Persons and Bodies

What is a human person, and what is the relation between a person and his or her body? In her third book on the philosophy of mind, Lynne Rudder Baker investigates what she terms the person/body problem and offers a detailed account of the relation between human persons and their bodies. According to the solution Baker offers, a human person is constituted by a human body, but a human person is not identical to the body that constitutes him or her.

Baker’s argument is based on a perfectly general view of material objects: the Constitution View. Applied to human persons, the Constitution View aims to show what distinguishes persons from all other beings and to show how we can be fully material beings without being identical to our bodies. The Constitution View yields answers to the questions “What am I most fundamentally?”, “What is a person?”, and “What is the relation between human persons and their bodies?” Baker argues that the complex mental property of first-person perspective enables one to conceive of one’s body and mental states as one’s own. She provides a convincing alternative to the competing viewpoints of Immateralism and Animalism.

This book will be of interest to professional philosophers and graduate students, and will also appeal to psychologists and cognitive scientists interested in the philosophy of mind.

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Persons and Bodies

A Constitution View

LYNNE RUDDER BAKER

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst
For Kate Sonderegger,
a perfect friend
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Preface

In my earlier books, I developed a critique of the dominant view of the mind, according to which attitudes like beliefs are in the first instance brain states, and I offered an alternative, more pragmatic, approach. See Saving Belief: A Critique of Physicalism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987) and Explaining Attitudes: A Practical Approach to the Mind (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). On my alternative, attitudes – like believing, desiring, and intending – should be understood not primarily as brain states but as states of whole persons. Such a view raises the questions What is a person? and What is the relation between a person and her body? These are the questions that I hope to answer in this book. The answers require a very rich and detailed theory that I call the ‘Constitution View.’ In this book, I set out the Constitution View and defend it against criticism and rival views.

I have tried out much of the theory and argument that appears here at departmental colloquia and at conferences where I have given papers recently: Yale University, Notre Dame University, York University (Ontario), Texas Tech, Texas A&M, University of Oklahoma, University of California (Santa Barbara), Whittier College, Utrecht University (Holland), Conference on Lynne Baker’s Theory of the Attitudes (Tilburg University, Nijmegen University, Dutch Research School in Philosophy [the Netherlands]), American Philosophical Association (Central Division), the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, the Conference on Naturalism (Humboldt University [Berlin]), and the Conference on Epistemology and Naturalism (University of Stirling [Scotland]).

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