

## Reply to Jackson, II

Lynne Rudder Baker

Commonsense psychological explanations are an integral part of a comprehensive commonsense background that includes almost everything that we deal with everyday – from traffic jams to paychecks to cozy dinners for two. It is the comprehensive commonsense background that I think is not wholesale refutable by science. A good deal of the comprehensive commonsense background itself depends on there being beliefs, desires, intentions and other propositional attitudes. If there never have been propositional attitudes, then there never have been statues or schools or terrorists or Nobel prizes. Since I think it unreasonable to suppose that science will reveal that there never has been a statue, or a school or a terrorist or a Nobel prize, I also think it unreasonable to suppose that science will reveal that nobody has ever had a belief, desire, intention or other propositional attitude.<sup>1</sup>

Jackson accuses me of conflating two issues: whether physical explanations will *refute* commonsense explanations and whether physical explanations will *supersede or replace* commonsense explanations. Although I did not distinguish these two possibilities, I do not think that wholesale refutation without replacement is a live option. First, refutations are typically accompanied by replacement (“The patient wasn’t just malingering after all. We discovered a tumor”). Second, we know, from the fact that our commonsense explanations and predictions work so well, that refutation-without-replacement is not widespread. And that’s a good thing too. For if we had wholesale refutation-without-replacement, then we would be left with no explanation whatever of commonsense phenomena – like taking a taxi, having a party or accepting a job offer. We would have to say either that there is no such thing as, say, taking a taxi or that taking a taxi is totally inexplicable. Or, perhaps more likely, in Kuhnian fashion, we would let anomalies pile up until there was a suitable explanatory competitor. Since neither of the first two alternatives is tolerable, and the third is not a case of refutation-without-replacement, I do not think that refutation-without-replacement is a live option. Hence, my “conflation” comes to nothing.

In my remaining space, I want to take up an analogy from Jackson. I wholly support Hornsby’s emphasis on the distinction between personal and sub-personal explanations and the explanatory pluralism that ensues. Jackson has an

1 I agree with eliminativists that neuroscience will not find the relevant brain states to be identified with beliefs, etc. But unlike eliminativists, I conclude that propositional attitudes are not brain states. The alternative is to give up the commonsense conception of reality, and so commit “cognitive suicide.” See Baker (1987, 1995).

analogy that he takes to count against that distinction. Where Jackson sees an analogy to the distinction between personal and sub-personal explanations, I see a disanalogy.

Jackson notes that the discovery that gases are collections of widely scattered particles had implications for the behavior of gases, and that it “would have been wrong-headed to invoke a distinction between gas-level and particle-level explanations.” (this issue, p. 190) Right, but that’s because a gas can be understood entirely in terms of its parts. Such is not the case for individuals that have intentional and/or relational properties essentially. Consider an everyday object that has intentional and relational properties essentially – e.g., a statue. You don’t come to understand much about statues by looking at or analyzing its parts. A statue is essentially related to an artworld. If you don’t understand that fact about statues, then you don’t understand statues. The commonsense background is full of things that cannot be understood in terms of their parts – flags, 5-pound notes, passports, and on and on.

So, too, the behavior of persons cannot be understood in terms of the person’s parts. If we want to know why Jones is running for U.S. President, we want to know his motivation. Suppose that Jones is running for U.S. President because he wants to fulfill his father’s wishes. I am confident that no explanation in terms of Jones’s brain states could possibly reveal his motivation for running for President. In the first place, Jones’s being motivated to run for President depends in considerable part on Jones’s living in a society that has a President and has elections. In the second place, I strongly doubt that there is a particular brain state that satisfies the description “desire to fulfill father’s wishes.”<sup>2</sup> Whether or not there is such a brain state is an empirical question, and I am prepared to let the neuroscientists decide it. But if I were a betting woman, I would place my bet like this: Neuroscientists are not going to find any particular brain state such that everytime Jones’s behavior is explainable by Jones’s desire to fulfill his father’s wishes, Jones is in that brain state. Paul Churchland, I believe, would place the same bet. If Churchland and I are right, then Churchland would conclude, “So much the worse for putative phenomena like desires to fulfill one’s father’s wishes.” Whereas I would conclude, “So much the worse for any wholesale reduction of commonsense explanations to physical explanations.”

In the envisaged circumstances, I say that explanatory reduction should go; the physicalist says that propositional attitudes should go. My defense is this: if we give up propositional attitudes, we commit “cognitive suicide.” If we give up explanatory reduction, we give up nothing. We can still be materialists in the sense that all individuals are ultimately constituted by fundamental particles, without supposing that explanations in terms of fundamental particles are explanations of the behavior of the individuals that they constitute.<sup>3</sup>

We persons and the other things in the everyday world that are defined in part

2 Of course, I do not doubt that the brain is implicated in every bit of Jones’s behavior. What I doubt is that there is a one-one or even a one-many correspondence—detectable by neuroscientists—between the mental states that explain Jones’s behavior and particular brain states that are taxonomic in some neurophysiological theory.

3 For a detailed elaboration of this point, see Baker (2000).

by intentional and/or relational properties (like a driver's license or an Australian dollar bill) are not like gases. For gases, as Jackson says, it "would have been wrong-headed to appeal to a distinction between gas-level and particle-level explanation." But the situation is quite different for intentionally-defined objects (like a driver's license or a U.S. dollar bill or a person). For such objects, explanations of the parts do not suffice for explanations of the whole.

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### References

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