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Naturalizing Persons: A Reply to Lynne Rudder Baker[†]

Eric Kraemer

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Biography

Eric Kraemer received his A.B. in philosophy from Yale University and his Ph.D. in philosophy from Brown University. He taught at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. His research areas include philosophy of mind, epistemology, and medical ethics.

Dedication

Lynne Rudder Baker (1946–2023) was Distinguished University Professor of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Baker was the author of 5 books and numerous articles. This paper is dedicated to her memory.

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Abstract

Persons are natural beings, but they probably do not constitute a natural kind. So how should a philosophical naturalist conceive of them? This article begins by critiquing different views on the nature of persons put forward by animalist, Eric T. Olson, medical ethicist, Mary Anne Warren, and common-sense metaphysician, Lynne Rudder Baker. Baker's views are of primary interest, as she initially offered a naturalist-friendly account of persons which later morphed into an anti-naturalist position. A naturalist account is proposed based on organisms having the properties of consciousness and intentionality that borrows from and modifies all three earlier views. The proposed account identifies three different kinds of persons. Kinds of persons are differentiated from each other by their serious capacity for one of three different forms of intentionality. The three different forms of intentionality identified are basic intentionality, enriched (or social) intentionality, and the intentionality required for a fully developed first-person perspective. Limitations of the proposal are explained, criticisms of the proposal are addressed and advantages of the proposal are enumerated.

Keywords

Persons, Philosophical Naturalism, Baker, First-Person Perspective, Intentionality, Warren, Animalism

Introduction

If you are reading and comprehending this discussion, then you are most surely a person.¹ But what is it for there to be persons? What makes a person a person? Let's call this the 'Person Question.' Human beings have attributed personhood to a wide variety of objects: in addition to human beings and various animals, plants, rocks and bodies of water have also been considered persons at some point in human history. Furthermore, the attribution of personhood has typically been taken to indicate the moral significance of the individual or group in question, and also to indicate limitations on how such individuals or groups are to be treated.

1. Given the current hype regarding ChatGPT, I should note that I do not consider current computer programs, however extraordinary their features, to have yet reached a level of sophistication that would count as genuine comprehension. But, given my commitment to philosophical naturalism, to be consistent I need to remain open on this matter.

This discussion, however, approaches the Person Question from the perspective of Philosophical Naturalism, the view that the only objects that exist are physical objects and the only properties that are instantiated are either physical or ontologically-neutral properties. No attempt will be made to accommodate non-natural entities such as souls, or spirits, or to accommodate the many celebrated purely imaginary or pseudo-scientific thought experiments often invoked in philosophical discussions of persons. This question about persons is an important one for philosophical naturalists to address. The answer to the question is by no means obvious for philosophical naturalists as persons as a group do not figure as the specific objects of any current branch of natural science.

The Person Question, we should note, is different from the Personal Identity Question, what makes a person the same person over time? But, it is reasonable to assume that any attempt to answer the Personal Identity Question must presuppose having an answer to the Person Question, as the latter is more basic. It should also be granted at the outset that even if one has a convincing answer to the Person Question, there is no guarantee that the Personal Identity Question will also receive an illuminating or definitive answer.

Ever since Peter Strawson's influential 1958 eponymous article, the concept of persons has been an important one that analytic philosophers have been confronted with having to address.² So, it is no surprise that naturalistically-inclined philosophers have found themselves in need of either accommodating the concept or explaining it away.³ But, since I take it as obvious that there are persons and since philosophical naturalism seems the most promising philosophical framework, I will focus on how one might best accommodate the concept of persons within a naturalistic framework.⁴

In this discussion my efforts will concentrate on the development of the late Lynne Rudder Baker's philosophical views on the topic of persons. My choice of Baker is deliberate, as Baker initially developed an account of persons which she took to be broadly compatible with a weak form of naturalism (Baker 2000), but then gradually changed her mind. At first she embraced a form of what she called "quasi-naturalism" (Baker 2007), and then she explicitly rejected the adequacy of naturalism, opting instead

2. In this discussion I will follow the convention adopted by many writers of using the term "persons" instead of the term "people" but my usage is purely stylistic. I do not recognize any significant philosophical difference between these two terms.

3. See, for example, Peter Unger (1979).

4. In what follows for ease of exposition I will use the terms 'naturalism' and 'naturalistic' to refer to philosophical naturalism.

for a view which she claimed was “close enough” to naturalism (Baker 2013). Thus, Baker is constructively useful for my purposes, first, in initially being sympathetic to a naturalist account of persons, and thereby laying out a helpful initial framework that naturalists can substantially adopt. And, second, her work is also critically valuable in providing both serious counter-arguments and nagging concerns that conscientious naturalists need to consider and counter.

To guide my efforts, in addition to Baker’s writings, I will also refer briefly to the pioneering work of philosophers, Eric T. Olson and Mary-Anne Warren. I will attempt to combine elements from all three thinkers into a view that none would accept. Unlike philosophers who seem concerned to tie personhood to multiple complex forms of thinking, my primary concern is to determine what minimal natural conditions, including minimal mental abilities that are required for minimal personhood. My reason for this deliberate emphasis is that it is all too easy for philosophers (1) to forget that there are many members of our own species that lack certain basic mental abilities and also (2) to ignore the option that there are members of a number of other species that share important mental features that we human beings prize.

Some Initial Comments on the Naturalization of Persons

Any attempt to say something meaningful about persons must start with an initial list of prospective candidates for personhood. Since as humans we are by nature anthropocentric, we must start with members of our own species. If we are willing to be fully anthropocentric, as many of our conspecifics still are, then we will stop at this point, claiming that human persons have a truly unique metaphysical status and are therefore special. But, there are other influences, religious, social, fictive, in addition to personal experiences with and testimonies by others about other animals that will often force many of us to be open to the notion that the class of persons is wider than the class of humans.⁵ Although, as I have already mentioned, I shall not be concerned to accommodate religious entities or science fiction entities in my efforts, I will, on the other hand argue, that naturalists have to be open to the live option that other animals are persons, too.

5. The example of Jane Goodall talking about her experiences with chimpanzees in her numerous books and documentaries is particularly moving.

What makes the question, “what are persons?” difficult to answer is that it is widely agreed that the concept of a person is a primitive concept, that is, one that cannot be further analyzed into simpler notions. Any attempt to provide an analysis of person, such as “A person is an individual with a self-concept,” seems to utilize a term, such as self, that either itself requires explication in terms of person or is a synonym of person. What one can do with respect to trying to get a deeper understanding of a primitive concept, however, is attempt to characterize it by pointing out its significant key features.

So, what is involved in naturalizing a primitive concept? Here’s a seven step procedure to follow.

1. Identify a set of typical characteristics generally regarded as being had by those individuals to whom the concepts apply.
2. Ascertain which features are also possessed by uncontroversially natural objects and which are not. (Those features also had by uncontroversially natural objects pose no threat for naturalists.)
3. With respect to those features not had by uncontroversially natural objects, determine whether and how they might be assimilated to natural properties.
4. If certain such features can be easily assimilated to natural properties, they, too, will pose no issues for naturalists.
5. Turn next to considering those features which cannot be easily assimilated to natural properties and determine whether or not they are essential to retain the concept as consistent with naturalism.
6. If a feature is not essential, then explain why it may be ignored; if a feature is essential, then adopt a revisionist strategy for these features.
7. To implement a revisionist strategy, consider which aspects of these features are most salient, have the best evidential support, and determine natural replacements for them.

For example, one might start by proposing that a person is a living organism with certain specific mental characteristics, A, B and C. To apply the above procedure schematically we would need to consider living organisms and features A, B, and C. Now it is reasonable to suppose that living organisms are naturalistically congenial, not requiring any non-natural properties or non-physical forces to explain their operations. We would then need to turn to features A, B, and C to see if a promising naturalistic account of them

can also be given. Let us suppose further that there are initially plausible naturalistic accounts already for A and B but not for C. We would then need to ask whether feature C was a significant feature of personhood. It might turn out that we could produce an argument to show that C was metaphysically dubious, and so not worth worrying about. In which case we could revise our naturalistic account of personhood to consist simply of organisms with features A and B. But suppose, on the other hand, we determined that C introduced an important feature of personhood but was not naturalistic in its present form. In this case we would need to figure out whether there was a more satisfyingly naturalistic replacement for C, call it C*, and whether C* would be adequate to cover the cases of all those individuals whom we wanted to include as persons.

The above schematic example begins with the assumption that persons are first and foremost living organisms that also have certain mental features. From the naturalist perspective, species of organisms that are persons evolved from other species of organisms that were not persons. Therefore, considering how the development from organisms who are not persons into organisms that are persons seems to be a fruitful way of providing an answer to the person question. Since starting with organisms seems to be a productive procedure for naturalists to follow, let us begin the search for an adequate naturalization of persons by considering the views of Eric T. Olson, who makes the organism the fundamental basis for personhood (Olson 1997).

Olson's Animalism

In his 1997 book Olson proposes and defends a naturalist-friendly account of personal identity based on the human being as an organism. This view has come to be known as 'animalism.' According to Olson, our basic organismic nature makes us what we are and accounts for our continuing to exist: "On the Biological Approach, what it takes for us to survive remains the same throughout our careers: like other animals, we persist as long as our life sustaining functions remain intact" (Olson 1997, 89). He also says, "The fetus or infant becomes a person" (Olson 1997, 89). *You*, however on Olson's view, are not basically a person, you are fundamentally an organism. You can also survive your psychological demise provided your organism continues otherwise to function. Olson admits that "Perhaps we cannot properly call that vegetating animal a *person*, since it has none of those psychological features that distinguish people from non-people (rationality, the capacity for self-consciousness, or what have you)" (Olson 1997, 17). Thus, Olson's view seems as though it might well count as a naturalized account of

personhood. Applying our above schema, for Olson a person is an organism plus the acquired features of (A) rationality, (B) the capacity for self-consciousness or (C) “what have you.” The problem for the picky naturalist, of course, will be with respect to (C), that is, not knowing exactly which specific feature or features the acquired possession of which Olson thinks turn organisms into people. But, unlike defenders of psychological criteria for personal identity, Olson is not worried to spell out what exact criteria, from a psychological perspective, a person phase of an organism needs to have. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that he does not consider such criteria to be metaphysically controversial. His metaphysical concerns are elsewhere. In particular, he is convinced that personal identity is organismically grounded, not psychologically based. So, while Olson distinguishes between the mere organism and its person phase that your organism transitions into and out of, it is the continuity of the organism that is essential for your continuity.

Olson maintains that “I” was an organism before “I” was a person, and that “I” may biologically continue as an organism after I cease being a person. But, why should we interpret things this way? Cases in which living bodies which cease relevant psychological function seem to me to have lost what is essential to their “I”-hood. Olson’s alternative interpretation is simply odd. Here’s a quick-and-dirty linguistic argument. The word “I” functions as a subject. What seems precisely to be lacking, if we try to take Olson seriously, is how statements about organisms lacking all psychological properties can be meaningfully interpreted as referring to subjects.

While as a naturalist I completely agree on the importance of my organismic nature’s role in making me what I am, I think Olson’s approach to persons is insufficiently organismic; he fails to appreciate the remarkable biological developments that are required for persons to exist. These biological developments are what really turn organisms into persons; Olson even admits there are no persons without them. But, my comments just reflect my own intuitions, perhaps Olson would reply that he just does not share these intuitions. So what arguments do serious critics provide?

Consider Baker. Baker raises two objections to Olson’s view, one based on the possibility of replacing all of a human’s biological parts with inorganic parts (Baker 2000, 122), the second based on brain transplants (Baker 2000, 124). Baker claims that both of these scenarios are conceivable, but that Olson’s view cannot accommodate them. But, there are replies to both of these science fiction possibilities. Olson can maintain that an organism with perfectly functioning artificial parts artificially performing all of the required bodily functions of the organism is still an organism, although an artificial one. And, Olson bites the bullet on brain transplants, holding that one’s brain switching

organisms is equivalent to one's death as a person. "So if you are a human animal, you do not go along with your cerebrum when it is transplanted; you simply lose an organ, and with it those psychological capacities that depended on that organ" (Olson 1997, 18).⁶

As a naturalist, my own view on this matter is that we simply do not know what the results of such a transplant might be. I can well imagine both scenarios that would support Baker's objection as well as contrasting scenarios that would support Olson's reply. At this point, there does not seem to be a way to decide whether Baker's transplant objection has any real force. We should instead remember that science fiction really is *fiction*, and not put much confidence in what are, for now, purely fictive scenarios. So, I do not find Baker's objections to Olson's view terribly compelling. In fact, I am not currently aware of any blatant inconsistency in Olson's animalist view; I just fail to find animalism to be a convincing account of persons. It would seem that a much more compelling alternative to Olson's animalism would be to propose, not that a person is simply an organism, but rather that a person is an organism as long as they have certain requisite psychological properties. But, to move to this next step we first need to consider an important contribution to the abortion debate by another philosopher, Mary Anne Warren, whom I view as an important forerunner to Baker.

Warren's Thought-Experiment Approach

It should not be surprising that one of the most important areas in which the Person Question should have been seriously raised has been in the debates over abortion over the past half century. After all, if the fetus is a person at some particular stage, then this seems to be nearly decisive regarding whether abortion is morally permissible or not.⁷ And, if the fetus is never a person, then the debate over abortion seems moot. The latter view is famously defended by Mary Anne Warren in a classic article in which Warren attacks leading views of the day (those of John Noonan and Judith Thomson) as well as offering her own innovative argument (Warren 1973).

For my purposes, John Noonan's view is worth considering briefly. Noonan claims that a fetus is a person because it possesses (a) "a full genetic code" and (b) the potential

6. Olson does not share the same religious commitments that we shall later see that Baker has.

7. Exceptions to be considered include a threat to the life of the mother, pregnancy as a result of rape or incest, and a dire medical diagnosis of an unavoidably and terribly painful, short and meaningless life of the future neonate

capacity for rational thought (Noonan, 134). Although Noonan was a prominent defender of the conservative religious view on abortion, Noonan's account of personhood includes an explicitly naturalistic part, namely the genetic code, and adds an important mental element, the capacity for rational thought. If this mental element could be accounted for naturalistically, then Noonan's account would be one that naturalists could also accept. Applying our above schema, Noonan's analysis consists not of an organism but rather of genetic material in a developing fetus combined with a single mental property, the capacity for rational thought.

We also need to remember that Noonan claims that having a full genetic code is already a sufficient condition for also having the capacity for rational thought, which, he thinks, makes abortion at any stage of fetal development *prima facie* immoral. Warren deftly critiques Noonan's claims, arguing that the most that Noonan can establish is, not that the fetus is a person at every stage in virtue of it possessing the capacity for rational thought, but, rather, the much weaker claim that the fetus has the potential to become a person in virtue of possessing this capacity, which carries no force with respect to rejecting the permissibility of abortion.⁸

Warren instead proposes a novel thought experiment in which "a space traveler... lands on an unknown planet and encounters a race of beings utterly unlike any he has ever seen or heard of" (Warren 1973, 54–55). Warren suggests that, in order for the space traveler to figure out whether these beings had moral standing (i.e., were persons,) the space traveler needs to consider five characteristics she claims, "are most central to the concept of personhood" (Warren 1973, 55):

1. Consciousness (of objects and events external and/or internal to the being), and in particular the capacity to feel pain;
2. Reasoning (the developed capacity to solve new and relatively complex problems);
3. Self-motivated activity (activity which is relatively independent of either genetic or direct external control);
4. The capacity to communicate, by whatever means, messages of an indefinite variety of types, that is, not just with an indefinite number of possible contents, but on indefinitely many possible topics; [and]

8. For a further critique of Noonan-type views see Kraemer (1983).

5. The presence of self-concepts, and self-awareness, either individual or racial or both.

Warren's strategy to counter the anti-abortionist's claim that fetuses are persons is to assert that at no point in its development does a fetus possess any of these five characteristics. Since the fetus lacks all of these features, it is not a person, but only develops into a person at some later point after birth (Warren 1973, 56).

Warren's discussion is relevant here because it introduces an interesting variety of features and also allows for some flexibility regarding the attribution of personhood. In particular Warren says:

We needn't suppose that an entity must have all of those attributes to be properly considered a person; (1) and (2) alone may well be sufficient for personhood, and quite probably (1)–(3), if "activity" is construed so as to include the activity of reasoning. (Warren 1973, 55–56)

Warren's thought-experiment approach is also important as it seems to allow for the possibility of two minimal kinds of persons, first those beings with consciousness and reasoning, and second those beings with consciousness, reasoning, and self-motivated activity (guided by reasoning). It also allows for other species to be persons. But, importantly, it also allows for more advanced persons, namely those also possessing communication abilities and self-concepts. And, if these features can all be provided with an adequately naturalistic account, then naturalists could well accept these different options as different kinds of persons.

There are some minor issues that might be raised for Warren's account. First, Warren's view is, rightly in my view, held hostage to scientific developments. So, for example, if it is determined that fetuses do possess consciousness and, especially sentience, as some have claimed, then this needs to be taken seriously.⁹ Warren can still maintain that an additional criterion would need to be discovered in fetuses for her view on abortion to be affected. Second, Warren's view as stated above might seem to place an undue emphasis on the importance of a person's possessing the ability to reason.¹⁰ But, it is not uncommon for some individuals to lose this capacity, either temporarily or indefinitely.

9. Charity requires that we recognize that scientific developments have certain changed over the past half century. A quick web search quickly reveals numerous sites claiming fetal sentience begins anywhere from 18 to 25 weeks.

10. Following Noonan and to some extent as well as Aristotle.

And, in such cases it also would seem odd to have to say that such an individual ceased to be a person, especially if they possessed other features on the list, such as the capacity to communicate and possession of self-concepts. So, perhaps a more charitable reading of Warren's view would be to suggest holding that a person is an individual who possesses consciousness and any of the other four criteria. This would then result in an even more complicated account of personhood than what I have indicated above. Third, although in addition to humans Warren only explicitly considers applying her view to alien persons and to the possibility of self-conscious robots and computers, she does not consider what her space traveler would think of elephants, dolphins and octopuses when they return to Earth. Again, her view could be extended to include all of these other species using several of the criteria from her above list.

Historically, however, the most important objection to Warren's position is that her view would permit infanticide up until the age of two. In a subsequent (Warren 1984) postscript to her original article, Warren defends against this charge by arguing there are other ways to argue for protecting neonates, such as the fact that they are deeply desired by their parents. But, those who think that very young infants who still possess significant capacities with respect to the above criteria are not going to be convinced. And, a related serious issue concerning euthanasia needs to be faced. How on Warren's view of persons should we respond in the case of an adult human has temporarily lost all or most of the five Warren features of personhood? On Warren's view it would seem that, as for the neonate, due to the absence of the requisite features such an individual is no longer a person. But, if Warren allows that the adult retain their personhood status during the period temporary loss from which they are expected shortly to recover, which seems the reasonable response, then it is blatantly unfair to deny the status of personhood to a fetus on the verge of shortly acquiring the same features.

Baker's Initial Constitution View

Let us now turn to Baker's Constitution View. In her book, *Persons and Bodies*, Baker presents a new way of conceiving persons which she claims to be consistent with a 'weak materialism' (Baker 2000, 134). A person, for Baker, is a combination of an adequately developed body plus "a capacity for" a first-person perspective (Baker 2000, 92).¹¹

11. It is tempting to view Baker as revising the fifth of Warren's central criteria of personhood listed above, namely the presence of self-concepts, and making it central to personhood.

This combination of items is to be understood as a technical relation that Baker calls *constitution*, which is not at all the same thing as identity. For Baker, a person's being *constituted* by a body and a first-person perspective means that (1) the body and the person spatially coincide but are not identical, and (2) it is possible for the body to exist without there being a person present.¹²

As is the case with Olson's animalism, Baker's constitution account of personhood requires that personhood be something that is both gained at some point after the body came into being and is also something that can be lost while the body continues to exist. But, for Baker, persons only come into being when their capacity for a first-person perspective is acquired. And this, in turn, requires that "all the structural properties required for a first-person perspective" are present, and the body is "in an environment... conducive to the development and maintenance of a first-person perspective" (Baker 2000, 92).

Before considering subsequent revisions of Baker's view, here are three quick criticisms of Baker's initial Constitution View. Consider, first, Donald Davidson's infamous *Swampman* thought experiment (Davidson 1987). If an alien body, Herbert, metamorphosed out of organic gook right in front of us and then communicated with us well-enough to convince us that they had a 1st-person perspective, it would seem utterly bizarre to claim that Herbert failed Baker's theory of personhood simply because Herbert did not develop over time but arose spontaneously. As a naturalist I have sworn off such considerations; but, Baker, given her criticisms above of Olson, leaves herself wide-open to this concern. (And, she could modify her view accordingly.)

There is the further worry as to whether Baker's constitution approach really does solve the problem of personal identity any better than other views she criticizes. It is simply not epistemically certain whether the same person over time is really being picked out by the same particular first-person perspective or whether there are two different first-person perspectives. Not only is this not the case for other people that one observes from a third person perspective, but it is also not the case from one's own first-person perspective. It may seem to me that (a) I have the same first-person perspective this morning that I had yesterday morning, but, the skeptic will point out, I could be wrong.

12. The metaphysics behind Baker's notion of constitution is murky. She motivates the notion by appealing to the difference between a statue and the piece of marble and art world that constitute it. But, it is hard to see a convincing parallel for the case of persons. The first-person perspective, although strongly influenced by language development and social interaction, seems much too organically connected to the well-functioning body. It would seem more appropriate to regard it as a property of the body.

There might in fact be (b) two different first-person perspectives involved. And Baker has no independent way to determine whether (a) or (b) is the case.

Baker is well aware of this objection. In a discussion in a subsequent book chapter on resurrection and the survival of death, to which she is committed, Baker admits:

What is needed is a criterion for sameness of first-person perspective over time.... Although I think the constitution view solves the synchronic problem of identity non-circularly...I think that, on anyone's view, there is no informative noncircular answer to the question: In virtue of what do person P1 at t1 and person P2 at t2 have the same first-person perspective over time? It is just a primitive, unanalyzable fact that some future person is I, but there is a fact of the matter nonetheless. (Baker 2005, 385)

But, to be aware of the objection and to suggest in reply that identity of first-person perspectives over time is a brute fact should strike the reader as a rather spectacular piece of stone-walling.¹³ It seems reasonable to hope that something more can be said to help us track persons over time. If an alternative view of personhood can do a better job of handling the problem of personal identity, then that would seem to be a strong reason to prefer it over Baker's constitution view.¹⁴

Also, the spectre of the infanticide objection is lurking. A quick google search reveals that a sense of self develops in infants between the ages of two and three. And we know that brain structures are developing continuously until the age of 25. Determining whether the right structures are in place to avoid the infanticide charge might have made Baker's view a hostage to future science. But, since she explicitly rejects reductive materialism and any promise of help that it might provide, it is not clear on Baker's view how one could determine just when the right brain structures for the capacity for a first-person perspective will be in place. So, Baker's early constitution view would also seem to face the same infanticide objection that haunted Warren.

13. First-person perspective identity might not be a brute fact due to empirical concerns. Suppose brain-conjoined twins are determined to have overlapping first-person perspectives, but consider themselves to be non-identical.

14. For example, defenders of animalism might claim to do a better job solving the problem of personal identity.

BAKER'S Initial Rejection of Naturalism

In her subsequent book, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life*, Baker continues to defend the constitution view outlined in *Persons and Bodies*, but revises her metaphysical claims. In particular, she no longer claims that her views are broadly consistent with naturalism, but instead embraces what she calls 'quasi-naturalism.' Quasi-naturalism differs from thorough-going naturalism in two ways. First, epistemologically, quasi-naturalism holds that there are other sources of knowledge besides the sciences. Second, metaphysically, quasi-naturalism holds that there may be some events that do not have scientific explanations (Baker 2007, 87). What quasi-naturalism entails with respect to human persons also involves two claims. First, human persons are part of a natural world that has evolved by natural causes over eons, are natural entities, and live under the same necessity as the rest of nature (Baker 2007, 89). And, second, human persons are ontologically *unique* in that the coming-into-being of a new person is the coming-into-being of a new kind of entity, not merely an already existing entity's acquiring a new property (Baker 2007, 90). In response, naturalists would readily admit that human beings are indeed remarkable. But, naturalists would contend, given that human persons are natural entities subject to natural forces that develop according to laws of nature, it seems highly unlikely that human persons are ontologically unique. What is not obvious is how one might argue for this uniqueness; and clearly, an argument is needed. Let us now consider the important additional modifications in Baker's theory of persons introduced in the final version of Baker's view.

Baker's Two-Tiered Revision

In her 2013 book, *Naturalism and the First-Person Perspective* Baker refines her view further. The same revisions are nicely summarized in a subsequent article, "Making Sense of Ourselves" (Baker 2016).¹⁵ This article's initial focus is to critique narrative accounts of personal identity as championed by Daniel Dennett and Myra Schechtman. One of Baker's criticisms of Schechtman's characterization view is that narrative accounts do not apply to infants (Baker 2016, 12). Perhaps to avoid a similar problem for herself, Baker now moderates her view, claiming that there are two different kinds of first-

15. I will here address remarks from her 2016 article, in part because it is most relevant to the 2023 CNN conference.

person perspectives, 'rudimentary' and 'robust.' The rudimentary first-person perspective consists of consciousness and intentionality, while the robust first-person perspective is the full-fledged "I*," or "the capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself in the first-person" (Baker 2016, 14). Further, Baker claims that most humans after becoming rudimentary persons normally develop into robust persons. Baker is now able to avoid the infanticide objection by claiming that infants possess rudimentary first-person perspectives, which subsequently usually becomes robust.

An important consequence of this distinction is that Baker admits she must now grant that many mammals—her favorites are lions—namely those possessing consciousness and intentionality, also become constituted as rudimentary persons when their bodies develop structures which can sustain consciousness and intentionality. Still, Baker insists, a huge metaphysical distinction still exists between humans and other animals: humans have their first-person perspective *essentially* while nonhuman animals only have first-person perspectives *contingently*. Again, as with Baker's earlier claims regarding the uniqueness of human persons, I cannot find any non-contentious reason to accept this claim; it just seems to be dogma. Further, her distinction between two classes of persons raises the worry as to how we should treat those humans who, because of bad biological or environmental luck, never become constituted by bodies with structures supporting the robust version of the first-person perspective. In addition the question as to how to treat animals with a rudimentary first-person perspective also arises.

Further, once one introduces two kinds of first-person perspective, it is then tempting to ask whether there are other kinds of first-person perspective. Might there be a moderate first-person perspective in between rudimentary and robust, consisting perhaps of having a weaker sort of first-person perspective?¹⁶ The worry is that introducing a variety of first-person perspectives makes it difficult to claim that one specific level or specific combination of mental traits is essential for personhood. The important moral we should again draw, as we have already observed in examining Warren's view, is that any adequate account of personhood needs to be suitable flexible on this point, allowing that there seem to be very different kinds of people with very different mental endowments.

At this point, after considering and critiquing the views of Olson, Warren and Baker, I will attempt to assemble the insights I have gained into a naturalized account of persons. Unlike the previous accounts so far discussed, there are no relatively simple guiding principles, except perhaps those of avoiding bias in favor exclusively of

16. Or, might there be an even more advanced kind of first-person perspective for Aristotelian super-stars who excel at the highest forms of thought, such as contemplation?

competent humans and also of granting there are still a number of unclear issues that need to be acknowledged.

Kraemer's Non-constituted Alternative Account of Persons

I begin my account by first taking stock and indicating what features so far discussed I agree with and what challenges remain. I think Baker is on the right track in terms of thinking of persons as being associated with individual physical bodies. While I cannot follow Olson's animalism, I find Olson's organismal assumption, the idea that persons are probably a heterogeneous class of organisms with certain mental abilities, also to be convincing. The hard part involves trying to specify which minimal mental ability or which set of such abilities are required. It seems reasonable to suppose that natural persons encompass a range, many features and dimensions of which have already been mentioned.

As a naturalist, I also urge that, while we may be very clear about certain additional kinds of organisms that we want to include (octopuses)¹⁷ and which to continue to exclude (slime molds), there are others that at this time we are not at all sure about. My proposals are tentative, like many areas of investigation in science. There are certain claims that we can justifiably advance now based upon our current scientific understanding. But, we need to be humble and admit that only future science may be able to give us more definitive insight as to not only the range of individuals that should be considered persons, but also with respect to the re-identification of specific individual persons over time.

Warren's bold attempt at categorizing persons is indeed helpful. And, it even seems plausible if we interpret her view as holding that organisms possessing consciousness and at last one other of the right elements should be considered persons. Our discussion so far has made it clear that being a naturalist regarding persons is going to be a messy proposition for the foreseeable future. There will be a variety of different sorts of persons, some very rudimentary indeed, some moderately developed, some fully developed, and some quite spiffy. And there will be hard cases where it just will not be clear what to say.

One further point. In her 2013 book Baker raises an important general point about persons, one hinted by other writers, namely the importance of language, which entails language communities. She says: "Persons are not solitary selves. They require language

17. Any reader doubting the personhood of octopuses is recommended to read Peter Godfrey-Smith [2017].

communities” (Baker 2013, 140). From a naturalist perspective, this claim should be taken seriously. Many species often considered as likely candidates for personhood seem also to have some form of communication, and live in communities. This leads me to introduce the notion of *enhanced* intentionality. Intentionality refers to the directedness of our thinking on objects, including some which may not exist.¹⁸ By enhanced intentionality I mean to indicate possessing sufficiently complicated mental structures that enable one to recognize individuals in a community, including recognizing oneself as an individual in that community. I am understanding enhanced intentionality as a mental capacity in between the perhaps basic intentionality of lions and the full-fledged I* ability to think of oneself as a self.

As the reader has already been warned, my view on persons is a rather messy one. Messy views are unfortunate because clear and simple philosophical views tend to be more successful at garnering attention and followers: they are easier to grasp, remember, apply, critique, revise, refute, etc. But, if we fairly consider all of the various animals that might be considered for some form of personhood as well as the corresponding different kinds of members of our own species that we would want to include as persons, then it becomes clear that, unlike some of the simpler answers that have been considered so far, the Person Question deserves a nuanced and multiple-level response. First, we would do well to consider distinguishing between at least three kinds of persons to be specified below. Second, on this view it is incumbent for us to be more humble about what the actual status of various animals actually is, and grant that we might turn out to be wildly incorrect in our current assessments.¹⁹ And, third, as a result of trying to naturalize persons we may need to admit that, although there are coherent and defensible accounts of personhood, the philosopher’s problem of personal identity over time may be one for which only a roughly approximate answer can ever be provided. We may be forced to admit that there may simply be too many obstacles to ever providing a definitive answer to all of the traditional philosophical questions that have been raised.

Here, then, are the six parts of my view of persons.

[1] *Basic* persons are organisms (living organic bodies) possessing consciousness and what I will call *basic intentionality*. By basic intentionality I include having some propositional attitudes about objects in the world, being capable of being fooled with

18. See Chisholm 1956, 125

19. For a discussion of moral issues at stake in determining the nature of animal thinking, see Kraemer (2006).

respect to those attitudes by appearances, and, further, being capable of engaging, or at least intending to engage in intentional actions based upon those attitudes.

With this requirement I intend to accommodate the initial granting of personhood to non-human animals. The details of who would be included in this category remain to be determined. Certainly, neonate humans quickly develop to this stage.

[2] *Social persons* are organisms that possess consciousness and what I call *enhanced intentionality*. If we are lucky, future science will reveal when these mental possessions are acquired as well as the extent of those that have them. In addition to apparently including a number of social animal groups, this category also includes certain human beings who face serious mental challenges.

[3] Full-blown 1st-person perspectives are indeed special, but material in nature. I think that they are constructed somehow out of consciousness and intentionality. They are remarkable and important but not ontologically unique and are not necessary for being a person.

[4] I am not especially sanguine about solving the problem of continued existence, especially not by appealing to first-person perspectives, but think a naturalist approach that looks for physical evidence in the organism is the only one with any likelihood of even moderate success. I have more to say about this below.

[5] I do not worry about constructing a theory of persons that accommodates deities, Martians, artificial devices, brains-in-vats, transplanted brains or brain-parts, or individuals who have been 'teletransported.'²⁰ If and when good impartial evidence of such things really existing is forthcoming, there will be plenty of opportunity to investigate and revise.

[6] I think we will need a separate category of *seriously potential persons* to cover certain individuals of our own and many other species. This seems to be the only honest way for humans to avoid the infanticide problem and also to help provide much needed guidance in connection with the appropriate way to respect organisms at the end of their biological lives. I have no proposals to offer, but I remain convinced that scientific investigation may be able to help us figure out some reasonable answers. Let us now turn to considering some objections.

20. Teletransportation was popularized in the *Star Trek* television series, and famously used by Derek Parfit (1986).

Baker's Arguments Against Naturalizing the First-Person Perspective

In her last book Baker goes on the attack against Naturalism. She contends that it is a flawed view for not being able to account for the first-person perspective. She argues as follows (Baker 2013, 123):

1. There are first-person properties that are neither eliminable nor reducible.
2. Any property that is neither eliminable nor reducible belongs in the ontology.
3. Thus, first-person properties belong in the ontology.
4. If first-person-properties belong in the ontology, then ontological naturalism is false.
5. Thus, ontological naturalism is false.

As an ontological naturalist, I must reject the argument's first premise. But, if I do not think that first-person properties are eliminable--and I do not--and if I do not have a handy-dandy reduction up my sleeve, then how can I reasonably justify rejecting that premise?

I admit that not having a reductive strategy ready-to-hand is a bit embarrassing, but so then is lacking a plausible reductive account for consciousness and for intentionality. And, that is, oddly enough, the key to my response to Baker. After all, Baker is not worried about the natural status of rudimentary first-person perspectives of human infants and other nonhuman animals, which are not ontologically special. And, she grants that they possess consciousness and intentionality. I think it reasonable to suppose that a robust first-person perspective is somehow composed of elements of both consciousness and intentionality. If we can at least provisionally grant that consciousness and intentionality are within the scope of ontological naturalism, this suggests the beginning of a strategy to deal with first-person perspective properties as well. While Baker would insist that having a first-person perspective is very different from what I have referred to as enhanced intentionality, I am confident that further investigation into what actually happens in us when our thoughts are directed in various ways—towards sources of sensation, towards individuals we recognize, and towards ourselves—will lead us to have a better understanding of what having a first-person perspective in all its complexity really amounts to.

Baker also provides in-depth critiques of various attempts to provide a naturalist-friendly account of the first-person perspective, and claims to show that they all fail. Her

basic strategy is to insist that: "What is needed for naturalization of the I*-concept is a third-person characterization of the capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself* in the first-person. I have argued that we have no such third-person characterization" (Baker 2013, 122).

I have a different take on the matter. I think that what this criticism demonstrates is that philosophical naturalists are in the same position as compatibilists have been with respect to indeterminists regarding free-will. Compatibilists need to reject an indeterminist reading of "could have done otherwise" and propose an alternative, determinist-friendly interpretation of this concept. So, too, some modification of what is essential for first-person perspective, other than the ontologically rich requirements that Baker insists on is probably in order. Just what those might be remains to be determined. We should not expect this to happen soon. After all, think how long it took for compatibilism to become the dominant philosophical view. We should not anticipate naturalist-friendly alternatives to Cartesian and Baker's neo-Cartesian approaches to persons becoming popular overnight.

Natural Persons and the Problem of Personal Identity

So what does the proposed view have to say about the problem of personal identity? Simply this: as long as the same organism, O, exists over time, and as long as that organism has both the same consciousness and one of the three forms of intentionality discussed above, the same person exists. I suspect that if an organism changes which form of intentionality it has, then it may also change its identity. Again more empirical evidence about such cases is needed.

Baker would object that the naturalized account cannot handle cases in which persons switch bodies, which it seems that it cannot. But, can Baker's own view account for survival without body switching? I have suggested that Baker's attempt to solve the personal identity problem by appealing to the brute identity of first-person perspectives is unsatisfying. Here is another reason to consider. First-person perspectives are *intentional*, meaning that they are directed on objects which need not exist. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to wonder whether one's first-person perspective from one day to the next is necessarily being directed towards the same self as itself as it was the day before. The additional element required to establish continuity is an identifying mark for a particular first-person perspective. And, that is what Baker's view explicitly denies.

Can the naturalist view of person just sketched do any better in terms of accurately identifying a particular individual in the same body over time?

Suppose we could discover distinct natural signaling patterns occurring among the relevant parts of the brains of a statistically significant sample of research subjects, patterns that we think are responsible for the relevant mental activities to be transpiring to account for personhood status, including their engaging in first-person perspectivizing. Suppose further that we then expanded our study to include thousands of humans which further corroborated our initial findings. And, suppose even further that we could discover similar signaling going on in nonhumans accompanied by nonlinguistic but 'pensive-like' behaviors. What would it be reasonable for us to conclude? Baker might maintain that the signaling was merely indicative of unrelated causes at work, and further insist that we couldn't have discovered anything remarkably unique enough to help us get a real natural reduction of the first-person perspective, let alone attribute it to nonhumans. But, what might others say about such findings? I suspect that many would not be so reticent. This scenario is, of course, pure science fiction, so no serious conclusion should be taken to follow from it. But, it might indicate the sort of evidence that future researchers will use to advance our understanding of continuing persons over time.

Another Worry to Consider²¹

There is a final concern to address: what, if anything, is so important about the term *person* that it is worth trying to hang on to it within the naturalist framework that has been sketched above? After all, there are now many different things that seem to qualify as persons. A quick answer is that conferring personhood still confers moral standing. But, more needs to be said. Here's a stab at a fuller answer to this challenge. I have claimed that there are three different kinds of intentionality corresponding to three different kinds of persons. The kind of person one is makes a difference. Unlike organisms with basic intentionality, those organisms with enhanced intentionality have the ability to recognize different individuals, typically though not restricted to members of one's own species, including that the organism in question is itself an individual. The acquisition of enhanced intentionality is the minimal requirement for something's being what we might call a *social person*, an entity that can interact with others as others. Individuals with consciousness and minimal intentionality are *basic* persons, individuals who can

21. I am indebted to Elizabeth Schechter for raising this concern.

interact with the environment. Individuals with fully developed first-person perspectives, on the other hand, not only recognize the individuals they interact with, they also have a developed understanding of themselves as actors among other actors. It is these individuals who have the wherewithal to be what we might term *moral persons*. And it is with respect to individuals in this last category that one can reasonably start to address concerns about responsibility. Given the above three part division, it seems appropriate to begin to answer the challenge with “it all depends...” That is, it depends upon what sort of person one is talking about. I take it as obvious that identifying someone as a moral person does not need any special attention. Moral persons have duties, rights, obligations, etc. So, what about the other two cases?

Once an individual has been identified as a basic person, that is conscious, which importantly includes being sentient, and also possessing intentionality, that suffices to establish a definite moral standing for such an individual. That is, practices involving and treatments of such individuals by others possessing more advanced personhood status need to come under serious moral scrutiny. In general, inflicting pain and interfering with the intentional actions of such individuals requires moral investigation and justification by moral persons. On the other hand, social persons, who have moral standing as well, also are entitled to engage in the social practices and to receive the social considerations that exist within the particular group of which they are a member.

Final Comment

I have devoted my efforts up to this point to outlining views I agree with partially and disagree with substantially, and to trying to provide solid criticisms of views I reject and what support I can for my own, very rough naturalistic account of persons. But, I must end by expressing my deep appreciation for the contributions of Olson, Warren, and Baker, especially, of course, those of Baker. For she has forced us to reconsider a number of claims that were taken for granted: identity vs. constitution, what’s really essential for personhood, who really has it, is it metaphysically special, and if not, how can we account for the first-person perspective. While I suspect that a number of her views regarding persons may not survive long into the future as viable options—the arc of naturalism seems to resemble the famous arc of justice—we will not have done an

adequate job of finally naturalizing persons until we can convincingly deal with the many issues that she raised.²²

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22. For further discussion of many aspects of Baker's philosophical work, see Oliveira and Corcoran (2021).

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