BAKER AND THE FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction

A commonly discussed question among philosophers is the issue of personal identity over time. That is, what does it take for a person x at some time t to be numerically identical to y at some other time t'? The correct answer to this question would be a description of one’s persistence conditions, with persistence conditions being the necessary and sufficient conditions for one to continue to exist. The debate has given rise to many theories, with one alternative being psychological approaches. These theories state that it is in virtue of some psychological state that one continues to exist.

Without going into detail, one complaint against theories relying on psychology for determining one’s persistence conditions, is that they make it difficult to understand what kind of thing one is identical to. This complaint has motivated some philosophers towards theories that focus on describing what thing one is identical to, rather than theories which describe one’s persistence conditions. One such theory is the theory of animalism, among others defended by Eric Olson (2008). Animalists think they can answer the question of what thing one is identical to quite simply. The animalists answer that one is simply identical to a human animal, the human animal that one sees when he looks in the mirror.

In this paper, I will examine Lynne Rudder Baker’s view on what are one’s persistence conditions, as well as her view on what kind of thing one is identical to. Though animalism is primarily a theory about what kind of thing one is identical to, it is close at hand to think that if one is identical to a human animal, then one’s persistence conditions are biological with reference to an organism; call this the biological account. Baker does not agree with animalists who adhere to the biological account. Though she agrees with Olson that one is a human animal, she still thinks that psychology has something to do with one’s persistence conditions. More specifically, Baker thinks one’s persistence conditions are psychological with reference to a first-person perspective; call this the psychological account (Baker 2016).
After first examining Baker’s theory and how it compares with animalism and the biological account, I will proceed to criticize Baker’s theory by presenting three arguments. These arguments will hopefully provide motivation for modifying Baker’s theory. In the last part of this paper, I will suggest modifications to Baker’s theory such that it escapes the three objections. These modifications will be centered around an altering of Baker’s definition and use of the first-person perspective.

The paper is arranged as follows: In section 2, I will briefly explain animalism and the reasons for choosing such a position, as it will be helpful for understanding Baker’s theory. In section 3, I will explain constitutionalism as it is an important component of Baker’s theory. In section 4, I will explain why Baker thinks constitutionalism allows one to say that psychology has something to do with one’s persistence conditions, without having to deny that one is a human animal. Next, in sections 5 to 7 I will present three objections to Baker. The first objection criticizes Baker on her account of what are one’s persistence conditions, as it has unintuitive implications. The second objection criticizes Baker on the fact that one cannot know his persistence conditions on her view, making it epistemically self-defeating. The third objection criticizes Baker on her use of the first-person perspective as a criterion for being a person, as this implies that persons have radically different persistence conditions compared to other material objects. In section 8, I will quickly summarize what has been said so far, and then move on to sections 9-11. There I will try to modify Baker’s theory, such that it escapes all three earlier objections. First I will address the unintuitive implications of her account of what are one’s persistence conditions. Then I will address the issue that one cannot know his persistence conditions on her view. Lastly, I will address the issue of persons having radically different persistence conditions compared to other material objects on her view. The paper finishes in section 12 with a brief summary and conclusion.
2. Baker and animalism

Before I begin, I want to again make clear the distinction between two different questions. Regarding personal identity, one could ask what thing one is identical to, or what are one’s persistence conditions. Call the first question the thing-question, and the second question the persistence-question. Asking the thing-question is rather straightforward, as one is simply asking what kind of thing you are identical to. Some common answers are that one is identical to a human animal, a brain, a soul or a mind. When asking the persistence-question, one is asking the following: What does it take for a person x at some time t to be numerically identical to y at some other time t’? Here one possible answer is that x at t is numerically identical to y at t’ if and only if x at t is psychologically continuous with y at t’. Another possible answer is that x at t is numerically identical to y at t’ if and only if x at t has the same soul as y at t’. Though the thing-question and persistence-question are closely related, it is important to make a distinction since this will become important later.

To understand Baker’s theory, let us first take a look at the theory of animalism. Adherents of animalism answer the thing-question by saying that one is identical to a human animal, the human animal that one sees when he looks in the mirror.

There is good reason to accept that one is identical to a human animal. Eric Olson (2008) brings forth a powerful argument for this in his essay ”An argument for animalism”. It can be stated as follows:

1. There is a human animal sitting in your chair
2. The human animal sitting in your chair is thinking
3. You are the thinking being sitting in your chair, the only thinking being
4. Therefore, you are the human animal sitting in your chair

Denying any of the three premises is difficult, which might tilt us toward conclusion (4) that one is identical to a human animal.
As animalism only answers the thing-question, animalism leaves the answer to the persistence-question up for debate. However, if one answers the thing-question by saying that one is identical to a human animal, it is close at hand to also think that one’s persistence conditions are biological with reference to an organism; call this answer to the persistence-question the biological account. On the biological account, one’s persistence conditions are as follows: \( x \) at \( t \) is numerically identical to \( y \) at \( t^* \) if and only if \( x \) at \( t \) is the same organism as \( y \) at \( t^* \), with that organism being a human animal (Baker 2016).

Baker admits that it is strange to say that one is not a human animal, but still does not think that the biological account is true (Baker 2016). In other words, Baker wants to say that one is a human animal, but she does not want to answer the persistence-question by saying that one’s persistence conditions are biological with reference to an organism.

One reason why Baker does not want to say this is because if one’s persistence conditions are biological with reference to an organism, psychology cannot have anything to do with survival. The reason psychology cannot have anything to do with survival if one’s persistence conditions are biological with reference to an organism is that there are then cases where one could survive without any psychological state. For example, a coma-patient can be completely without a psychological state, but still be considered a living organism. We could even add that this coma-patient does not have an ability to regain a psychological state anymore. Thus, if one’s persistence conditions are biological with reference to an organism, then it follows that there are cases where one could survive without a psychological state and/or the ability to regain it.

According to Baker (2016), this is reason to doubt that the biological account is true. For she thinks it is reasonable that if one completely lost his psychological state, then one would not survive even if the organism sitting in one’s chair would have...
survived. In other words, she thinks one would have ceased to exist if he had no psychological state and no ability to regain it.

So Baker shares Olson’s sentiment that it is strange to say that one is not a human animal, but she does not want to answer the persistence-question by saying that one’s persistence conditions are biological with reference to an organism. She thus wants to get the best of both worlds, and seeks a way to both say that one is a human animal and answer the persistence-question by saying that psychology matters for one’s survival. Baker thinks she can manage this with her own theory, the theory of constitutionalism.

3. Baker and constitutionalism

In Baker’s essay “Animalism vs. constitutionalism” (2016), Baker argues that with the theory of constitutionalism, she can say that one is a human animal without denying that psychology matters for one’s survival. To very briefly summarize Baker’s answer to the thing-question, she thinks one is identical to a person which is constituted by a human animal. In other words, Baker thinks you are not the only being sitting in your chair. Instead, there is both a human animal and a person sitting in your chair. This might be confusing, so before we go any further, it must be explained both what is meant by “constitution” and what is meant by “person”.

First, let us have a look at constitution.

Here is a classic example of a problem where constitution is used as a solution. Imagine you have a lump of clay at some time t1. At a later time t2 you reshape the lump of clay into a statue of a monkey. Hence, you have created a monkey-statue. At an even later time t3 you crush the monkey-statue back to a lump of clay and hence destroy the monkey-statue.

This sounds simple enough, but now consider that one would also be reluctant to say that the lump of clay is destroyed at time t2 when you reshape the lump of clay into a monkey-statue. If one assumes that the lump of clay and monkey-statue are
non-identical objects, this brings us the seemingly unattractive conclusion that two objects, the lump of clay and the monkey-statue, at time t2 occupy the same space at the same time. But commonsense would tell most that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

To this problem one could give several answers, but one of these answers involves using the concept of constitution. Here one simply accepts that it is possible for two objects to occupy the same space at the same time. The explanation for this is as follows: At time t1, there is only the lump of clay, and at time t2 there is both the lump of clay and the monkey-statue, where the lump of clay constitutes the monkey-statue. At time t3 when the lump of clay is crushed, the lump of clay no longer constitutes the monkey-statue, and hence the monkey-statue goes out of existence.

Here one should ask how the lump of clay and the monkey-statue can be non-identical objects even though they share the exact same matter. The answer is that what separates the lump of clay and the monkey-statue are not their matter, but their properties. How are their properties different? For one, the lump of clay and the monkey-statue have different persistence conditions. When the monkey-statue is crushed at time t3 the monkey-statue ceases to exist whereas the lump of clay does not cease to exist. Therefore, the lump of clay and the monkey-statue must have different persistence conditions and hence have different properties. Because the lump of clay and the monkey-statue have different properties it follows that they cannot be identical objects, even though they share the exact same matter. For a more detailed discussion on constitution, see Wasserman (2018).

So in this way, constitutionalists simply accept that two objects can occupy the same space at the same time. Now that we have an idea of what constitution is, I will explain how this relates to Baker’s theory.

Baker’s idea is that one is identical to a constituted thing. So when asked the thing-question, Baker answers by saying that one is identical to a person which is
constituted by a human animal (Baker 2016). Similarly to the lump of clay and the monkey-statue, what separates the constituting thing (a human animal) and the constituted thing (a person), is not their matter, but their properties; among other things their modal properties such as their persistence conditions.

So now let us look at what Baker means by “person”. Baker says that the criterion for being a person is to have a first-person perspective, where having a first-person perspective is to be understood as having a sense of self (Baker 2016). This would be for example; having the ability to recognize oneself in the mirror; an ability to self-reflect; and a self-awareness. This means that a human animal starts to constitute a person at about two years of age, when that human animal obtains a sense of self and hence a first-person perspective.

So, regarding the lump of clay and the monkey statue, Baker thinks that when the lump of clay is shaped into a monkey-statue, the lump of clay constitutes a monkey-statue. Similarly, when the human animal obtains a first-person perspective, the human animal constitutes a person. That person is you, meaning that a person is the kind of thing you are identical to (Baker 2016).

4. What problems does Baker think she can solve?

Thus, on Baker’s theory there is not one, but two beings sitting in your chair right now. One is a constituting thing (a human animal), and the other is a constituted thing (a person). Baker thinks that one is identical to a constituted thing, meaning she thinks one is identical to a person which is constituted by a human animal. In turn, the criterion for being a person is to have a first-person perspective (Baker 2016).

However, now it must be explained how Baker’s view is supposed to solve the problems she intends to solve. Remember, Baker’s goal is to both say that one is a human animal, and answer the persistence-question by saying that psychology matters for one’s survival.
It should be clear that on Baker’s view psychology matters for one’s survival.

Formally stated, when asked the persistence-question, Baker answers in the following way: \( x \) at time \( t \) is numerically identical to \( y \) at some other time \( t^* \) if and only if \( x \) at \( t \) has the same first-person perspective as \( y \) at \( t^* \) (Baker 2016).

Since the criterion for being a person is to have a first-person perspective, we may conclude that if a person lost his first-person perspective, that person would cease to exist. Since a loss of a first-person perspective is a loss of a psychological state, it follows that psychology matters for a person’s survival. As you are identical to a person, it follows that psychology matters for your survival.

However, this is not the only thing Baker wants to accomplish. Baker also wants to say that one is a human animal. But at first glance, it is unclear how that is possible on her view. For Baker says that one is identical to a person which is constituted by a human animal (Baker 2016). And if one is identical to a person which is constituted by a human animal, it seems that one is identical only to a person and not a human animal.

Baker thinks she has a way out of this problem, as she thinks that properties can be obtained derivatively between a constituting and a constituted object (Baker 2016). On this view, when a lump of clay constitutes a monkey-statue, though the lump of clay and monkey-statue are non-identical objects, the monkey-statue is still a lump of clay since it obtains this property derivatively from the constituting object. In reverse, the lump of clay is still a monkey-statue since it obtains this property derivatively from the constituted object. This might be unclear, so I will explain more thoroughly how this is meant to work.

Consider again a lump of clay not yet shaped into a monkey-statue, call it constituting object A. Now imagine that you reshape it into a monkey-statue, call it constituted object B. Hence, we have two non-identical objects: constituting object A and constituted object B. Baker now adds that constituting object A and constituted
object B obtain most properties derivatively from each other. Constituting object A derivatively obtains the property of being a monkey-statue from constituted object B. In reverse, constituted object B derivatively obtains the property of being a lump of clay from constituting object A. Constituting object A is thus both a lump of clay and a monkey-statue, and constituted object B is also both a lump of clay and a monkey statue.

However, even though constituting object A derivatively obtains the property of being a monkey-statue from constituted object B, constituting object A could survive without being a monkey-statue. Remember, if constituting object A was crushed, constituting object A would no longer constitute a monkey-statue. Hence, constituting object A would then no longer derivatively obtain the property of being a monkey-statue from constituted object B. Nevertheless, constituting object A would still survive the crushing since constituting object A would still be a lump of clay afterwards. This means that though constituting object A is a monkey-statue whenever constituting object A constitutes a monkey-statue, constituting object A could survive without being a monkey-statue.

This is what one would call having a property *non-essentially*. Constituting object A has the property of being a monkey-statue non-essentially, because constituting object A could survive without being a monkey-statue. However, constituting object A has the property of being a lump of clay *essentially*, since constituting object A could not survive without being a lump of clay.

Concerning constituted object B, this is reversed. Constituted object B has the property of being a lump of clay non-essentially, but the property of being a monkey-statue essentially. Constituted object B could hence not survive without being a monkey-statue, but could survive without being a lump of clay. For a more detailed discussion on essential and non-essential properties, see Robertson and Atkins (2018).
This is analogous on Baker’s view concerning the thing-question. First consider a human animal, call it constituting object A*. Constituting object A* constitutes a person, call it constituted object B*. Constituting object A* derivatively obtains the property of being a person from constituted object B*. In reverse, constituted object B* derivatively obtains the property of being a human animal from constituting object A*. Constituting object A* thus has the property of being a human animal essentially, and the property of being a person non-essentially. In reverse, constituted object B* has the property of being a person essentially and the property of being a human animal non-essentially.

Since constituting object A* is a human animal essentially, Baker thinks constituting object A* has biological persistence conditions with reference to an organism. And since constituted object B* is a person essentially, Baker thinks constituted object B* has psychological persistence conditions with reference to a first-person perspective (Baker 2016).

In this way, Baker thinks one is identical to a constituted thing. She thinks one is identical to a person constituted by a human animal, and thus one is a person essentially, and only non-essentially a human animal (Baker 2016). Though one is essentially a person, and only non-essentially a human animal, one is nevertheless a human animal on Baker’s account. And because one is a person essentially, and a person survives in virtue of retaining his first-person perspective, it follows that psychology matters for one’s survival.

Hence, Baker seems to have found a way to get the best of both worlds, namely to both say that one is a human animal and answer the persistence-question by saying that psychology matters for one’s survival.

Now that we have investigated animalism, the biological account and how those ideas compare with Baker’s theory, I will proceed to present three arguments that
point towards issues with Baker’s theory. My hope is that these arguments will provide reasons to modify her theory.

5. Beginning and ceasing to exist on Baker’s theory

I have thus far presented the theory of animalism, the biological account and how those ideas compare with Baker’s theory. Baker wants a theory where she can both say that one is a human animal, and answer the persistence-question by saying that psychology matters for one’s survival. With her version of constitutionalism she thinks that she can manage this. This is because on her view, one is essentially a person, which means that one’s persistence conditions are psychological. And though one is only non-essentially a human animal, one is nevertheless a human animal (Baker 2016).

However, even if Baker is right that psychology matters for one’s survival, her answer to the persistence-question has some questionable implications. Her answer to the persistence-question was as follows: x at some time t is numerically identical to y at some other time t* if and only if x at t has the same first-person perspective as y at t* (Baker 2016).

This answer to the persistence-question is highly inconsistent with intuitions of particular cases when one begins to exist and ceases to exist. I will give two counterexamples to illustrate this for each of these two areas of persistence questions: beginning to exist and ceasing to exist. Let us start with beginning to exist.

A rough estimate of when a human animal obtains a sense of self and hence a first-person perspective is when a human animal is about two years old. Because this is only a rough estimate, it might not be empirically accurate. But such things will not be important concerning this objection. If not by two years of age, the objection is still relevant if a human animal obtains a first-person perspective as a one-year old, or as a three-year old and so forth. So presume that a human animal obtains a first-person perspective and hence starts to constitute a person at about two years of age.
This means that you (being a person constituted by a human animal) did not exist before the human animal that is sitting in your chair constituted a person at about two years of age. This is awkward. If your parents showed a photo of you as a one-year old and you responded that the one-year old in the photo was not really you, you would get quite a few raised eyebrows in response. To deny that the one-year old in the photo is you is indeed quite extravagant. Hence, Baker’s theory is in conflict with intuitions of when one begins to exist.

Baker’s theory is also in conflict with intuitions of when one ceases to exist. Assume that you got into a car crash, and as a consequence lost most functions in your brain’s frontal lobe. As the frontal lobe of one’s brain is responsible for the cognitive functions that allow for one to have a first-person perspective, that means you would lose your first-person perspective and hence cease to exist. It follows that the car crash would have caused you to cease to exist even if the rest of your body and basic cognitive functions kept working properly. Baker’s theory does therefore not allow for the possibility of one surviving with major intellectual dysfunction. This is problematic, as we might imagine trying to tell a family who is visiting their beloved member in the hospital that their visit is in vain. “He has lost most of his cognitive functions, so you are not visiting your family member. That person you knew does not exist anymore”. Again, you would just get a lot of raised eyebrows in response.

Hence, these are two unintuitive implications of Baker’s view, regarding difficulties with accounting for intuitions when one begins and ceases to exist. It may be worth noting that Olson and other animalists who adhere to the biological account do not have similar problems. This is because if one’s persistence conditions are biological with reference to an organism, it does not matter for one’s survival whether one retains his first-person perspective or not. Adherents of the biological account answer the persistence-question as follows: $x$ at $t$ is numerically identical to $y$ at $t^*$ if and only if $x$ at $t$ is the same organism as $y$ at $t^*$ (Baker 2016). Because of this, the biological account can better account for these particular cases, and here is why:
Regarding when one begins to exist, those who adhere to the biological account do not have the problem of having to say that one did not exist before one turned two years old. Since the human animal that is sitting in your chair is the same organism as the one-year old human animal in the photo, it follows from the biological account that the one-year old in the photo is indeed you, and that you existed at that time.

Regarding when one ceases to exist, those who adhere to the biological account do not have to say that a car crash which gave you severe intellectual dysfunction would result in you ceasing to exist. This is because the human animal with severe intellectual dysfunction would still be the same organism as the human animal that existed before the car crash. Therefore, it follows from the biological account that one would survive such an event.

Thus, Baker’s answer to the persistence-question runs into some issues that do not befall the biological account.

6. One cannot know his persistence conditions on Baker’s view

Another problem with Baker’s theory is that it excludes one from knowing his persistence conditions. This is because constitutionalism implies that two objects can share the same space at the same time. To illustrate again why constitutionalism implies this, consider again a lump of clay, call it constituting object A, and a monkey-statue, call it constituted object B. Since constituting object A and constituted object B derivatively obtain most properties from each other, constituting object A is both a lump of clay and a monkey-statue. In turn, constituted object B is also both a lump of clay and a monkey-statue.
This has the consequence that wherever a lump of clay constitutes a monkey-statue, where we previously thought there were only one lump of clay and one monkey-statue, there are instead two lumps of clay and two monkey-statues.

This works the same way wherever a human animal, call it constituting object A*, constitutes a person, call it constituted object B*. Constituting object A* derivatively obtains the property of being a person from constituted object B*, and constituted object B* derivatively obtains the property of being a human animal from constituting object A*. Since constituting object A* is then both a human animal and a person, and constituted object B* is also both a human animal and a person, this has the consequence that wherever a human animal constitutes a person, where we previously thought there were only one human animal and one person, there are instead two human animals and two persons. Hence, there are twice as many persons, and many more human animals than we previously thought.

This may be problematic in itself, as it is unintuitive that this could be the case. But what might be especially striking is that this may lead to one not being able to know his persistence conditions. This becomes apparent after considering the following three things:

**First:** As Olson (2016, p. 147) argues in his essay “The Remnant-Person Problem”, this casts doubt on who you are. Because both constituting object A* and constituted object B* are a human animal and a person, this means that both constituting object A* and constituted object B* are having your exact thoughts and experiences. Since there is then no qualitative difference between the experiences and thoughts of constituting object A* and constituted object B*, your experiences and thoughts might just as well be the experiences and thoughts of constituting object A* as constituted object B*. Because of this there seems to be no obvious way to know whether you are identical to constituting object A* or to constituted object B*.
Secondly: Since constituting object A* is a human animal essentially and a person non-essentially, constituting object A* has *biological* persistence conditions. In reverse, since constituted object B* is a person essentially and a human animal non-essentially, constituted object B* has *psychological* persistence conditions.

Thirdly: If we combine the two things we have said so far; that there is no way to know whether you are identical to constituting object A* or constituted object B*; and that constituting object A* has biological persistence conditions and constituted object B* has psychological persistence conditions; it follows that there is no way to know whether your persistence conditions are biological or psychological. In other words, if you got into a car crash and suffered brain damage to the point to where you lost your first-person perspective, it is not certain whether you would survive or not. If you are identical to constituting object A*, you would survive, and if you are identical to constituted object B*, you would not survive. Respectively, if you looked at an old photo of constituting object A* as a one-year old child, it is not certain whether the child in the photo would be you or not. If you are identical to constituting object A*, that child would be you, and if you are identical to constituted object B*, that child would not be you.

If these are indeed implications of Baker’s view, I argue that Baker’s view is epistemically self-defeating since she *insists* that she has psychological persistence conditions. For on her view it might just as well be the other way around, that she has biological persistence conditions. Therefore, if Baker’s theory is true, then there is no way for Baker to know if her proposition, “I have psychological persistence conditions” is true, making her theory epistemically self-defeating.

It may be worth noting two things. Firstly, according to Baker, even though she accepts that wherever constitution takes place the constituting and the constituted object are not numerically identical, Baker still thinks we can say that wherever constitution takes place there is one object as opposed to two (Baker 2016, p. 56). But even if Baker is correct about this, it would not help against this objection. What
concerns this objection is whether, strictly speaking, there is numerical identity or not between the constituting and the constituted object. For as long as the constituting and the constituted object are not numerically identical, there seems to be no grounds to know whether one is identical to the constituting or constituted object. So even if Baker is correct that we can say there is one object as opposed to two wherever constitution takes place, this is not a way for her to escape this objection.

Secondly, Olson and other animalists who adhere to the biological account do not have similar problems. Since animalists do not accept constitutionalism, they do not think that two objects can share the same space at the same time. They think that there is only a human animal sitting in your chair right now, and it is only that human animal which is having your thoughts and experiences. Therefore, there can be no confusion regarding what kind of thing you are identical to, and hence there is no confusion regarding what are your persistence conditions either.

7. Persons have radical persistence conditions compared to other material objects

My last objection to Baker’s theory is that a person is a material object, and that it is difficult to see how any material object could have the persistence conditions that Baker proposes a person has.

As previously stated, according to Baker a person is composed of the exact same matter as the human animal which it is constituted by. This means that a person is a material object with arms, legs and so on. Now consider again Baker’s answer to the persistence-question: $x$ at time $t$ is numerically identical to $y$ at some other time $t^*$ if and only if $x$ at $t$ has the same first-person perspective as $y$ at $t^*$ (Baker 2016). This means that a person’s persistence conditions are psychological with reference to a first-person perspective.
But now we should ask a crucial question by asking what the persistence conditions of a first-person perspective are? What makes it the case that a first-person perspective \( x \) at time \( t \) is numerically identical to first-person perspective \( y \) at some other time \( t' \)? Here I will argue that since a first-person perspective is not a concrete object, but rather a psychological state, the persistence conditions of a first-person perspective do not seem to be dependent on any particular object. Here is an example to illustrate why:

Consider a person \( x \) on Earth, and presume that we had a machine that could disintegrate person \( x \)'s body on Earth into particle dust, and with completely different matter instantly rebuild a copy of person \( x \) on Mars with an exact similar body and psychological state as the one on Earth. If so, it would seem like we had created a body with \( x \)'s first-person perspective on Mars. If the person on Mars has \( x \)'s first-person perspective, then it follows from Baker’s persistence conditions that person \( x \) has now been transported from Earth to Mars.

Furthermore, if we also consider that a person is a material object with arms, legs and so on, this implies that person \( x \), a material object with arms, legs and so on has been transported from Earth to Mars without any particles being moved from Earth to Mars.

But this sounds absurd, for it runs contrary to commonsense that a material object could be transported to a completely different location without any particles being moved from the original location to the new location. There seems to be no other circumstances under which one would accept that a material object could be transported to a different location without any particles being moved from the original location to the new location. For example, one would not accept that the chair you are sitting in right now could move from its current room into your neighbor’s living room without any particles being moved from its current room into your neighbor’s living room. Therefore, If Baker says that a person is a material object, and that a person survives in virtue of retaining his first-person perspective,
then a person is a material object with radical persistence conditions, much different from the persistence conditions of other material objects.

One might wonder why Baker does not simply say that the first-person perspective that is on Mars cannot be x’s first-person perspective, but must be someone else’s, say person y’s first-person perspective. This would solve the problem, since that would imply that person x has not been transported from Earth to Mars after all. Baker does not insist on this because of a small detail not yet mentioned. On her view, there are no criteria whatsoever for the persistence of a first-person perspective (Baker 2013, p. 154-156), and it is hence possible that one might wake up tomorrow in a completely different location, with a body composed of completely different matter. Baker herself does therefore not exclude the possibility that the first-person perspective that is on Mars is in fact x’s first-person perspective.

If so, then Baker has admitted for the possibility that the first-person perspective that is on Mars could be x’s first-person perspective. And if that is possible, Baker does not escape the issues raised above. So it seems that Baker’s answer to the persistence-question imply that persons have radical persistence conditions, much different from other material objects.

One might be tempted to object that it does not follow from Baker’s view that a material object has been transported from Earth to Mars in the example above. All that follows from Baker’s view is that person x has been transported from a material object on Earth to another material object on Mars. Unfortunately, this is incompatible with the following claim: person x is either numerically identical to a material object on Earth or numerically identical to a material object on Mars. Since numerical identity is a necessary relation, it follows that for person x to be numerically identical either to a material object on Earth or to a material object on Mars, person x must be numerically identical either to a material object on Earth or to a material object on Mars in all possible worlds. But it is plain that if person x can
be transported from a material object on Earth to another material object on Mars, then person x is neither numerically identical to a material object on Earth nor to a material object on Mars in all possible worlds.

If so, it then follows that person x is neither numerically identical to a material object on Earth nor to a material object on Mars. But if that is the case, then there are no reasonable suggestions left for what object person x could be numerically identical to, and we are left with the conclusion that person x is not numerically identical to any object, which is absurd. Hence, this objection to my argument fails.

As another response, one might insist that persons in particular are material objects which could possibly be transported to a new location without any particles being moved from the original location to the new location, even though there are no other material objects which have this property. But such a statement simply looks ad hoc to me, and I for one cannot grasp what it would mean for a material object to be transported to a different location without any particles being moved from the original location to the new location.

8. A brief summary

To summarize, I have thus far presented Olson’s (2008) argument for animalism. And if these three premises are true, then it is true that (4) you are identical to a human animal:

1. There is a human animal sitting in your chair
2. The human animal sitting in your chair is thinking
3. You are the thinking being sitting in your chair, the only thinking being

Due to the difficulty to refute the argument for animalism, Baker finds it strange to say that one is not a human animal. However, when met with the persistence-question, Baker thinks that the straightforward combination of animalism together with the biological account does not respect the fact that psychology seems to matter
for one’s survival. Therefore, Baker wants to get the best of both worlds, and both say that one is a human animal and answer the persistence-question by saying that psychology matters for one’s survival. She thinks she managed this with her version of constitutionalism. On Baker’s view, one is a person essentially and a human animal non-essentially. Since one is a person essentially, one’s persistence conditions are psychological with reference to a first-person perspective and hence psychology matters for one’s survival. And since one is a human animal non-essentially, Baker can still say that one is a human animal (Baker 2016).

However, Baker’s theory ran into some problems. In section 5, I gave two examples of how Baker’s answer to the persistence-question is inconsistent with commonsense intuitions of when one begins and ceases to exist. Then, I argued in section 6 that Baker’s theory casts doubt on if one could know his persistence conditions, and that therefore her view is epistemically self-defeating. Lastly, I argued in section 7 that Baker’s answer to the persistence-question implies that persons have radical persistence conditions, much different from other material objects.

With all of this established, I will finish the paper by suggesting some modifications which might help Baker approach these three arguments. These modifications will be centered around altering Baker’s definition and use of the first-person perspective.

9. Escaping the two counterexamples: beginning to exist and ceasing to exist

One of the problems with Baker’s theory was that her answer to the persistence-question had unintuitive implications regarding when one begins to exist and ceases to exist. Regarding when one begins to exist, Baker’s view implies that you are not identical to one-year old “you”. This is due to the fact that a one-year old does not yet have a sense of self and therefore does not yet have a first-person perspective. Regarding when one ceases to exist, Baker’s view implies one would cease to exist if
one received major intellectual dysfunction. This was because a major intellectual 
dysfunction would not allow for one to retain his first-person perspective.

These two implications of Baker’s view are a consequence of her definition of what it 
means to have a first-person perspective. This use of the first-person perspective is 
indeed quite strange, as it leads to such unattractive conclusions. As such, my first 
suggestion will be that this definition of what it means to have a first-person 
perspective must be changed.

To clarify, it is not just one-year old human animals which are considered not to 
have first-person perspectives on Baker’s view. Any animal without a sense of self 
does not have a first-person perspective on Baker’s view. With this in mind, I want 
to suggest another definition of what it means to have a first-person perspective that 
allows for almost any animal to have a first-person perspective, regardless of how 
advanced its cognitive ability is. What I think should be the proper definition of a 
first-person perspective is not to have a sense of self, but an ability to have any 
experience or sensation. This would include every instance of experience or 
sensation: sight, hearing, smelling, thinking and so on. Regardless of what 
experiences and sensations one has, I thus think all experiences or sensations should 
be understood as being a “perspective”.

To avoid the conclusion that any animal with an ability to have experiences or 
sensations will be considered a person, I suggest that Baker should not say that one 
is identical to a person constituted by a human animal. Instead, I think she should say 
that one is identical to a subject constituted by a human animal. For clarification, if 
Baker says that animals with first-person perspectives constitute persons on my 
definition, it will have the implication that every animal with an ability to have 
experiences or sensations constitutes a person. As we normally do not consider 
animals such as birds and cats to be persons, I think “subject” is a more precise 
choice of word. Also note that even though one is no longer identical to a person
constituted by a human animal on this account, I still find it legitimate to use the term “first-person perspective” as a description of the criterion for being a subject.

Formally stated, Baker should claim that one is identical to a subject constituted by a human animal, where the criterion for being a subject is to have a first-person perspective. In turn, having a first-person perspective is to be understood as the ability to have any experience or sensation.

Adopting this view of what it means to have a first-person perspective will evade the two counterexamples, and I think Baker’s theory would be more plausible on this account. Here is why:

Regarding when one begins to exist, this allows for subjects to be constituted by any sentient animals regardless of their cognitive abilities. When looking at an old photo of the human animal that was the one-year old “you”, Baker would now have grounds to say that the one-year old subject in the photo is in fact you and that you existed at that time. Since a one-year old certainly has the ability to have experiences and sensations, there is on this account no reason to say that one-year old “you” did not have a first-person perspective. Hence, this allows for the fact that you once existed as a one-year old. Of course, this also implies that you did not exist before you had the ability to have experiences and sensations. But I regard this as not being nearly as problematic as Baker’s proposal.

Regarding when one ceases to exist, it accommodates the intuition that one should not cease to exist because one receives major intellectual dysfunction. On my definition, even if one receives major intellectual dysfunction, one will still retain his first-person perspective. For a subject with major intellectual dysfunction still has an ability to have experiences and sensations.

Hence, my alternative definition of what it means to have a first-person perspective escapes both of these counterexamples which befall Baker’s definition.
The problems regarding that one cannot know his persistence conditions on Baker’s view

The second issue that befell Baker’s theory was that it seemed epistemically self-defeating. Baker insists that one’s persistence conditions are psychological with reference to a first-person perspective. But if constitution works as she proposes, then it seems one cannot know what his persistence conditions are. This was because the constituting thing (a human animal), and the constituted thing (a person), are having the exact same thoughts and experiences. Therefore, one cannot know whether one is a human animal essentially or a person essentially, and hence it is not certain whether Baker is correct that one’s persistence conditions are psychological with reference to a first-person perspective or not. For there is also a possibility that one’s persistence conditions are biological with reference to an organism.

I have two suggestions for how Baker could approach this. First, Baker could accept the conclusion that there is no way to know one’s persistence conditions, rather than insisting that one’s persistence conditions are psychological with reference to a first-person perspective. If Baker were to simply accept this, then her view certainly has the unintuitive implication that one cannot know his persistence conditions for certain. But at least her view would then be internally coherent. It is better if Baker makes her view internally coherent with one unintuitive implication than if she makes it internally incoherent. One might argue that this implication is particularly unintuitive. But then again, every philosophical theory usually must make at least one or two unintuitive concessions. Regardless, Baker probably would not want to take this path, as she would then have to say that it is possible that she has biological persistence conditions. The possibility that she has biological persistence conditions was one of the conclusions Baker wanted to avoid right from the beginning.

Another perhaps more viable option is that Baker should deny that human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences, and that therefore human animals
cannot have first-person perspectives. To see how this solves the issue, consider the previous example:

Let us say we have a constituting object $A^*$ (a human animal), and a constituted object $B^*$ (a person). Let us say one of these two beings is you, and that both constituting object $A^*$ and constituted object $B^*$ are having the exact same thoughts and experiences. Since there is then no way to know whether you are identical to constituting object $A^*$ or constituted object $B^*$, it is not certain whether you are a human animal essentially, or a person essentially. Hence, it is not certain whether you have biological persistence conditions or psychological persistence conditions.

However, if one were to deny that human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences, there would be no more confusion. For the reason there is no way to know whether you are identical to constituting object $A^*$ or constituted object $B^*$, is because one currently accepts that constituting object $A^*$ and constituted object $B^*$ are having the exact same thoughts and experiences. But if one simply denies that human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences, and it is only persons which are capable of having thoughts and experiences, it is now only constituted object $B^*$ which is capable of having thoughts and experiences. There could then be no more confusion regarding whether you are identical to constituting object $A^*$ or constituted object $B^*$. For you know that you are a being which is capable of thoughts and experiences, and it is only constituted object $B^*$ which is capable of thoughts and experiences. Therefore, there is no longer a possibility that you are identical to constituting object $A^*$, and thus you can know that you are identical to constituted object $B^*$. Since constituted object $B^*$ has psychological persistence conditions, it then follows that you can know that your persistence conditions are psychological.

Therefore, if Baker denies that human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences, this solves the epistemic issue, and her theory would no longer be self-
defeating. For if Baker adds this modification and her theory is true, there is now a way to know that her proposition “I have psychological persistence conditions” is true.

However, this has further consequences for her theory. If Baker were to take this path then she has to be more parsimonious regarding what properties can be obtained derivatively between a constituting and a constituted object. Baker thinks that constituting object A* can derivatively obtain the property of being a person from constituted object B*. But if Baker denies that human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences, then this would not be possible. For if one denies that human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences, and constituting object A* is a human animal essentially, then constituting object A* cannot have a first-person perspective. If the criterion for being a person is to have a first-person perspective, and constituting object A* cannot have a first-person perspective, then constituting object A* cannot be a person. Thus, it cannot then be the case that constituting object A* can derivatively obtain the property of being a person from constituted object B*.

Furthermore, this also has the reverse consequence that constituted object B* cannot derivatively obtain the property of being a human animal from constituting object A*. This is because if one says that human animals are not capable of having thoughts and experiences, and persons are necessarily capable of having thoughts and experiences, it follows that because constituted object B* is a person essentially, constituted object B* cannot be a human animal. As one is identical to constituted object B* on Baker’s view, it means one cannot be a human animal on this account.

Therefore, since one of Baker’s main goals is to say that one is a human animal, I suggest she should add that beings which are non-essentially human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences, while still denying that beings which are essentially human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences. This
allows Baker to solve the epistemic issue while also allowing for one to be a human animal. Here is why:

Since constituting object A* is a human animal essentially, constituting object A* is then still incapable of having thoughts and experiences, and therefore cannot derivatively obtain the property of being a person non-essentially from constituted object B*; thus solving the epistemic issue. Simultaneously, since beings which are non-essentially human animals are now capable of having thoughts and experiences, constituted object B* (being a person essentially) can now derivatively obtain the property of being a human animal non-essentially from constituting object A*. And since one is identical to constituted object B* on Baker’s view, she thereby does not have to give up on the idea that one is a human animal non-essentially.

Hence, if Baker says that beings which are non-essentially human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences, while still denying that beings which are essentially human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences, she will solve the epistemic issue while still allowing for one to be a human animal.

11. The problems regarding why a person’s persistence conditions are so different from other material objects

The third problem that befell Baker’s theory was that her theory implied that persons have radical persistence conditions, much different from other material objects. This was due to her answering the persistence-question by saying that a person’s persistence conditions are psychological with reference to a first-person perspective. Since the persistence conditions of a first-person perspective do not seem to be dependent on any particular object, this had the implication that it might be possible for a person, a material object with arms, legs and so on to be transported to a different location without any particles being moved from the original location to the new location. If so, then a person is a material object with radical persistence conditions, much different from other material objects.
This is especially problematic as Baker insists that there are no criteria whatsoever for the persistence of a first-person perspective (Baker 2013, p. 154-156). Therefore, to avoid the conclusion that a person is a material object with radically different persistence conditions compared to other material objects, I suggest Baker must add some criterion for the persistence of a first-person perspective, such that a first-person perspective must persist by virtue of some spatial continuity. This way, Baker would have room to claim that it is impossible for a first-person perspective to be transported to a new location so suddenly.

We can see how this could solve the problem if we once again consider the previous example. Presume that we have a person x on Earth, and that we once again disintegrate x’s body on Earth into particle dust and with completely different matter instantly rebuild a copy of x’s body on Mars with an exactly similar psychological state. It is plain that in this example no particles have been moved from Earth to Mars. Yet, the body on Mars has an exactly similar psychological state and hence an exactly similar first-person perspective as x’s. If the first-person perspective on Mars is in fact x’s first-person perspective, it then follows that person x, a material object with arms, legs and so on has been transported from Earth to Mars without any particles being moved from Earth to Mars.

Now, before Baker could not object and say that the person on Mars does not have x’s first-person perspective, but instead must have someone else’s, say y’s first-person perspective. This was because on her view, there are no criteria whatsoever for the persistence of a first-person perspective. Therefore, Baker cannot deny that such a transportation of a first-person perspective might be possible. But if Baker adds some criterion for the persistence of a first-person perspective, such that a first-person perspective must persist by virtue of some spatial continuity, then Baker can say that it is impossible for a first-person perspective to be transported in this way.

For example, Baker could add as a criterion for the persistence of a first-person perspective that a first-person perspective could not survive such a sudden change
of location, and that therefore it is not possible that the first-person perspective on Mars is x’s first-person perspective. This would prevent the possibility of a first-person perspective being transported to a different location so suddenly, and hence prevent the possibility of persons being transported to a different location without any particles being moved from the original location to the new location. In turn, this would mean that a person is no longer a material object with radically different persistence conditions compared to other material objects.

Of course, this has the side-effect that there cannot be no criteria whatsoever for the persistence of a first-person perspective. Baker might think this would be a great loss, but perhaps it is a necessary one to make her theory more plausible.

12. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined Lynne Rudder Baker’s answer to the thing-question and the persistence-question, and how these answers compare with animalism and the biological account. I then argued that Baker’s theory cannot account for intuitions about when one begins to exist and ceases to exist, it cannot account for how one could know his persistence conditions, and it cannot account for intuitions about what persistence conditions a material object could have.

Lastly, I suggested some modifications to Baker’s theory that will help it escape such objections. These modifications were all centered around altering Baker’s definition and use of the first-person perspective, and can be summarized as follows.

Baker should say that one is identical to a subject constituted by a human animal, where the criterion for being a subject is to have a first-person perspective. In turn, having a first-person perspective is to be understood as the ability to have any experience or sensation. Furthermore, Baker should deny that beings which are essentially human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences and hence deny that beings which are essentially human animals are capable of having first-person perspectives, thus solving the epistemic issue. Lastly, when asked what
the persistence conditions of a first-person perspective are, Baker should not say that there are no criteria whatsoever for the persistence of a first-person perspective. Instead, she should add that first-person perspectives must persist by virtue of some spatial continuity. Thereby Baker escapes the implication that persons are material objects which could be transported to a different location without any particles being moved from the original location to the new location.

As a final note, I recognize that it might seem somewhat ad hoc to claim that beings which are essentially human animals are not capable of having thoughts and experiences, while simultaneously claiming that beings which are non-essentially human animals are capable of having thoughts and experiences. It is not obvious however, why this assumption is worse than other assumptions Baker makes. And even if it is, I think it is a necessary sacrifice if one wishes to make Baker’s theory more plausible.
References


