Comments on Peter Langland-Hassan's "Craniopagus twins and the possibility of introspective misidentification"

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According to Langland-Hassan, the case of Krista and Tatiana Hogan, two craniopagus twins, attached at the head, is of help to make sense of the *possibility* of errors through misidentification (EM) of mental states one is introspectively aware of, especially with respect to sensory and perceptual states, rather than beliefs, desires and memories.

These twins are reported to have a connection "at or near the thalamus" (p. 3) and to be able, presumably on the basis of that connection, "to know what the other is seeing or feeling, and perhaps even thinking, in a way others cannot. Each seems to know these things through introspection" (ibid.). Otherwise, their brains "are relatively normal", since each of them "has two cerebral hemispheres connected by a corpus callosum" (ibid.)

As a matter of fact, however, no controlled study has been carried on on the twins, and, moreover, the only example of their alleged ability introspectively to know each other's mental states is that "with her eyes covered by her mother's hand, Krista seems able to report on what kind of object (a toy pony) has been raised before Tatiana's eyes; facing the opposite direction, Tatiana knows when (and where) Krista has been tickled". (ibid.)

Langland-Hassan rightly points out that this case can only help make sense of the *possibility* of EM for mental self-ascriptions on the assumption that these twins' odd situation can be explained by reference to the "One Token (OT) scenario" (p. 4). In this scenario the information concerning the visual experience *v* had by Tatiana is introspectively accessed by Krista, to the effect that the latter can judge that the former sees a doll, for instance (ibid.). So I'll focus my discussion on this OT scenario, leaving aside all other possible explanations of what is going on in this case.

First of all, where exactly is the case of EM? After all, Krista correctly attributes the visual perception to Tatiana and Tatiana correctly attributes the property of having been tickled to Krista.

Clearly, the most this case shows is that it would be possible to have introspective access to someone else's mental states; yet nothing which, as such, would speak to the possibility of EM, regarding *self* ascriptions of psychological states one is introspectively aware of.

So we need further to supplement the case by conceiving of a physical situation like theirs which, however, gives rise to introspection-based psychological self-ascriptions that are EM. For example, Krista should say, when her eyes are closed and Tatiana is seeing a doll in front of her, "I'm seeing a doll"; conversely, Tatiana should say, when Krista has been tickled, "I've been tickled".

Consider, then, this last case. The question arises whether Tatiana is *feeling* ticklish and, on that basis, is making the further self-ascription "I have been tickled", which isn't strictly speaking a psychological self-ascription. If this were the case, there would be no counterexample to logical IEM of *sensory* self-ascriptions. For Tatiana would feel ticklish and if she were only to self-ascribe that sensation, she would be

perfectly right. Notice, moreover, that if she issued the judgment "I have been tickled", while clearly she weren't feeling ticklish at all, then this report would be no counterexample to logical IEM of self-ascriptions of *sensations* either, for, as we have just seen, *having been tickled* isn't a psychological property unless one had the corresponding sensation. Rather, it would be like the physical property *having been wounded at one's arm* unaccompanied by the corresponding painful feeling roughly located in that position, thought of as a property one would have knowledge of by looking at one's arm, or by means of third-personal reports.

Similar considerations would hold if we thought of the visual perception case as depending on a visual *experience*, had by Krista herself, which would then lead to the false self-ascription of the corresponding *perception*. Krista would be right in self-ascribing the former and wrong to self-ascribe the latter. Yet, logical IEM would be preserved at least as far as one's sensory experiences were concerned. Perceptual self-ascriptions, in contrast, are presumably dependent also on a specific physical situation, which partly depends on ordinary human anatomy (as well as on further worldly conditions). But this fact, as important as it may be, would simply show the need of adding certain qualifications to logical IEM of psychological self-ascriptions but wouldn't constitute a counterexample to the spirit of that thesis.

So, the moral we should draw, I think, is that even on the assumption of a OT scenario, it doesn't matter how the neural configuration is set up. What matters is the actual *mental* state an eventual *psychological* self-ascription, properly so viewed, is based on. And if such a mental state were one felt or had by one of the two twins, while its physical basis took place in the other twin's brain, it would be the former's (too) anyway. Hence, it couldn't be a counterexample to the thesis that psychological self-ascription, based on an immediate awareness of a given mental state, are one's own and are therefore logically immune to error through misidentification (IEM).

I also found it slightly inconsistent to state, on p. 1, that introspective IEM of mental states is a thesis which "is itself neutral on how introspection works" and then go on to remark, on pp. 4-5, that OT scenarios leading to the possibility of EM would depend on thinking of first-order and second-order mental states as separate existences. First of all, I don't think there is any overall consensus on the fact that this is an independently correct way of thinking of mental states and our knowledge of them. For one thing, especially with respect to propositional attitudes, so-called "constitutive" accounts (variously proposed by Wright, Heal, Bilgrami, Shoemaker and myself) would deny or at least importantly qualify that claim. For another, the kind of broadly speaking observational accounts of self-knowledge referred to by Langland-Hassan (Armstrong, Rosenthal, Lycan, Stich, Dretske, etc.) are at odds with an insufficiently noticed assumption in much of the discussion of logical IEM of psychological self-ascriptions based on introspection (in Coliva 2012b I do explicitly recognize its role, though). Namely, that those who maintain this kind of strong IEM are impressed with the intuition that (at least) one notion of introspection is such that to have introspective access to pain, say, is for one to *feel* pain (and *mutatis mutandis* for other mental states and their introspective awareness). So no matter how one wants to account for self-knowledge, one should respect this *phenomenological* feature. In contrast, Langland-Hassan seems to rely on a different notion of introspection, in order to make his possibility conceivable. Namely, that to have introspective access to a given mental state is simply to be somehow informed about it, though in a direct and immediate way usually available only to the person whose brain is the site of the physical realization of that mental state. But notice that that mental state seems to be thought of as making no difference to the inner phenomenology of the person who gets informed of it (or at least no more than being told that *S* thinks or feels so-and-so would make a difference to my own inner phenomenology), nor be taken as a basis for first-personal action. (E.g. Tatiana doesn't start laughing like one who has been tickled normally does and Krista doesn't reach out for the doll, like most children would do on seeing one). I surmise that unless it can be

proved that the latter is the only relevant sense of "introspection", cases like the one presented by Langland-Hassan won't move much supporters of logical IEM of introspection-based psychological self-ascriptions.

Turning now to some relatively minor points in Langland-Hassan's paper, I wasn't clear about the following. Take the visual perception described above. Take the claim that its neurological realization occurs in some part of Tatiana's brain other than the one Krista has clearly in common with her sister (i.e. the thalamus). Now consider that whatever account of introspection one might want to subscribe to, it'd better avoid positing that introspection is some kind of magic. So I assume there must be a physical connection that allows Krista's brain to access this portion of Tatiana's brain. What would prevent one from thinking that Krista's brain is, after all, more extended than normal ones, even if the region of brain where the neurological realization takes place, *by normal standards*, would count as Tatiana's only? And in such a case, wouldn't the perception occur in Krista's brain so that if she were to self-ascribe it – and this, as we saw is what we would need to posit in order even to start making sense of the possibility of EM of mental self-ascriptions – she would be right?

Or else, if I misunderstood the case and the physical realization took place in a part of the brain the two twins clearly have in common (i.e. the thalamus) then isn't it even clearer that that information would belong to Krista's brain too? Hence, were she to make the relevant *self*-ascription, she would be right after all.

Another minor point I wasn't clear about occurred between end of p. 5 and top of p. 6, where cases that support the non necessity of introspective access to the ownership of a mental state are taken to support the claim that the letter isn't a sufficient condition either. Why think so? After all, the existence of unconscious mental states doesn't seem to impugn the idea that if one *is* introspectively aware of a given mental state, it is one's own. Especially on the thick notion of introspective awareness I referred to a few paragraphs back and which is shared, I think, by supporters of logical IEM of the relevant psychological self-ascriptions.

Finally, I agree with Langland-Hassan that perceptions are less central to the individuation of a person than other kinds of mental states. But one has to keep in mind that perceptions depend on the cooperation of worldly conditions in ways that other mental states don't. For instance, I can't see *x* unless *x* exists and is actually in my field of vision. Nor can I see *x* if my sense organs are deluded by the consumption of drugs, even if *x* exists and it is in my field of vision, yet it isn't causally responsible for my visual impression. As claimed before, I would think that as long as we think of perceptual self-ascriptions as partly based on the awareness of a visual impression, then they are, after all, at least partly constitutive of the person one is. So, inasmuch as one might have visual impressions which depend on causal connections with objects in someone else's field of vision, and on neural configurations one could have physical access to, no matter where they would be located, those visual impressions would still be one's own, even if it could be made a case to support the view that the perception proper weren't.

Notice that the claim that self-ascriptions of perceptions could depend at least partly on awareness of a visual impression is only a – perhaps contentious – way of expressing the idea that perceptions are representational mental states one is *consciously aware of*. Sometimes these representational states are veridical, sometimes they aren't, yet subjectively things might just as well be the same (Burge 2010), whether or not one is willing to subscribe to the further thesis, which personally I don't endorse, that in *both* cases the direct object of perception is a visual impression. What is relevant to what I have been

saying here is simply the fact that perceptions involve conscious awareness and that subjectively things may appear to one as being a certain way even if they aren't that way. This conscious element of perception, no matter how it is accounted for, seems to be constitutive of the person one is just as much as one's beliefs, desires, memories and sensations are, precisely because it would make a difference to inner phenomenology and could lead to characteristic behavioral output. Hence, its eventual self-ascription would seem to be as logically IEM as the self-ascription of the latter kinds of mental state.

To conclude: I think that as interesting as the case of Tatiana and Krista might be, it is not sufficient reason to overturn the widespread view that psychological self-ascriptions based on introspection (proper) are logically IEM.

References

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