

Joint Attention and the Second Person

Draft

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I. Introduction

On all accounts, during episodes of joint attention a three-way, triadic relation is established between two subjects and an object both subjects are attending to. Most developmental psychologists treat the emergence of the capacity to engage in such triadic relations (at about 10 months) as a landmark of sorts. The relation is thought of as importantly different from the earlier dyadic relations infants enter into, either with physical objects (in perception and object-directed action) or with their caregivers (mainly through exchanges of various emotions).

But when we ask how this triadic relation should be described and explained, how exactly it should be distinguished from, say, switching between two types of dyadic relation, all hell breaks loose. There is hardly a major debate in developmental psychology, and, more recently, in philosophy of mind that does not find expression in this minefield. By way of cutting through this tangle, and in order to focus attention the particular issues I will be pursuing, it will help before us a concrete example of adult joint attention, which I will use to isolate the problem I will be focusing on.

II. The university meeting

Consider the following case. You are sitting at a pep talk organised by senior university administrators, in which the idea of a ‘Warwick entrepreneurial gene’, say, or some equivalent piece of bullshit, in Harry Frankfurt’s technical sense of the term, is being promoted. At some point you raise your head from your doodling, and your eyes lock into those of a colleague sitting opposite you at the large table. This meeting of eyes may last a split second, and then you each return to whatever it is you were doing before. Here are two of several possible scenarios of what happens as your eyes meet.

- a. A brief almost deadpan meeting of eyes suffices to establish you both feel and think exactly the same about the proceedings.
- b. Your eyes meet. You expect an exchange of shared embarrassment/ despair, for example. Instead you encounter eyes shining with enthusiastic

endorsement. This kind of exchange probably needs more time than the first, as each one of you registers the difference, before you return to your doodles and he resumes his rapt attention to the speaker.

The initial feature I want to highlight about the example is this. Unlike in many illustrations of the phenomenon, your perceptual experiences of the input are in one sensory modality, and your interpersonal exchange is conveyed by another. I think that the possibility of distributing sensory modalities in joint attention is important for substantive reasons, to which I later briefly return. But for current purposes, its interest, in this particular example, lies in the way it makes vivid a fundamental distinction between two kinds of thing that might be shared during an episode of joint attention.

First, there is a clear sense in which minds meet in the first scenario, the quick flash of mutual agreement, and don't in the second. Crudely, your respective responses, your evaluations, emotional take and so forth are shared in the first case and aren't in the second. Second, however, there is something that *is* shared in both cases, namely the perceptual experience. Even when you are startled or bemused by your colleague's enthusiasm for the idea of a Warwick gene, there is no question as to what you are both hearing. On some level of description you have a perceptual experience in common.

In everyday language when we speak of sharing our experiences of an event or thing we often mean both. In the developmental literature we find emphasis on one over the other. But these need distinguishing, and each needs to be dealt with separately. I will label them the 'shared perceptual experience' and the 'shared response' ingredients respectively. Joint attention, strictly understood, refers to the former. Although I think the sharing of responses, to which I return only in the last section, has great importance in addressing a particular version of the 'other minds' problem, my main focus throughout will be on shared experiences.

My question will be: how should we explain the relation between the two co-attenders during episodes of sharing experiences in joint attention? In the next section I set out some of the theoretical background in the developmental literature, which will provide the framework for the way I will be pursuing this question.

III. *Joint Attention: Bruner's Claims*

To begin, it will help to step back, and recall the way Jerome Bruner introduced the very idea of joint attention as a subject for research in the 1970's. There is a generality and, as he himself puts it 'boldness' about it, which, it seems to me, takes us straight to the heart of the fundamental problems it raises. I'll isolate a few claims he makes and with these in place turn to the issues I want to consider.

Bruner's background concern at the time was the question of how children acquire a language. His claim was that joint attention is essential for learning what the words of a common language refer to, what they mean. Bruner later expanded the claim, when he became interested in the problem of other minds. On that version, the slogan became: 'joint attention makes the meeting minds of possible'. The fundamental claims he made about joint attention in his earlier work, about language acquisition, apply to both explananda. They are as follows.

1. The social structure into which joint attention is slotted is essentially communicative, in two senses. First, when it emerges in children, it is, in some sense, the product of a pre linguistic communication system which exists between infants and adults they interact with. Second, it provides the basis for the earliest manifestations of linguistic communication.
2. In order to explain how joint attention performs its reference-securing and/or mind-meeting role, according to Bruner, we need to endorse three 'bold claims', as he calls them. They are the following. (Bruner, 1983, p 122 ff).
 - i. We must take infants to be primitively disposed towards 'Naïve Realism'.
 - ii. We must take them to be primitively disposed towards treating others they interact with as experiencing the same world as they are.
 - iii. For the latter to be possible, infants must be disposed to share their experiences with others, thereby manifesting a treatment of other minds as like their own.

Bruner locates his three 'bold claims' in the nativism vs. empiricism debate. However they survive a bracketing of that debate, and a reformulation into claims about the framework that we, as theorists of the situation, should adopt when explaining joint attention, whether in children or adults. In what follows, I want to have before us such a reformulation, captured in claims II and III below, combined with I, an abbreviated but substantially unchanged version of his Communication Claim. Taken together we have the following:

- I. The Communication Claim: Joint attention is an essentially communicative phenomenon.
- II. The Naive Realism Claim: As theorists of joint attention we should be naïve realists about perceptual experience and assume naive realism when we explain what joint attention consists in.
- III. The Sharing Claim: Explaining joint attention requires explaining what it is for experiences to be shared in a way that shows how the problem of other minds is thereby solved/dissolved.

Whether or not one agrees with all these claims, at the very least it must be conceded that Bruner captures brilliantly both why the phenomenon is so fundamental and why it is so difficult to get right, given the number and nature of the issues we need to negotiate in attempting to do so. My own view is that Bruner is spot on with all three claims, on particular interpretations of each. In what follows, though, I will not so much try to defend them against the many possible oppositions they might incur -- though I will indicate chief points of contention in passing, and linger over some --but, rather, attempt to show how they connect with each other, and the fundamental problems that come into view once we adopt them -- problems that need further attention, whatever your view on one or more of Bruner's claims. My discussion will be geared towards isolating the issues we should have before us when considering the account we should give of the relation between the co-attenders when describing the kind of sharing of experiences that happens during episodes of joint attention.

IV. Shared perceptual experiences

As the object attended to in the university example is somewhat complex, it will help to consider a simpler example. Suppose you are standing outside your house chatting to a neighbour and you both catch sight together of a low harvest moon, and you stand looking at it together, or jointly attending to it. Our questions are: how should we describe each of your experiences before joint attention sets in if we adopt naïve realism, as Bruner recommends, and how should we describe them afterwards?

Before joint attention: in current philosophical debates about perception, the naïve realism claim is usually aired in the context of the question: how should we explain the

phenomenal character of your experience, say when you see a red cube in front of you. On the one hand, we find those who appeal either to sensational properties or to a combination of these and representational properties or to representational properties alone. On the other hand, we have the naïve realists who adopt a relational approach to experience. On the latter view, or on the version I want to have before us, to have a perceptual experience of an object is to stand in a non-representational relation of acquaintance with the object, where properties of the object you are presented with determine the character of your experience directly. The object and its properties reach right in to how things are for you, from your conscious perspective, when you have a perceptual experience. To adopt a relational view is to hold that perceiving an object, a dyadic relation, is not reducible to propositional perceiving, perceiving that.

This is, as will be obvious to anyone working on perception, one of the major contestable claims in Bruner's framework. I note this, in passing, but will not attempt to defend it. My question now, rather, is this. Suppose we apply this relational account to the experiences you and your neighbour each have before joint attention sets in. What should we say about your experiences once sharing takes place?

There are basically two kinds of move here. Either one appeals to some form of iterated reflective propositional awareness you each have of the other's perception of the moon and awareness of the other's awareness of your awareness of the moon and so forth. Or one says that the first order experience of the world is transformed. The best worked-out version of the former approach is to be found in Christopher Peacocke's account, according to which full joint attention" by x and y to o requires that the following conditions be met:

- (a) x and y are attending to o .
- (b) x and y are each aware that their attention in (a) has mutual open-ended perceptual availability; and
- (c) x and y are each aware that this whole complex state of awareness (a)–(c) exists. (Peacocke, 2005) 307–308).

(We have "mutual open-ended perceptual availability" when: "Each perceives that the other perceives that s obtains; and if either is occurrently aware that the other is aware that he is aware ... that s obtains, then the state of affairs of his being so occurrently aware is available to the other's occurrent awareness. (p. 302). (Peacocke, 2005, 302)

The contrasting approach I want to have before us, which says that the first-order experience of the world is transformed, is that proposed by John Campbell, which builds

on and extends his relational approach to the perception of objects. On his account, “We should take joint attention to be a personal level, non propositional state. We should think of it as a three-place relation between subject, co-attender, and object. The relation is a primitive: x and y are jointly attending to z .” (Campbell, 2011, 416. See also Campbell, 2005).

The question of whether appeal to iterations can achieve the required openness, and whether it can be right, phenomenologically and/or developmentally (given the joint attention is such an early, basic phenomenon) is another one of the big questions that the phenomenon of joint attention gives rise to (Campbell’s experiential account if motivated by negative answers to such questions). And, again, I make do with noting it rather than engaging with it directly, though I return to it briefly later on. For a closely related version of the issue comes up again, in a form that will, in effect, concern us for the next two sections, when we examine a particular aspect of Campbell’s account, namely how it deals with interpersonal component in joint attention.

To take Campbell’s claim seriously is to say that the experiences you have in jointly attending to an object depend for their very experiential nature on someone else. The dependence is not causal (though it has sub personal causal underpinnings) but internal -- constitutive of the experience itself. The other subject is as internal to the configuration of your experience as is the physical object perceived.

That is the claim. What justifies it? This depends in part on how we address the question: how exactly does the other enter into your perpetual experience, and in virtue of what? Prima facie, appeal to the form of acquaintance that is applied to explain awareness of objects cannot work as it stands. While you may be perceptually aware of the co-attender's physical properties she is not there *as* a perceived object, but rather as a subject of a (joint) perceptual experience. So if the relation is experiential it cannot, on the face it, be treated in exactly the same way as is the experiential relation you have to objects in your environment.

This is acknowledged briefly by Campbell when he writes: “[Joint attention] is a relation of experience between X , Y , and Z . When this holds, X has Z as the object of attention and Y is there as co-attender. There is that difference between the way in which X is related to Z and the way in which X is related to Y .” (Campbell, 2011, 419.). Campbell does not elaborate. He may have had several ways of developing the difference in mind. But if the idea of primitiveness is to be sustained and justified this is,

arguably, something that needs elaborating, not least because there is renewed pressure, when accounting for the interpersonal ingredient, to offer an iterative account of what this involves.

The pressure comes from a natural way of spelling out what it is for the co-attenders to be aware of each other as subjects. According to Peacocke, again, but in a separate discussion of the kind of ‘interpersonal self consciousness’ which occurs according to him in joint attention, this requires of each attender that she thinks of the other as a thinker of ‘I’ thoughts who is also aware of her as such a thinker. On the account proposed by Peacocke this involves three levels of embedding of the self-concept. (Peacocke, 2014, 236-243). As Peacocke develops it, we lose both the first order, non-iterative character of Campbell’s primitive triadic account, and relationality, for it is possible to give an exhaustive account of what is going on in each thinker’s mind without presupposing in any way that the co-attender exists.

The proposal I want to make about the relation between the co-attenders is intended to explain and retain at least some sense in which joint attention should be treated as a primitive three-place experience (though whether it retains all things Campbell might have had in mind when he describes the relation as primitive is an issue I return to in a later section). It can be summarised in the following two claims.

- a. *The Second Person Claim*: A necessary condition for joint attention to occur is that the co-attenders stand to each other in a second person relation
- b. *The Communicative Stance Claim*: to stand in a second person relation to another is, in its most minimal, basic form, to adopt a communicative stance towards that person, a stance that makes possible and appropriate the use of the second person in addressing her.

Two preliminary comments about these claims are in order before I begin to unpack them. First, we stand to each other in second person relations in many cases other than in joint attention (I say more about this later on). Standing in such a relation is, then, clearly not sufficient for joint attention. The Second Person Claim should be read, rather, as introducing as a supplement to the three-place experiential claim, a further characterisation of the relation between the co-attenders when such experiences occur

The second point is this. I will say that when people stand in such a relation they are aware of each other as ‘you’. When supplemented by the Communicative Stance Claim, the resulting account of such awareness yields a very minimal notion of ‘second person

awareness'. As I will develop it, such awareness requires neither reflective self-consciousness, nor awareness of the other as a self-conscious 'I-thinking' subject, nor appreciation of the other's awareness of oneself as such. So, it is far less demanding than the kind of account proposed by Peacocke. It is also far less rich and rewarding than what many take to be the point of second-person awareness, namely the distinctive kind of knowledge and understanding of each other that face-to-face interactions, in contrast to observation, can yield. It does, though, in my view, provide the basis for these richer ways of being aware of each other by establishing a particular kind of primitive link that two subjects may have with each other in virtue of their readiness to communicate.

Finally, to end these introductory comments, and by way of a connection between the issues we have discussed so far and those that follow, I want to describe as best I can a case of joint attention in slow motion, as displayed in a video clip of a particular episode of joint attention studied by Maria Nunez, between a blind and deaf child and her mother.

The sequence is as follows. The child and mother sit on the floor, facing each other, at a slight angle. The mother's arms are extended in front of her, hands on the floor. The child first feels the mother's arms, to check, as Nunez puts it, that the mother is oriented and ready to engage with her. The experimenter places a large box of toys near the child, within the mother's reach. The mother picks up a toy, brings it close to the child, for the child to feel, and returns to her original position. The child then picks up the toy and very briefly lifts one of her mother's arms so that the mother can quickly touch the object again. The child continues to check for engagement, by feeling the mother's arms again, and then checks for her mother's speech by placing her hand on the mother's chest and checking the mother's breath as she speaks. The child herself vocalises with excitement, smiling and looking up at her mother.

The first point I want to highlight about this episode concerns the nature of the shared experience of the toy. Although there is a brief spell of their both touching the toy, the shared attention experience encompasses the mother's visual experience and the child's haptic one. The different modalities contribute a perspective each has on the object, but if we try to explain what is shared, the case for appealing to the common object is, I suggest, compelling. What the mother and child have in common, in virtue of which we can speak of a shared experience, is their relation to the object each is presented with. Generalising: joint attention can encompass different modalities in more everyday cases. Appeal to sensations or to 'phenomenally laden' modality specific representations will not deliver a common experience. Such cases, and more generally joint attention itself, make the case for a relational approach more powerfully, in some sense, than does appeal to individual experiences. What holds the experiences together,

as shared, just is the object. This is part of what Bruner meant when we said that we must assume naive realism when explaining what sharing consists in.

The second point I want to highlight, which anticipates the issues I am now turning to, concerns the child's checking of the mother's readiness to engage before and during the episode. In my terms, what she is checking for are expressions of the mother's adoption of a 'communicative stance' towards her, a readiness to engage in whatever is to follow, be it joint play, joint attention or whatever. In so doing, she herself is adopting a communicative stance towards her mother, and, on my stipulation, a second person attitude towards her. What exactly this amounts to, and how exactly this feeds into an account of the kind of sharing of experience that happens in joint attention is the topic that will, in one way or another, concern us for the remainder of the paper.

VI. On the primitiveness of 'you'.

In recent writing in philosophy, the question of whether there is such a thing as a primitive 'you awareness' is often aired in the context of debates about the content of thoughts expressed using the second person pronoun. Such thoughts, as we shall see, are but one manifestation of what it is to be aware of someone as 'you', on the view I will be developing, and one of many manifestations of the link between that and adopting the communicative stance. However, some of the basic issues raised by treating second person awareness as primitive are usefully introduced in the context of this more familiar debate, so I say a few words about it here, before returning to joint attention in the next section. I should say in advance that my aim here is not so much to argue for the primitiveness claim -- this would take us too far off track -- as to explain the sense of primitiveness I will later be appealing to in explaining the interpersonal component in joint attention.

In cases in which the second person is in fact used, the most explicit denial of the kind of primitiveness claims I will be proposing for second person awareness is to be found in a widely endorsed claim made by Richard Heck. Although he says he does not know how to argue for the claim, the passage in which he elaborates it is worth quoting in full as it contains the materials for elaborating on the claims underpinning the Second Person and Communicative Stance claims.

Consider the indexical 'you'. As a matter of its standing meaning, an utterance of 'you' refers to the person addressed in that utterance. But in the sense that there is such a thing as a self-conscious, first person belief, there is no such

thing as a second-person belief, or so it seems to me... I mean to deny that there is any such thing as an essentially indexical second-person belief. The phenomenon of the second person is a linguistic one, bound up with the fact that utterances, as we make them, are typically directed to people, not just made to the cosmos. ... The word 'you' has no correlate at the level of thought: if not, then the contents of the beliefs we express using the word 'you' have very little to do with its standing meaning. (Heck 2002, 12).

According to Heck, then, there is a kind of thought about oneself one can think only if one is the person thought about; and this precisely mirrors the conditions for the correct use of 'I' to refer to a person--one can only use it if one is that person. Such thinking is in this sense essentially indexical and for that reason cannot be reduced to descriptions that others could also employ in thinking about the referent of token uses of 'I'. Heck's claim about the second person is that, in contrast, there is no way of thinking about a person that can only be employed when conditions for the use of the second person pronoun are met. This is the sense in which there are no essentially indexical second person thoughts. (See Longworth 2014).

To endorse this claim is to say that whenever I address a person using the second person pronoun it is possible to express the way the addressee is being thought of without using the second person. In contrast, to insist on the existence of indexical 'you' thinking is to insist that such thinking is primitive in this particular sense: no descriptions, first or third personal can capture the way of thinking involved, anymore than they can in the case of first person thought. To say that 'you-awareness' is primitive, as I will be interpreting the claim, is to generalise the you-indexicality claim as applied to thought and to say the following. There is a way of being aware of someone which can only be expressed by use of the second person.

A second aspect of the denial of 'you-indexicality' that I want to emphasize brings us straight to one idea underpinning the Communicative Stance Claim (I return to others in the next section). To deny you-indexicality is to say that the requirements on successful communication of thoughts expressed using the second person are extrinsic to the characterisation of the requirements that must be met if one is to be credited with thinking the thought thus expressed. Whatever there is to say about the latter, it will not involve appeal to the kind of the relation people stand to each other when they are in a position to

use ‘you’ to address that person. In direct contrast, one aspect of the Communicative Stance Claim, applied here to the case of thoughts expressed using the second person, says the following. There are ways of thinking about another that can only be exercised when we stand in a communicative relation to that person, the kind that warrants the use of ‘you’.

The combined point of the you-indexicality and Communicative Stance claims, when applied to thoughts expressed using the second person, can, in the first instance, be illustrated by contrasting two accounts of a widely accepted constraint on understanding uses of the second person pronoun. Suppose S says to A: ‘You are trailing sugar on the supermarket floor’. To understand the statement S must think ‘I am trailing sugar on the supermarket floor’. Following Guy Longworth (2014), I will call the requirement the ‘coordination claim’. On a proposal developed separately and in somewhat different terms by Longworth and Sebastian Rodl, the best explanation of this is that A and S share a thought, an I-you thought, which S expresses using ‘you’ and I expresses using ‘I’. From the perspective of the issues I want to have before us, what is critical to this kind of appeal to shared thoughts turns on the account both give of S’s thinking. It can only succeed by its own lights if there is uptake by A, of a kind that, in our example, she would express by ‘I am trailing sugar’. It is, in this sense, ‘thinking for two’.

Contrast this with an explanation proposed by Peacocke, who endorses Heck’s claim that there are no ‘you’ thoughts. The alternative he proposes to Rodl’s version of the idea of shared I-you thoughts are needed for explaining coordination is the following. When S says: ‘You are F’, to A, each of the participants in the exchange knows that we have called the ‘coordination claim’ holds, and this is reflected in S’s intentions in communicating, which A picks up on. S intends that A employ the first person concept in combination with the predicational information conveyed, and A, in understanding S’s intention duly does so. As Peacocke himself puts it: ‘The utterer a refers to the first person type of mode of presentation and intends, of the instance of it that b is capable of employing in thought...that his hearer come to know the Thought that consists of it combined with concept <F> in predicational combination. (Peacocke 2014, 149).

In most cases of face-to-face verbal communication, when we want to explain what A understands and comes to know when S tells her something we appeal to the content of the thought expressed by S. Similarly, when we want to explain what S intends A to pick up on, we appeal only to the content of the thought expressed by S. This does not, on Peacocke’s account, hold for thoughts expressed using the second person, and

would also, presumably, not hold for thoughts expressed using the first person. In these cases, on his account, we need to introduce instructions, so to speak, in S' communicative intention, about which singular mode of presentation A should employ in picking up on S's thought.

The alternative, I-you sharing approach, retains appeal to the content of the thought expressed by A in explaining what A intends to convey and what S picks up on and comes to know. But it also makes an exception for such thoughts, by building special conditions for successful communication (first person pick-up) into its account of the content of the thought expressed.

Both accounts, then, make exceptions, of different kinds, for thoughts that are communicated using the second (and first) person. It seems to me that appeal, at this point, to this or that thought-theoretical framework for accounting for the coordination claim cannot carry the weight of making the case for one rather than another kind of exception-making account. (For example, it is possible, contra both Rodl and Peacocke, to give a Fregean account of shared I-you thoughts (Longworth 2013). For the fundamental issue at stake here arises whether or not the second person pronoun is, in fact, used. This is the question of how we explain the kind of awareness people have of each other when they stand to each other in a relation that puts them in a position to address each other using the second person pronoun, whether or not they actually use it. People can be in such a position in virtue of having a conversation with each other, giving and obeying orders, playing at least some games, and, indeed, jointly attending to an object. What we say about thoughts expressed when the second person pronoun is in fact should be an instance of a more general claim about the kind of awareness of each other subjects have in virtue of standing in such relations to each other.

On Peacocke's account, recall, we should explain the way S and A are aware of each other in such cases as follows. Focusing on S, she will think of A as a thinker of I thoughts who is aware of me (S) as a thinker of I thoughts who is aware of her as such a thinker. (Given this account, and the kind of reflection that goes into it, the resources for formulating one's communicative intentions when using the second person, in the manner described by Peacocke, are already available, there to be used).

On the alternative account I would like to have before us, when S and A are jointly attending to an object, or having a conversation and so forth, they adopt a communicative stance towards each other, where this in turn makes possible and appropriate the use of the second person to address each other. Such uses require for their success first person

uptake by the other. That is all that is required for basic interpersonal awareness. On this proposal, A's first person perspective comes into the account of what is going on in S's mind (and vice versa) not by S referring to it, but, rather, in virtue of the first person uptake requirement on A. The labour of securing a link with the other's first person perspective is, if you like, distributed between S and A, instead of it all having to be secured by S and A in the confines of their own minds. The division of labour is a constitutive ingredient in the second person primitiveness claim, as I will be interpreting it, both in cases when the second person pronoun is used and in cases when it isn't.

VII. Joint Attention and the Communication

To make the second person primitiveness claim, as it applies to joint attention, somewhat less abstract, let us return to the university meeting example. As I noted, there are two things that might be shared in such exchanges, your perceptual experience and your responses to what you experience. The second person claim is intended, in the first instance, as a characterisation of the relation that holds between the two of you when your auditory experience is shared. Its role and point can be brought out by comparing the two scenarios I described with a third, in which your eyes meet those of your colleague and encounter a blank stare, he's looking through you rather than engaging with you. Sharing experiences, let alone responses to the object experienced, is not even in the offing.

But appeal to the communicative stance, as I intend it, is meant not only to characterise the interpersonal component in joint attention. It is also meant to be partially constitutive of what sharing of experiences itself amounts in such cases. It is here that the Communicative Stance Claim, as I understand it, does its main work, and this section will be devoted to a sketch of how it does so.

To get going, I want to return to Bruner's Communication Claim, which, recall, says the following. The social structure into which joint attention is slotted is essentially communicative, in two senses. First, when it emerges in children, it draws on a pre linguistic communication system which exists between infants and adults they interact with. Second, it provides the basis for the earliest manifestations of linguistic communication. The proposal I want to make consists, in effect, in an application of these two claims to explaining (a) the experiential nature of the interpersonal ingredient in joint attention; (b) the essentially triadic structure of joint attention as a whole; and (c) the sense in which experiences are shared in joint attention.

The prelinguistic communication system Bruner is referring to is the kind that is said to exist in the developing dyadic relations between infants and their carers prior to the onset of joint attention. One critical feature in such exchanges, highlighted for example in work by Vasu Reddy and Peter Hobson, is the basic capacity exhibited by infants to respond to expression of readiness to engage with their carers, coupled with reciprocal production of such expressions. Reddy's studies (refs) suggest this emerges, in a very primitive form, as early as two months, for example when infants visibly prepare themselves for being picked up by their carer in response to their carers' stretching out of their arms to pick them up. Hobson's suggestion is that it is precisely failure to perceive and produce such expressions that marks out autistic children. (Hobson 2005)

The importance of referring to this kind of structure, even when we are concerned with joint attention in adults, is that it serves to highlight the sense in which the detection of expressions of readiness to engage is perceptual, or experiential. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this is in the slow-motion case of joint attention in the blind and deaf child. As Nunez describes it, she can tell by her perception of the mother's arms, their orientation and so forth whether her mother is there, ready to engage; conversely, the mother can tell by seeing the child's checking for such readiness in her that her child is ready to engage. One part of the proposal I am making, captured in the two claims, is that this kind of mutual experience of readiness to engage is an essential component in all cases of joint attention. We find it also in cases that happen in a flash, for example in the looks exchanged in the university meeting when joint attention gets off the ground.

The second part of the proposal is this. It is only right to treat such detections of readiness to engage as sufficient for the interpersonal component in joint attention when we have in play capacities that make it right to say that the readiness to engage includes a readiness to communicate about the presented object, to share, or not, response to it. The proposal I want to have before us is that the kind of sharing of experiences we find in joint attention is constitutively linked to the possibility of such communications about the object both subjects are attending to. This is part of what it means to say the experiences are shared in such cases.

Suppose one were to accept such a proposal. How much of Campbell's appeal to a primitive three-place experiential relation would be retained? Campbell's main contrast, in setting out his account, is with the iterative reflective account of joint attention proposed by Peacocke, where the latter is intended to capture the kind of openness we find in joint attention. One of his arguments against Peacocke's account turns on the

explanatory role played by joint attention in rationalising coordinated action directed at the object. It is implausible, he suggests, that subjects would need to go through that amount of reflection in order, for example, to coordinate an attack on the object. More strongly, given its potentially infinite nature it is doubtful whether at any point in the iterations do we have enough to rationalise such coordination. Rather, we should think of joint attention, as he characterises it, as the common cause both of the kind of reflective awareness Peacocke describes and coordinated action directed at the object.

On the proposal I am sketching there is no reference to propositional perceiving, perceiving that, nor to reflection or introspection. And the experience is conceived of as essentially relational. In these respects, Campbell's primitiveness is retained. But there are two major differences, both of which turn on the fact that Campbell does not explicitly discuss the sense in which joint attention is the basis for communication about the jointly perceived object.

Presumably, were he to consider communication he would add such communication to the list of things joint attention is the common cause of. One difference between our accounts is that on mine the link with communication is privileged over the links with introspection and coordinated action because it is used to define the interpersonal ingredient in joint attention. The second, related and perhaps more substantive difference is that in characterising the relation between the two subjects as a second-person relation, and, as such, as involving a readiness to communicate, in this case about the object attended to, I am characterising the relation in terms of the possibility of exercising capacities not actually exercised in the experience of joint attention. As I read Campbell, he thinks the triadic experience of joint attention can be fully characterised without appeal to the capacities that are exercised in the states and actions it causally explains. This would, presumably, also apply to communication. And this is the major difference between the two accounts.

It is worth noting, though, that insisting that the experience of joint attention is defined in part by appeal to the possibility of communication about the object attended to does not prevent the experience thus defined from being invoked in a causal explanation of actual exercises of such capacities for communication. Insisting on autonomy is more than is required for the latter. And more than is required for Bruner's suggestion that joint attention provides the basis for the earliest manifestation of verbal communication.

VIII. Shared attention and other minds

So far I have said nothing about a critical ingredient in Bruner's requirement on the account of sharing in joint attention. His version of the Sharing Claim, recall, says that the account we give of sharing should, at the same time, solve or dissolve the other minds problem. As he puts it, an account of joint attention should show how and in what respect we treat 'other minds as like our own'. I end with a few very preliminary remarks about how the framework I have proposed provides, at the same time, a framework for beginning to address a particular version of the other minds problem. This is the question of how we explain and justify the claim that the concepts we apply in to our own mental states are the same as those we apply to those of others (the so-called 'unity' question). To do so I return to the distinction I drew, when setting out the university meeting example, between two kinds of sharing or 'meeting of minds' that might happen during episodes of joint attention, the sharing of experiences and the sharing of responses. I take these in turn.

Much of the renewed interest in the 1990's in joint attention was informed and motivated by findings to the effect that children only acquire the concept of 'belief' and other propositional states between the ages of three and four. The idea was that in explaining the kind of grasp of mental concepts that we must credit babies with if we are to credit them with the capacity to understand what is happening during episodes of joint attention we need only ascribe to them grasp of simpler mental concepts, which do not require the capacity to grasp the idea of the possibility of truth and falsehood. Ascribing relational uses of the concept of perception fits the bill. From our perspective, though, what matters is that if some version of the three-place experiential model of joint attention is right, such concepts are applied in the first instance to experiences that are in fact shared, and for which the distinction between what I perceive and what the other perceives plays no role in determining the correctness of the application of the concept to either of the attenders. If this is right, then, at least with respect to the concept of 'perception' Bruner is right to see in joint attention a counter to the acquisitional version of the unity problem, according to which babies first learn to apply mental concepts to their own states on the basis of introspection and are then faced with the problem of extending these very concepts on the basis of observing their behaviour. Rather, on this picture, when they introspect they encounter an experience which does not require the distinction between their own and the other's perceptual experience (a distinction they only learn to draw progressively during their second and third years -- Franco, Moll etc).

The way in which the concept of perception is deployed here does not give the second person a distinctive role. The latter comes in when we turn to the primitive mental concepts deployed in responding to the object jointly attended to, and to the prelinguistic early communication system into which joint attention is slotted. The early dyadic relations between infant and caregiver involve much more than exchanges of expression of readiness to engage. They consist mainly in progressively sophisticated productions of and responses to expressions of emotions, directed by each at the other. There are various ways of describing how this feeds into joint attention, but the most convincing in my view, and certainly the one most relevant to seeing how it might address the other minds problem is to be found in Bates et al's account of the motivational structure underpinning declarative pointing. They suggest that what distinguishes such pointings from imperative pointings (aimed at getting the adult to give the baby the object pointed at, a kind of pointing produced also by chimpanzees) is that they are aimed at *sharing* emotions with their caregiver, but here, crucially, directed at the object. The same expressions of delight produced earlier in dyadic interactions become, on their account, primitive forms of joint predication, when they accompany pointings, which in turn are conceived of as 'proto-demonstratives'. This is, for example, the way they would interpret what the blind and deaf child is checking for when she puts her hands on her mother's chest to check for her vocalisations. She is checking that they express the same emotions of pleasure and delight, directed at the object, as the ones she is expressing.

For this to be the right description of what is going on it must be the case that the child knows, in some minimally demanding sense, what these vocalisations express; and knows, at the same time, what she feels, say in smiling. And she must be treating these very different physical expressions of the emotion as expressions of the same emotion.

It might appear that in appealing to knowledge of sameness here we are introducing reflective capacities which are not only inappropriate developmentally but also undercut the sense in which such awareness of sameness can ground concept application. A brief return to our university example should give a sense of why I think such an objection should be resisted.

How should we describe the kind of meeting of minds that happens in the 'good case' when you eyes lock with those of your colleague, and fails to happen in the bad one? Well, in the good case you both respond in the same way. But that is not all that is happening. The sameness of your response is no less mutually manifest than is you experiencing of the same input. Your responses are in this sense shared. How should we

explain the sharing? On the view I am proposing it is only when things go wrong that reflection sets in. In our example, it is when expectations of a joint ‘yuk’ response are not met, when you encounter a ‘wow’ instead, that thoughts about thoughts begin. When we share responses in the good case we are doing exactly what young infants do when they share their yuk and wow responses with their caregivers, namely engaging in a primitive, non reflective shared commentary on the objects of our joint attention.

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