

## Joint Attention and the Second Person

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### I. THE QUESTION

How should we describe and explain the relation between co-attenders when experiences are shared during episodes of joint attention?

### II. THE EXAMPLE

#### *The university meeting*

You are sitting at a pep talk organised by senior university administrators, in which the idea of your university's '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.

### III. INTERPERSONAL AWARENESS: THE DILEMMA

#### *Either*

We ascribe capacities of implausible complexity to the co-attender, as in Christopher Peacocke account of 'ascriptive self conscious', where this involves three levels of embedding of the first person concept. (*Mirror of the World*).

#### *Or*

We work with an unexplicated notion of 'presence as co-attender', as in John Campbell's relational account, in which:

"[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.)

### III. BRUNER'S CLAIMS

#### *1. The Communication Claim*

Joint attention is an essentially communicative phenomenon.

#### *2. The Naive Realism Claim*

We must take infants to be 'Naive Realists'. We must assume that they take it that 'there is a world out there', which, crucially, is 'shared by others'.

#### *3. 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.

#### IV. REPOSE TO THE DILEMMA

##### 1. *The generalised 'you-indexicality claim'*.

When people stand in a second person relation to another, one which makes possible the use of the second person to address each other, they are aware of each other in a *sui generis* way, which is unavailable in the absence of this relation being instantiated, and which can only be expressed by means of 'you'.

##### 2. *The Second Person Claim*

When we attend jointly to an object we are aware of each other as 'you'.

##### 3. *The Communicative Stance Claim.*

For two people to stand in a second person relation to each other requires, in its most minimal, basic form, that they adopt a communicative stance towards that person.

##### 4. *The Experiential Claim*

Expressions of readiness to engage or communicate are directly perceived, where this form of perception is invariably accompanied, in normal cases, by reciprocal expressions of such readiness.