Consciousness and Persons: Unity and Identity. Michael Tye. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. Pp. xv + 203.

There is much to admire in this book. It is written in a pleasingly straightforward style, and offers insight on a wide range of important issues.

The book's main topic is the unity of phenomenal consciousness. Phenomenal consciousness is the property that a mental state has when there is something it feels like to be in that state--experiences being the clearest example. Experiences are unified when there is something it is like to have them together: if I see a bird and at the same time hear it squawk, these experiences are unified; if you see the bird and I hear it, they are not. But this unity does not simply amount to the experiences' belonging to the same subject, Tye says, because in split-brain cases a single person might have simultaneous but disunified experiences. Tye's question is what phenomenal unity does amount to.

His begins by arguing that the question is wrongly framed. If I see a bird and hear it squawk, he says, there is no purely visual experience and no purely auditory one whose unity needs explaining. There is rather a single, broader experience which has both visual and auditory content. The question of what unifies the two experiences does not arise because there aren't two experiences there to be unified.

Tye applies this surprising view across the board: whenever we want to say that several experiences are phenomenally unified, there are not in fact several experiences, but one experience with several aspects of representational content. (Tye thinks every experience represents something.) This applies not only to simultaneous experiences, but also to those occurring at different times. You don't just see a bird here and then see it there; you see it moving from here to there. Tye says that there is no experience of seeing the bird here and only here, and no experience of seeing the bird only there, but rather a single experience of seeing the bird successively occupying a series of positions. More generally, most of us have just one experience, representing all that we are experientially aware of, stretching between periods of complete unconsciousness. Provided that I don't have a nap at midday, the taste of my coffee this morning and the feel of my shower this evening are both aspects of a single phenomenal content.

Tye's view is that phenomenal unity is not a relation among experiences, but a relation among "qualities represented in experience" (36). The problem of phenomenal unity, then, is what it is for two qualities to be represented by the same experience, as opposed to each being represented by a different experience. What makes the avian shape my experience represents here and the squawking sound it represents there aspects of the content of a single experience?

Tye's answer appears to be this: the avian shape and the squawking sound are phenomenally unified just in the case that my experiencing an avian shape and my experiencing a squawking sound jointly entail my experiencing an avian shape *and* a squawking sound (37, 100f.). If this is Tye's answer, it is rather unsatisfying. For one thing, he doesn't say what he means by 'entail'. It isn't logical entailment: even if my experiences are in fact perfectly unified, Tye doesn't think it is *impossible* for me to experience an avian shape and experience a squawking sound without experiencing both together. But the more urgent question is *what it is* to experience an avian shape and a squawking sound. How is it different from merely experiencing an avian shape and experiencing a squawking sound? As far as I can see, this is just the problem of phenomenal unity restated. So although Tye may have clarified the problem, he doesn't appear to have solved it.

Tye's final chapter, on personal identity, appears to be entirely independent of his discussion of phenomenal unity. Here he makes three main claims. The first is that people necessarily match up one to one with "person-level psychological frameworks", which consist of the beliefs, desires, experiences and so on that explain a person's behavior (141). So a person *x* existing in one situation is identical with a person *y* existing in another if and only if the psychological framework that *x* has in the first situation is the very psychological framework that *y* has in the second.

This proposal is less interesting than it sounds. It appears to imply that no person--none of *us*--can exist at a time without having a psychological framework. It follows that I was never an early-term foetus: I came into being several months, at least, after I was conceived. But it is unclear what it implies beyond that. Could I survive a brain transplant (where the rest of me is destroyed)? Or Star-Trek teleportation? In these cases the resulting being *has* got a psychological framework, and according to Tye he is me if and only if the framework he has then is the one I have now. But Tye doesn't say when psychological frameworks existing at different times are identical, and his opinions about who is who in these cases are based on other considerations.

We might expect someone who held that people necessarily match up one to one with psychological frameworks to say that people *are* psychological frameworks--beings composed not of matter but of mental states. But this is not Tye's view. He says instead--and this is his second claim--that we are *brains* (142). Strictly speaking we each weigh less than three pounds. Most of us have never literally seen a person, and wouldn't want to. This claim is not only counterintuitive, but it looks inconsistent with the first claim, about psychological frameworks. It seems possible for the thing that is now my brain to end up displayed in a jar of alcohol, a state in which it would have no psychological framework at all. If I am my brain, it follows that *I* could exist without a psychological framework, contrary to the first claim.

That we are brains may not be Tye's considered view. He also says that we are "brains insofar as those brains are in the appropriate physical states (states sufficient for psychological states making up a single psychological framework)" (143). Call this condition *S* for short. That suggests that I am not my brain, but rather my brain insofar as it is in S.

This proposal is hard to understand. Is a brain (one that happens to be in S) really something numerically different from that brain insofar as it is in S? Is Winston Churchill one thing, and Churchill insofar as he is sitting down another? What about Churchill insofar as he is smoking a cigar--is that a third thing? Is there a different Churchill for every state he is in? Surely not. It is hard to see how I could be my brain insofar as it is in S without being my brain.

When Tye says that I am my brain insofar as it is in S he may mean that I am the thing my brain "constitutes" when and only when it is in S. That would fit with his third main claim, that in multiple-personality cases a single brain constitutes several people. It would be odd if people with multiple personality were things constituted by brains and the rest of us were not, but rather things of a completely different kind. Tye doesn't say what constitution is, but his examples suggest that if a brain constitutes something, the thing it constitutes is a material object that shares its matter with that brain. So his view might be that my brain now shares its matter with a material object other than itself: me. In multiple-personality cases, a brain shares its matter with several different conscious beings.

But it is hard to believe that this is Tye's view either. It would make it a mystery how the people who share a brain in multiple-personality cases could be psychologically different. When two people share a brain at the same time--and in many multiple-personality cases more than one personality is functioning at once--they will be in precisely the same physical states. They are, after all, made of the same matter, arranged in the same way and in the same surroundings. And there is no point in saying that two psychologically indistinguishable people share a single brain at once in multiple-personality cases. It follows that people can be psychologically different yet physically identical. I doubt whether Tye, a confessed physicalist, will be happy with this.

The constitution proposal has a similar implication for those of us who don't have multiple personality. If my brain now constitutes me, it is now physically indistinguishable from me. But Tye will not want to say that my brain now has the same psychological properties as I have. He will want to say that it has no psychological properties at all. (Otherwise how could I know which thinking being I am--my brain, or the thing my brain now constitutes?) This too would appear to conflict with Tye's physicalism.

Tye's view of personal identity seems unlikely to please anyone. I suspect that it goes astray right at the start. His main claims are all founded on the ancient Lockean dogma that personal identity is ultimately a matter of psychology: whether we have one person or two, in other words, is determined by facts about psychological unity and continuity. Otherwise there would be no reason to suppose that our psychological frameworks fix our careers, or that we are "brains insofar as they are in S", or that a human being with multiple personality can house several different people. Given the sort of critical scrutiny that received views come in for elsewhere in the book (the discussion of split-brain cases is a nice example), it is surprising to find Tye assuming the Lockean dogma if as if it were obvious. His philosophy of mind would do better without it.[1]

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[1] For what it's worth, I argue against the dogma in The Human Animal (Oxford University Press 1997) and "Was Jekyll Hyde?", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 66 (2003): 328-48.