

## RESPONSE TO ERIC OLSON

**Lynne Rudder Baker**

I was taken aback (to say the least) when Eric said, “Lynne often misdescribes her own view,” and then accused me of making a simple logical error. These are such serious charges that I feel that I must try to make my view clearer. (Otherwise, I wouldn’t go into the technical detail that follows.)

The technical apparatus of my Constitution View contains a well-defined distinction between ‘having a property nonderivatively’ and ‘having a property derivatively’. Roughly, (omitting reference to times),  $x$  has  $F$  *nonderivatively* iff  $x$ ’s having  $F$  does not depend on  $x$ ’s constitution relations, and  $x$  has  $F$  *derivatively* iff  $x$ ’s having  $F$  depends on  $x$ ’s having constitution relations with something that has  $F$  nonderivatively. Now call the distinction between having a property nonderivatively and having it derivatively the ‘Key Distinction’.

My thesis is this:  $x$  has  $F$  iff  $x$  has  $F$  nonderivatively or  $x$  has  $F$  derivatively. The Key Distinction shows how some  $F$ s have their persistence conditions in virtue of being  $F$ s and other  $F$ s do not. If  $F$  is a primary-kind property, then nonderivative  $F$ s have their persistence conditions in virtue of being an  $F$ ; derivative  $F$ s do not. My body is an animal nonderivatively and has its persistence conditions in virtue of being an animal; I am an animal derivatively and do not have my persistence conditions in virtue of being an animal.

One more technical point: not all properties may be had derivatively. Several classes of properties are excluded from being had derivatively. One of them is the class of properties expressed in English by ‘constitutes’ or ‘is identical with.’ Other excluded properties are those rooted outside the time that they are had, such as what is denoted by ‘starting out as an embryo’. Such properties are not shared; they are either had nonderivatively or not at all.

Application of the Key Distinction to Eric’s criticisms rescues me from each of them. To wit:

Eric formulates a valid argument form:

- (A) I am an F  
 Everything that is an F is a G  
 So, I am a G

and he offers an instance of it as a counterexample to my view:

- (1) I am an animal  
 Every animal started out as an embryo  
 So, I started out as an embryo.

I deny the conclusion of (1), but (1) is a problem for me only if the premises are true. Are they? The first premise is true: Since I'm an animal derivatively, I'm an animal.

But the second premise is false: Only nonderivative animals—not *all* animals—started out as embryos. (Recall that anything that started out as an embryo, started out as an embryo nonderivatively.) So, given the Key Distinction, (1) is unsound because it has a false premise.

However, we can make the second premise true:

- (2) I am an animal  
 Everything that is an animal nonderivatively started out as an embryo.  
 So, I started out as an embryo.

Given the Key Distinction, the second premise of (2) is true. But in that case, (2) is invalid and hence not an instance of the original argument form (A).

So, either: the second premise is false (as in (1)) or the argument is invalid and not an instance of (A) (as in (2)). Either way, the valid argument form (A) provides no counterexample to me, nor did I misdescribe my own view.

Application of the Key Distinction also (a) defuses Eric's worry about 'separate existence'; (b) defeats Eric's claim that if x constitutes y at t, then x and y are

numerically different; (c) answers Eric's question: If I am not identical to this organism, how do I know which one (the person or the organism) I am?

In short: There is a single thread of misunderstanding that runs through Eric's remarks. On my view, identity is necessary; however, if  $x$  and  $y$  are *nonidentical*,  $x$  and  $y$  may be related in either of two time-indexed ways: (i) by being constitutionally related at  $t$ , and (ii) by having separate existence at  $t$ . The different ways of being nonidentical embody the Key Distinction. There's no mystery here since the Key Distinction, as well as ' $x$  constitutes  $y$  at  $t$ ' and ' $x$  and  $y$  have separate existence at  $t$ ', are all explicitly defined in familiar terms.

Eric never mentions the Key Distinction. It's not that he argues that there's something wrong with the distinction or that it can't do the work that I propose for it; he simply doesn't acknowledge it—although it takes up a whole section of a chapter of *Persons and Bodies*.

As to whether or not I have misunderstood Eric's own view, I certainly understand that he thinks that there are persons. But on his view, being a person is no more fundamental to what we are than is being a fancier of fast cars. On his view, there is no *ontological* distinction between us and earthworms. His approach to metaphysics tells us nothing about what is distinctive about us. By contrast, I think that metaphysics should tell us about what is fundamental to our being the kind of thing that we are (as opposed to earthworms), and about what is significant about us.

By the way, it is most assuredly *not* my view that "*all* value...carries ontological significance" or that "any kind...that's distinctive or important to us in any way has to be a kind that's *ontologically* significant."

I'll not remark further on Big-Tent Metaphysics. I knew that it would not appeal to Eric, but I hope that it does appeal to some of you.

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