THE METAPHYSICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

In The Metaphysics of Everyday Life Lynne Rudder Baker presents and defends a unique account of the material world: the Constitution View. In contrast to leading metaphysical views that take everyday things to be either nonexistent or reducible to micro-objects, the Constitution View construes familiar things as irreducible parts of reality. Although they are ultimately constituted by microphysical particles, everyday objects are neither identical to, nor reducible to, the aggregates of microphysical particles that constitute them. The result is genuine ontological diversity: people, bacteria, donkeys, mountains, and microscopes are fundamentally different kinds of things— all constituted by, but not identical to, aggregates of particles. Baker supports her account with discussions of nonreductive causation, vagueness, mereology, artifacts, three-dimensionalism, ontological novelty, ontological levels and emergence. The upshot is a unified ontological theory of the entire material world that irreducibly contains people, as well as nonhuman living things and inanimate objects.

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The Metaphysics of Everyday Life

An Essay in Practical Realism

LYNNE RUDDER BAKER

University of Massachusetts, Amherst
For my dear friend and colleague,

Gareth B. Matthews,

with gratitude and affection
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Preface

Nonphilosophers, if they think of philosophy at all, may wonder why people work in metaphysics. After all, metaphysics, as Auden once said of poetry, makes nothing happen. Yet some very intelligent people are driven to spend their lives formulating and arguing for metaphysical claims. Part of what motivates metaphysicians is the appeal of grizzly puzzles (like the paradox of the heap or the puzzle of the ship of Theseus). But the main reason to work in metaphysics, for me at least, is to understand the shared world that we all encounter and interact with.

The title of this book, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life*, may bring to mind the title of Freud’s lively book, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, published in 1904. Although scientifically obsolete, Freud’s little volume aptly describes numerous kinds of familiar phenomena. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud focused on ordinary mistakes that go unnoticed: forgetting proper names, mistakes in reading, mislaying things, forgetting to do things, and so on. These banal errors appear to be random but, according to Freud, are products of subconscious desires. Putting aside Freud’s own explanations, we can applaud Freud’s seeing significance in occurrences that are usually overlooked as haphazard and purposeless. Whereas Freud saw psychological significance in ordinary things and our interactions with them, I see ontological significance in ordinary things and our interactions with them.

In addition to responding to critics and expanding my earlier work – work that appeared in *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) and in *Explaining Attitudes: A Practical Approach to the Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) – *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life* offers detailed treatments of some of the most important issues in metaphysics: nonreductive causation, vagueness, mereology, artifacts, three-dimensionalism, time, ontological novelty, ontological levels, and

1 W. H. Auden, “In Memory of W. B. Yeats.”
Preface

emergence. On each of these topics, I present a fresh account in line with my overall view of Practical Realism. The result is a unified ontological theory of the whole material world that contains people, as well as non-human living things and inanimate objects.

A number of people have generously helped me, whether they have found my views congenial or not – in particular, Phillip Bricker, Roberta De Monticelli, Edmund Gettier, David B. Hershenov, Frank Hindriks, Ralph Kennedy, Hilary Kornblith, Menno Lievers, Gareth B. Matthews, Anthonie Meijers, Derk Pereboom, Jonathan Schaffer, Stephen P. Schwartz, Theodore Sider, Marc Slors, Katherine Sonderegger, Robert A. Wilson, and Dean Zimmerman. I have benefited from correspondence with Tomasz Kakol at the Nicholas Copernicus University in Poland. I also thank the participants in my Metaphysics Seminar at the University of Massachusetts, Fall 2004.


Many of the arguments here have descended from papers that I have presented at conferences and universities. Audiences to whom I owe
thanks for helpful criticism include those at presentations at the following: Notre Dame University (2005); the Inland Northwest Philosophy Conference at the University of Idaho (2005) (read in absentia; discussion recorded); Conference on Artefacts in Philosophy, Technical University of Delft (Holland) (2004); the Werkmeister Conference on Folk Concepts (2004); the Philosophy Working Group (Erasmus University, Technical University of Delft, Technical University of Eindhoven, Nijmegen University, Utrecht University) (2004); Canisius College (2004); the Philosophical Workshop on Individuality and Person, University of Geneva (2004); Conference on Dimensions of Personhood, University of Jyväskylä (Finland) (2004), Utrecht University (Holland) (2004); the Conference on Personal Identity, Social Philosophy and Policy Center, Bowling Green State University (2004); the Seminar on Persons and Artifacts, Technical University of Delft (Holland) (2003); Book Symposium on Theodore Sider’s *Four-Dimensionalism*, American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division (2003); Spring Symposium on *Persons and Bodies*, Ohio University (2003); SUNY at Buffalo (2003); Erasmus University of Rotterdam (2003), Connecticut College (2003); The Chapel Hill Colloquium (2001); The Gifford Lectures, Glasgow University (2001); Conference on Reasons of One’s Own, University of Utrecht (Holland) (2001), Leiden University (Holland) (2001); Conference on Self-Consciousness, University of Fribourg (Switzerland) (2000); Memorial Conference for Roderick M. Chisholm at Brown University (2000); Washington University (St. Louis) (1999), the University of Missouri (Columbia) (1999), the University of Toronto (1999); the Australasian Association of Philosophers, Annual Meeting, Melbourne AU (1999); the Australian National University, Research School of Social Sciences (1999) and Yale University (1998).

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