itself — whether a divine being, an artificially manufactured being (like a computer), a human clone, a Martian, anything that has a first-person perspective — is a person. A *human* person is a person ... that is constituted (at least at the beginning of his or her existence) by a human body.”

Baker thinks that this account intuitively captures what is essential to persons:

“What is distinctive about us is that we, alone among the creatures, have a conception of ourselves as beings with futures. Only persons can conceive of having a future, for which they have hopes and fears; only persons can make plans to try to control their futures. Only persons can entertain the thought, ‘What kind of being am I?’ Only those who can think of themselves as themselves (i.e., only persons) can think of themselves as having values that they can assess. Animals that do not constitute persons can attempt to survive and reproduce, but being unable to conceive of themselves in the uniquely first-personal way they cannot try to change their natural behavior. Things that matter deeply to us — our values, our futures, our ultimate destinies — could matter only to beings with first-person perspectives. ... That is the reason, I believe, that we, alone among creatures, have religion, science, art, and government.”

#### 4 The Constitution View and the resurrection

But is the Constitution View compatible with the possibility of life after death? Baker identifies three features of Christian belief in the afterlife which a Christian view of personal identity should capture:

- We have bodies in the afterlife which are distinct from our bodies on earth.
- Individuals genuinely continue to exist after death. The relationship between you now and you after death is genuine identity.
- Life after death is a gift from God, rather than something which would happen naturally, given the kinds of things we are.

So is the Constitution View compatible with these three claims? Let's consider them one by one:

1. According to the Constitution View, it is necessary that I am embodied, even though it is not necessary that I have the particular body which I have right now. So this fits well with the idea that we have bodies in the afterlife distinct from our bodies on earth.
2. According to the Constitution View,  $x$  and  $y$  are identical persons if they share the same first-person perspective. I can exist after death since I can share the same first-person perspective with my resurrected self. But, we might ask, what does it mean to share a first-person perspective? Is this just a version of the psychological view? And, if so, will this account of resurrection face the same Parfit-style problems that were difficulties for Hick's account? Baker says:

“Suppose that a mad scientist managed to duplicate me overnight using a brain-state transfer device, and that he cleverly fashioned bodies, so that now there are 100 physical and psychological replicas of me — each sincerely claiming to be Lynne Baker, each reporting past events that only I knew about before I was duplicated, each looking just like me. Notice that the Constitution View, unlike other materialistic views, does not have the untenable consequence that they are all Lynne Baker. All 100 of the duplicates are psychologically continuous with me when I went to bed, but the Constitution View does not hold that psychological continuity is sufficient for personal identity over time. What is required is sameness of first-person perspective. The 100 duplicates all have different first-person perspectives — even if each of the first-person perspectives is ‘qualitatively indistinguishable’ from mine. They have different first-person perspectives (and hence are different persons), in virtue of the fact that they have first-person relations to completely different bodies. A sufficient condition for there to be 101 persons, according to the Constitution View, is that there be 101 first-person relations to 101 bodies. The fact that each claims to be Lynne Baker, and the fact that each has apparent memories qualitatively similar to Lynne Bakers, and the fact that each looks like Lynne Baker are all irrelevant to whether any of them is actually Lynne Baker. At most, one of them can have my first-person perspective. So, the first point is that Constitution View does not have the untenable consequence that more than one future person is I.”

3. Baker on the miracle of resurrection:

“according to the traditional doctrine of Providence, the obtaining of any contingent state of affairs depends on Gods free decree. Whether the person with resurrected body 1, or body 2, or some other body is Smith is a contingent state of affairs. Therefore, which if any of these states of affairs obtains depends on Gods free decree. No immaterial soul is needed for there to be a fact of the matter as to whether Smith is the person with resurrected body 1. All that is needed is Gods free decree that brings about one contingent state of affairs rather than another. If God decrees that the person with body 1 have Smiths first-person perspective, then Smith is the person with body 1.”

A worry: here a ‘first-person perspective’ begins to seem suspiciously like an ‘immaterial soul.’ Compare to other examples of constitution. Could God make some other lump of clay *this* statue? If not, how should Baker explain this difference?