Joel Smith commentary February 2013

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I am very pleased to have this opportunity to comment on Professor Smith's manuscript, "Alienation and self-presentation." I am always grateful to those who take the time to read what I write and grateful for the opportunity to rethink my positions concerning the issues that Professor Smith so very capably and insightfully addresses here. Below I focus on our differences, but this focus should not be taken as a blanket rejection of the many excellent and well-articulated points that he presents.

Smith, provisionally, takes the view that self is not identical to the body as his point of departure. He then proceeds to defend Hume's and Kant's rejection of the "self-presentation thesis" (SPT)—viz., "no self is given among the multitude of conscious states, of which we are certain that we own." Of particular relevance to the observations that I make below, Smith argues that a set of empirical cases that involve the experience of "alienation" (see next paragraph) can be adduced to show that SPT is false. Nevertheless, Smith holds that Shoemaker's IEM, when properly understood as a concern about the possibility of "self-misidentification," is untouched by such cases. Below I am not so much concerned with Smith's rejection of SPT; my main concern is with Smith's defense of IEM.

The "alienation" mentioned in Smith's title refers to a set of empirical cases that appear to raise problems for certain assumptions concerning ownership or belonging, cases that I collectively refer to as "problems of belonging" (Lane, in draft). Some among these, e.g. thought-insertion and anarchic hand, are fairly well known. Others, e.g. those that involve somatoparaphrenia or episodic memory, are not so well know. But a feature that these seem to share is that "from the inside" it seems to be the case that ownership—over a bodily experience, an action, a memory, or a thought—is "disrupted."

In building his defense of IEM, Smith invokes some familiar mirror/window analogies, two of which I'll address here: (a) The first analogy concerns *self*-misidentification: he cites the famous Duck Soup example wherein the character mistakenly thinks an apparent mirror-reflection is self. (b) The second analogy concerns *other*-misidentification: this can occur when a person mistakenly thinks a shop-window reflection is someone else. In the first case the subject thinks he is

looking at a mirror, when he is not; in the second, the subject thinks he is looking through a window, when he is not. Smith says of (a) that "it is natural to think that when it comes to judgments based upon bodily-awareness, action-awareness, memory and intellectual experience (self-misidentification) errors are not possible." As for (b), Smith says "it should be reasonably clear that alienation cases are not errors of self-misidentification. They are, rather, errors of other-misidentification."

Although I allow that expressions such as "natural to think" and "it should be reasonably clear" might well reflect commonplace intuitions, it is just those intuitions that are suspect (Lane and Liang 2010, 2011; Lane, 2012). And I don't see in what sense the analogies help to disambiguate. That the analogies differ is clear enough; in this regard they can help to pump intuitions. But I discern no naturalness of thought or clarity of reason whereby the difference that inheres to the analogies can be applied to alienation and its possible relevance to IEM.

Let me try to explain where I think Smith, and other defenders of IEM, take some of their missteps. First, Smith emphasizes that his concern is with awareness "from the inside," and this concern indeed seems compatible with all versions of IEM. But then it strikes me as odd that the disambiguating analogies both concern external appearances. "From the inside" is, to begin with, just a metaphor, unless it is reduced to the dynamic interaction of "proprioception, kinaesthesia, bodily sensation, and the sense of balance." And even were "from the inside" so reducible, it would only help with one type of alienation, the alienation from bodily experiences. In any case, I don't think this way of unpacking "from the inside" is what Smith is after. So we are left with talking about self "from the outside"—seeing myself, or not, through reflective surfaces, or not—and it is unclear how these can be employed to the advantage of IEM. My puzzlement is compounded by the fact that in the two analogies the problem concerns subject confusion about the media through which they are observing the world; it is unclear how confusions about media are applicable to real world attributions of mental states to self or other, at least insofar as the attributions involve IEM.

More generally I think that "from the inside" plays a role in IEM arguments that is analogous to what "limits of the skin and skull" play in arguments that concern the Extended Mind Hypothesis, EMH (Lane, 2012). Just as advocates of EMH complain that it is arbitrary to constrain vehicles of mind to the limits of the body, it seems that advocates of IEM arbitrarily take refuge in assumptions about what must belong to or be owned by me, in virtue of the fact that it happens inside of my brain or

my body. Nearly all philosophers agree that thought insertions, for example, are realized in virtue of the activity of a person's brain, despite the person's experience of them as having been inserted. So in that sense the thoughts do indeed "belong to" the person who reports them. But this point is trivial and, more importantly, it does not concern the self that is not identical to the body, the self-qua-self, or the self "from the inside." And if IEM is to be secured, what matters is making sense of the ins-and-outs of qua-selves. That mental states are functions of, or must be realized by, or supervene on brain states is irrelevant.

I believe Smith's second misstep is in adopting several mistaken assumptions concerning the alienation cases: Concerning body ownership he observes that "typically *we experience a sense of ownership*[1] with respect to our own bodies. It is manifest to one that the body one is aware of through bodily awareness is one's own;" (b) Concerning action ownership he observes that "action awareness…provides us with *a sense of ownership*[2] with respect to our own actions. If I am consciously typing then it is manifest to me that it is *me* that is typing." (c) Concerning thought ownership he observes that "when I think through a problem I am aware of the problem itself, but *it is also manifest to me that it is me that is thinking about it*. That is, there is *some sense of ownership over*[3] my episodes of conscious thinking." And, (d) concerning memory ownership he observes that "when I episodically remember eating breakfast, *it is manifest to me*[4] that it was *me* eating breakfast." He then goes on to say that "…it seems reasonable to say that, *in some sense*, people can become alienated from their own their own bodily experience, action, memory and conscious thought."

Note that Smith claims that in quotidian circumstances we *experience a sense of ownership* or belonging for our bodies, our actions, our thoughts, and our memories, and that it is the "disruption" of this experience that causes us to experience alienation. But what is the basis for this claim? What do actions that are taken to be mine feel like? They feel like nothing. It is only those that are accompanied by the thick experience of proprioception and sensory feedback that feel as though they belong to someone else. What do thoughts that are taken to be mine feel like? They feel like nothing. It is those for which I seem to have a thick sensory experience of the point at which they are inserted into my brain that feel as though they belong to someone else (Lane, 2012; Lane and Northoff, 2012).

[1] Italics not contained in original manuscript.
[2] Italics not contained in original manuscript.
[3] Italics not contained in original manuscript.
[4] Italics not contained in original manuscript.

What seems to be amiss here is related to one of philosophy's occupational hazards: scientists tend only to posit the existence of contentious phenomena when by positing those things they can enhance their ability to explain. In other words, they posit them for the benefit of the explanans, not the explanandum. Philosophers, on the other hand, are much more likely to devote time to arguing for the existence of things—e.g. belonging experiences for the body, actions, thoughts, and memories—that do not in any obvious way exist.[5] By doing so, they sometimes create gratuitous problems of explanation. IEM, in some respects, seems to be a case in point; it is treated more as something to be explained than as something which can help carry the burden of explaining some well-established phenomenon—at least that is in the writings of Shoemaker.

Despite the fact that Smith claims these experiences are "manifest," it is by no means clear that such is the case.[6] What is manifest, on the contrary, are pathological or illusory cases wherein alienation or estrangement occurs when, objectively speaking, those thoughts, memories, body parts, or actions must belong to that person. But the third-person point of view that grounds the claim about what must objectively be the case does not help when the subject matter is self-qua-self and, more importantly, it seems that philosophers have assumed the existence of something—quotidian belonging experiences—when there is nothing beyond contentious intuitions to support these existence claims. Although I won't address the issue here, I don't think appeals to Cartesian indubitability or the Kantian "I think" can help here either, because these too are contentious, perhaps indications that we should be devoting more time to escorting flies out of philosophical bottles and less time to creating unnecessary explanatory burdens.

I do agree with Smith's worry that a significant problem in this vicinity is that "IEM is often described in a number of non-equivalent ways." On Smith's view the main issue, following Shoemaker, concerns the self-misidentification view: viz., that "'I feel pain' is IEM if and only if, it cannot happen that I am mistaken in saying 'I feel pain' because, although I do know of someone that feels pain, I am mistaken in thinking that person to be myself." Here Smith says that "it seems clear that alienation cases pose no threat to this claim…in this respect at least, the certainty of self is preserved."

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[5] To make the point more modestly, the alienation experiences to which Smith refers are what I call "thick experiences" (Lane and Northoff, 2012); belonging experiences in quotidian circumstances are, at best, "thin experiences," so evanescently thin that it is by no means clear that they exist.

[6] Perhaps more fairly, I am not always certain just how "manifest" should be explicated in this context.

Smith insists on this point, at least partially in response to a case of somatoparaphrenia that I have previously described and analyzed (Lane and Liang, 2011): the patient, FB, feels that her left hand belongs to her niece. FB has also lost tactile sensation in that hand. Tactile sensation is recovered though when FB is told (with appropriate experimental controls in place) that her "niece" is about to be touched. Here we have an opportunity to employ contrastive explanation, because we have a difference in need of an explanation and only one apparent causal factor that distinguishes feeling touch from not feeling touch—touch is felt only when FB is led to believe that her niece is about to be touched.

Since my main concern is with explanation, one motivation for writing about IEM is that, on some interpretations, and to the extent that it reflects commonplace intuitions, it might pose an obstacle to empirical inquiry. I would want (Lane and Liang, 2010), among other things, the clinician to further inquire of the patient "is it *you* who experiences the tactile sensation." The person who is in a position to introspect on a state and report it is not necessarily the self who experiences the state. If I occupy a unique position in space-time such that I can "see" fear in your eyes and report on it, it does not follow that I am the self who experiences the fear. Indeed, I might even be aware of the fear before you become aware of it, or even if you never become aware of it (in the latter case, allowing for the possibility that the fear was fleeting). How cases of introspecting on tactile sensations or seeing fear in the eyes of another should be understood are largely empirical matters, not matters to be decided by the imposition of an IEM tautological interpretation.

There are many reasons for wanting to prompt further inquiry along these lines; principal among these is the desire to make such concepts as from-the-inside and self-qua-self less inchoate. An additional reason is the desire to explain why alienation in pathological or illusory circumstances seems more obviously (why are these experiences thick) to occur than does belonging in quotidian circumstances. I anticipate that one among many benefits from exploring these lines of inquiry is that they stand to inform about which theories or consciousness are more deserving of support.

As this relates to Smith's self-misidentification view—viz., that "'I feel pain' is IEM if and only if, it cannot happen that I am mistaken in saying 'I feel pain' because, although I do know of someone that feels pain, I am mistaken in thinking that person to be myself"—perhaps IEM remains secure, but only trivially so, and depending

upon whether and to what degree one manages to hold steady or waver in the construal of the five "I-s" that appear therein. And holding steady is difficult to do when the ins-and-outs of qua-selves are neither clearly characterized nor empirically grounded.

Smith observes that the case of FB does "not show that it is possible to mistake one's own states for somebody else's." Maybe, but that was not the thrust of that portion of my argument.[7] I say "maybe" because "one's own" and "somebody else's" are insufficiently characterized. The encouragement of empirical probes is intended in the spirit of helping to gain empirical traction with these concepts or, perhaps, replace them. And as I have suggested above the standard construal of "one's own" seems to be erroneous, as are standard ways of distinguishing self from "somebody else."

I think one way to begin making progress on issues of this type is to side with those who would accept Hume's thesis, and take it one step further—there is no experience of ownership or belonging in quotidian circumstances. Belonging (as in the rubber hand phenomenon) or alienation (the cases that Smith addresses) is only experienced in pathological or illusory cases (Lane and Northoff, 2012). What seems to occur in the ordinary case is that self (or self-processing) is managed at a sub-personal level. What might be called "self-experiences" only occur when expectations concerning how mental states should cluster (e.g. no pronounced proprioceptive or sensory feedback when we act) are confounded (Lane, in draft; 2012).

References

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[7] I believe a different case presented in Lane & Liang (2011) more clearly evinces the possibility of mistaking one's own states for someone else's.