

國立中正大學 哲學系學術演講

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【講題】

A Puzzle about Self-Knowledge of
Consciousness

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A Puzzle about Self-Knowledge of Consciousness

It is widely thought that there is something special about self-knowledge of consciousness. There is an asymmetry between knowledge of one's experiences and knowledge of others' experiences. I can have justification to believe that I see the sunrise, that I am feeling cold, that I am excited, and so on, in a distinctively first-personal way. You can also have justification to believe these propositions about me, but you cannot do so in the way I do.

In virtue of what is self-knowledge of consciousness special? A natural thought is that the asymmetry between knowledge of one's experiences and knowledge of others' experiences is grounded in a parallel asymmetry between how one is related to one's experiences and how one is related to others' experiences:

Special Relation: Your self-ascriptions of experiences can be justified in a certain way such that your ascriptions of experiences to others cannot be justified in that way because you can bear a certain relation to your experiences such that you cannot bear that relation to others' experiences.

While a major challenge is to say what the special relation is, recent work on shared consciousness suggests that the issue is even more complicated.

Krista and Tatiana Hogan are craniopagus conjoined twins—that is, they are joined at the head. They are unique because they are also joined at the thalamus, where information in each's brain can be transmitted to the other's brain. As a result, stimulation of each's body can cause the other to have experiences. On one interpretation (Cochrane 2021), they sometimes share experiences:

Sharing: The twins sometimes have the same experiences.

In previous work (Kang 2022), I argued that even if they share experiences, their case does not threaten asymmetry:

Asymmetry despite Sharing: Even if the twins share an experience E, each's self-ascription of E can be justified in a certain way such that her ascription of E to the other cannot be justified in that way.

The three claims seem jointly inconsistent, thereby generating a puzzle. In this talk, I will explain the puzzle in more detail and consider some solutions to it.