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# On Learning, Playfulness, and Becoming Human

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## Abstract

This essay aims to develop the so-called ‘transformational view’ of human development (advocated by McDowell and Bakhurst) by advancing a play-based model of learning. I first consider challenges to this view posed by Luntley and Rödl who argue that the learning encounter must presuppose some rational faculty already present in the prelinguistic child. Rödl in particular considers joint attentional episodes in which child and adult attend to objects in their environment together as signifying a uniquely rational consciousness active in the human child. I however argue on phenomenological grounds that this intellectualist treatment is implausible and unconvincing. I propose a play-centered treatment (inspired primarily from Huizinga) that is more sensitive to the life of the child. This perspective of play I maintain scaffolds a shared normative space which enables self-conscious, responsive, and intelligible thought and action. This account motivates what I call a participatory play model of learning which is constitutively non-intellectual but is nonetheless intelligent. It is non-intellectual because it emphasizes building co-reactive relationships and participation in shared cultural practices. But it is also intelligent because it makes possible a distinctively human mode of understanding grounded on an interactive, relational, and imaginatively reflexive engagement with the world.

## 1. The Transformational View

According to the ‘transformational view’ of human development advanced by John McDowell humans are born ‘mere’ animals but are transformed over the course of their immersion in social-cultural settings into rational and intentional agents that inhabit and are responsive to a ‘space of reasons’.<sup>1</sup> This transformation occurs during a critical formative period in a child’s upbringing (or *Bildung* as

<sup>1</sup> J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1st edition, 1994) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 125.

McDowell calls it). Through *Bildung* the child is equipped with conceptual capacities granting her a distinctively human form of mindedness.<sup>2</sup> First language acquisition is important for McDowell because it serves as a ‘repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what’.<sup>3</sup> The child’s initiation into social-cultural contexts in effect reconfigures her interface with her surroundings facilitating a transformation from a mere animal mode of life to a more recognizably human one. So not only does *Bildung* allow us to participate in shared practices, it also structures our very experience of and encounter with the world in a way that makes it normatively intelligible.

Insofar as entering the space of reasons facilitates the formation of this normative form of mindedness, this is also the space where freedom is made possible. The freedom McDowell adheres to follows the Kantian sense of possessing rational autonomy. This space is distinguished from the realm of law where more deterministically scientific modes of intelligibility are relevant. In exploring the educational implications of *Bildung*, David Bakhurst defends the ideal end of education as the cultivation of this rational autonomy.<sup>4</sup> Since freedom is operative in the space of reasons it is the goal of education to produce individuals who exercise that freedom. The formation relevant here is not about the further development of an ‘already-existing self’ but more the creation of a self that ‘in which minded beings come to be’.<sup>5</sup> The *Bildungsprozess* thus facilitates the acquisition not only of capacities not yet present in the early child but a mode of being, particularly a human mode of being.

## **2. Challenges to the Transformational View**

To say that a human child starts off a mere animal before turning into a rational and intentional agent immediately invites controversy. How can the child come to learn the ways of being human when she is at first relegated to the life of a brute? A bit of clarification is needed here to ease some unfounded concerns. The suggestion that the human child starts off a mere animal does not mean that she is a brute through and through. ‘Mere animal’ expresses the thought that

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>4</sup> D. Bakhurst, *The Formation of Reason* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 9, 123.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 9.

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the child is a biological creature and therefore has the nature consistent with that of other biological beings. As such, their mode of life is determined only to the extent that biological imperatives allow. Also, it would be crude to generalize that animals have more or less the same mode of life. They of course don't. What is important here is the mode of intelligibility relevant for understanding the mode of life of the creature. It can be said that most animals possess a mode of life that can be sufficiently understood through explanatory resources found in biology and related scientific disciplines. On the other hand, our lives as humans have a mode of life that extends beyond this because we are also largely creatures of culture. So the worry now comes to explaining this transition. If the child is not credited with innate cognitive resources that enables her to grasp and have rational mastery of normative inputs provided during the educational encounter, then how can she even begin to make the transition into a rational and intentional agent? To suggest that the child does not yet possess the ability to grasp what her adult caregiver is trying to convey through the course of learning and that it is the purpose of education to somehow get this ability to materialize in the mind of the child certainly demands explanation. Michael Luntley gives a rather bluntly-worded statement of the problem which he calls the 'hard question':

What are the capacities that provide the pupil with the platform to respond to reasons? Once this question is on the table, it becomes very difficult to see how to answer it without endorsing a rationalist account of those capacities... [I]t is utterly unclear how capacities that fall short of the capacity to give and take reasons can be the basis for bootstrapping rational capacities.<sup>6</sup>

So given a set of inborn cognitive resources that do not amount to an ability to understand what constitutes correct practice, it is unclear how these very same resources would enable the child to eventually acquire full normative competence of correct practice. For Luntley it amounts to asking something to emerge from nothing.<sup>7</sup> The move from non-rational capacities to the possession of reasoning skills (here understood broadly as the ability to grasp norms of correct practice) therefore seems mysterious and unwarranted.

Two responses can be given here. One is to bite the bullet and admit that rational capacities are indeed already present in the child. This response is a concession that the transformational view

<sup>6</sup> M. Luntley, 'Training and Learning', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* **40** (2008), 698.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

gets things wrong. The other option is to provide a principled account of how normative competence can be acquired by a child without presupposing innate cognitive resources designed for that very purpose. As nativists have noted, this is a risky move. If one is to get any significant mileage out of the learning encounter, shouldn't we at least recognize that the child ought to come pre-equipped with some inborn reasoning capacity, that is, some ability to understand norms of correct practice, that can be brought out naturally and cultivated during that encounter?

The thing with Luntley's position is he does not give a detailed account of his rationalist position. He only offers a broad conceptual argument. Luckily, we can find in Sebastian Rödl a more detailed account of learning matched with some attention to relevant empirical considerations. Though Rödl does not explicitly endorse Luntley's rationalist thesis, there is nothing to suggest that he won't agree with Luntley. Rödl though may differ on certain details. While Luntley's rationalism is in part motivated by Wittgensteinian considerations, Rödl's discussions come with an Aristotelian guise.

Rödl's critique primarily targets the very idea of transformation.<sup>8</sup> For him, the human child already possesses from birth the form of a rational creature; that is, reason must already belong to the child, at least initially as potentiality, as part of her first nature in that it already characterizes the form of the child's consciousness.<sup>9</sup> Metaphysically speaking for Rödl, things can only have at most one nature that captures the very being of the thing. Being a rational agent, insofar as it is a defining metaphysical feature of human beings, is not an attribute that individuals can acquire nor lose like that of being an artist or a salesperson. Just as animals by their very principle of being cannot gain nor lose their animal nature so humans by their very principle as a rational being cannot acquire nor cease to be rational.<sup>10</sup> This for Rödl explains the human being's having a 'rational consciousness' (apart from having a merely animal 'sensory consciousness') which allows her to act intentionally and self-consciously.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond these Aristotelian considerations, Rödl claims to enjoy empirical support by recruiting Michael Tomasello's work on joint or

<sup>8</sup> S. Rödl, 'Education and Autonomy', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* **50** (2016), 84.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

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shared consciousness, a skill that begins to emerge at around nine months of age.<sup>12</sup> For Rödl, this shared attention reflects a growing awareness in the child of a general concept or representation, what he calls an ‘incipient consciousness of the general’.<sup>13</sup> By having a shared experience, the child begins to have an awareness of general concepts that apply in particular instances made salient in the joint activity. The adult participant serves as the guide that helps shape the child’s rational consciousness by giving it more determinate content. In Rödl’s words ‘the power of reason can only be awakened into action in interactions... in which the formal representation that constitutes the power of reason is provided with content in a joint consciousness of parent and child’.<sup>14</sup> An initial dependence on an adult caregiver facilitates the actualization process of the child’s reason but it is still the ‘child’s will’ to exercise her rational consciousness that makes that encounter genuinely educational.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Initial Responses

In ‘Training, Transformation and Education’, Bakhurst rejects Luntley’s talk of ‘getting something out of nothing’ in favour of ‘getting more out of less’.<sup>16</sup> Bakhurst contends that Luntley is blind to ‘modes of explanation that capture becoming’ and so cannot appreciate the importance of the proleptic attribution of capacities not yet present in the child.<sup>17</sup> He thinks Luntley assumes an intolerably individualistic position, perhaps an excessively internalist and first-personal account of competence, which inevitably leads him to endorse rationalism. Much of this debate revolves around how we are to interpret the learning that occurs when the child is initiated into shared practices. What makes us special as humans is our exceptional ability to be inducted into these shared modes of understanding and encountering the world. So the question comes down to asking what this exceptional ability amounts to. Is it appropriate to portray the

<sup>12</sup> While Rödl uses joint or shared consciousness, most developmentalists refer to the same phenomenon as joint attention. I will follow this latter, more conventional term for the phenomenon.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>16</sup> D. Bakhurst, ‘Training, Transformation and Education’, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 76 (2015), 310.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

learning encounter as one in which rational powers are being exercised? Or are there other principled accounts which offer a different picture of the learning encounter? This is where talk of joint attention can be instructive. Joint attention presents an opportunity for a truly intersubjective encounter between child and adult in which they jointly attend to objects in their environment together in a sustained manner. Much interest in joint attention primarily stems from its purported role in the child's acquisition of knowledge about the world so there is motivation to frame the learning encounter in this way.

Unlike Luntley, Rödl's account of shared consciousness offers us a rationalist interpretation of joint attention. But there is reason to doubt his account. Theorizing about infant cognition always carries the risk of overinterpretation or overattributing capacities in infants. This I suggest Rödl courts with his Aristotelian rationalist embellishments. His account offers an implausibly complex intellectualist picture of what happens in the consciousness of the child during joint attention. A quick look at phenomenological interpretations of joint attention reinforces this view.

While Rödl's account of shared consciousness portrays the intersubjective coordination during joint attention as a coordination of mental representations, one can more simply portray this coordination in terms of movement within a shared pragmatic context.<sup>18</sup> Coordinating movements require no sophisticated mindreading abilities,<sup>19</sup> only a perceptual attunement to the actions of others in relation to a shared context. Gallagher argues that the intersubjective

<sup>18</sup> S. Gallagher, 'Seeing Things in the Right Way: How Social Interaction Shapes Perception', in M. Doyon and T. Breyer (eds), *Normativity in Perception* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Rödl's account is in some sense analogous to theory-of-mind or 'mindreading' approaches to social cognition which accounts for our ability to understand others in terms of having a specialized mental mechanism that give us the capacity to draw inferences or simulations regarding the mental states of others. This thoroughly mentalistic, observational, and individualist model of social cognition is contrasted with more interactive models which accounts for our understanding of others in terms of our context-based interactions and second-personal relations with others. My phenomenological treatment is of a piece with this latter interactive approach. For more on interaction theory see S. Gallagher and D. D. Hutto, 'Understanding Others Through Primary Interaction and Narrative Practice', in J. Zlatev, T. P. Racine, C. Sinha and E. Itkonen (eds), *The Shared Mind: Perspectives on Intersubjectivity* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008).

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coordination between child and adult rather than an occasion for forming general concepts should instead be read as an opportunity for the child to shape her perception of the environment.<sup>20</sup> Her perception is shaped in such a way that she becomes more attuned to shared significations allowing her to engage in meaningful joint activity with others. A concept according to Gallagher 'would be something extra-perceptual, added perhaps in a reflective stance on such perceptual events'.<sup>21</sup>

I should qualify that what Gallagher is criticizing here primarily is an overly intellectualist interpretation of the learning encounter. He does I think go overboard in saying that concepts play no part in the encounter. This is perhaps motivated by a common predisposition to portray concepts as inner representations or as figuring in an overly cognitivist account of encountering the world. McDowell himself rejects these overly intellectualist accounts but denies that concepts have no role in our encounter with the world. Conceptual capacities in his view are also manifest in our everyday actions and encounters in the world.<sup>22</sup> In the same vein, Alva Noë notes that there is a risk of 'over-intellectualizing the intellect' when we portray concept use in abstract, representational terms.<sup>23</sup> For Noë concepts are a way of 'achieving access to the world around us' and in so doing enable skillful engagement with it.<sup>24</sup> One can capture concept acquisition during joint attention through the words used for the objects of shared awareness. Language learning is thus intimately conjoined with joint attention. Together they work to support the child's entry into shared practices.

### 4. The Phenomenology of Play in Joint Attention

We now have reason to think that the phenomenological features of joint attention offer fertile grounds for further understanding the learning encounter. I now aim to extend this phenomenological

<sup>20</sup> Gallagher, 'Seeing Things in the Right Way: How Social Interaction Shapes Perception', 122.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> J. McDowell, 'The Myth of the Mind as Detached', in J. K. Schear (ed.), *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> A. Noë, *Varieties of Presence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 34.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 127.

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analysis by advancing an alternative picture of joint attention that centers on a blindingly obvious fact about the life of the child. That is of course the life of play.

The notion of play I want to use comes from the cultural historian Johan Huizinga's analysis of the play-element that essentially informs and undergirds human culture. Huizinga's take on play is decidedly anti-reductive. He claims for example that attempts at explaining play in terms of biological imperatives and tendencies leaves out its most crucial quality:

This intensity of, and absorption in, play finds no explanation in biological analysis. Yet in this intensity, this absorption, this power of maddening, lies the very essence, the primordial quality of play. Nature, so our reasoning mind tells us, could just as easily have given her children all those useful functions of discharging superabundant energy, of relaxing after exertion, of training for the demands of life, of compensating for unfulfilled longings, etc., in the form of purely mechanical exercises and reactions. But no, she gave us play, with its tension, its mirth, and its fun.<sup>25</sup>

Play according to Huizinga is a 'well-defined quality of action which is different from 'ordinary' life'.<sup>26</sup> By 'ordinary life' here Huizinga means life dictated by physiological imperatives and demands such as food, shelter, safety, and the like. Huizinga's consideration of play is in terms of its 'primary significance' to the player herself in its 'manifold concrete forms'.<sup>27</sup> Play in Huizinga's vivid construal thus places it within the province of the shared space of meaningful interactions as it is displayed in the life of the human being.<sup>28</sup>

Huizinga also rightly points out the role of the imagination as the basis of play and thus concerns himself with the value we place on these acts of the imagination.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, in paying closer attention to its primary quality, Huizinga affords play not with an intellectualist sensibility but with a 'profoundly aesthetic' one.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), 2–3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Huizinga makes a critical distinction between 'primitive' forms of play exhibited by young animals and infants and 'higher forms' displayed in human social-cultural practice. Huizinga is interested in analyzing the higher forms of play, what he calls 'social play'. *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



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Nevertheless, Huizinga is hesitant in conflating or reducing play to aesthetics but he does recognize that there is a close connection between play and various 'elements of beauty' such as that of 'mirth and grace', 'rhythm and harmony' as well as 'tension, poise, balance, contrast, variation', etc. and most crucially, that play creates order.<sup>31</sup>

Huizinga lays out for us four main elements that characterize the play-concept. The first is that it is free by which Huizinga means it involves a voluntary act on the part of the player. There's an intuitive sense in which play gives us an opportunity to exercise our sense of embodied agency and where a player's moves and actions are explained less in terms of mechanistic or deterministic forces and more by voluntary and purposive expressions of one's agency. Free will of course is tricky philosophical territory but Huizinga wants to sidestep the philosophical puzzle of freedom by relying on its 'wider sense'.<sup>32</sup> Huizinga isn't very clear on this 'wider sense' of freedom but we can take it to mean the everyday sense of agency we experience. Not that all our actions are expressions of freedom. Some are of course coerced and some dictated by brute physiological imperatives. When we play on the other hand, our actions convey a huge degree of discretion; that what we do is up to us.

This brings us to the second and related characteristic of play, that it goes beyond the brute necessities of life in that it is a step removed from the 'immediate satisfaction of wants and appetites'.<sup>33</sup> Play according to Huizinga 'becomes the accompaniment, the complement, in fact an integral part of life in general. It adorns life, amplifies it and is to that extent a necessity both for the individual - as a life function - and for society by reason of the meaning it contains, its significance, its expressive value, its spiritual and social associations, in short, as a culture function'.<sup>34</sup>

In relation to play as a sphere of activity and a culture function, its third characteristic lies in its boundedness in time and place. The activity is 'played out' in a contained manner and its significations only understood within the course of the activity. As the activity is repeated and transmitted it becomes a tradition. The specified space where play takes place also marks out a 'play-ground' where the shared significations take effect and are made intelligible.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

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The fourth and final characteristic of play is its structure and order. Play establishes a sort of order which Huizinga claims is attached to its aesthetic feature: 'It may be that this aesthetic factor is identical with the impulse to create orderly form, which animates play in all its aspects'.<sup>35</sup> The sphere of play therefore establishes its own 'world' made intelligible by the order required for one to properly navigate it as a player.

With Huizinga's notion of play in mind, I argue that the natural facility for play that saturates much of the life of the child accompanies her emerging capacity for joint attention. This sensitivity to the experiential aspects of play offers us a plausible phenomenological base from which to ground our account of joint attention. I maintain that this phenomenological perspective naturally accommodates the subjective life manifest in the child's actions and expressions during joint attentional episodes. I expound on this by showing how Huizinga's four characteristics of play is manifest in joint attention.

I begin with the second characteristic. In joint attention, the infant starts to explore with utmost curiosity the world around her with the help of a caregiver. The disposition relevant for the child engaged in this activity can't just be one of satisfying physiological demands. It is an activity with no immediate material gain but due to its rich extra-physiological dispositional quality, its playfulness let's say, she can nevertheless be intensely absorbed in the activity. This seems a more natural motivation for the child to engage in joint attention. We can find in play a key motivational and dispositional component that makes engaging in joint attention desirable for the child. A child has a natural instinctual desire to play for it is here where she can experience intense emotions and pleasures sought for their own sake. This rich motivational and dispositional quality I reckon is the kind of experience the child has in discovering the meaningfulness and value of things that surround her.

For instance, say a bright yellow object grabs a child's attention and shows it to her caregiver. The caregiver gently collects the object from the child, points at it, and smilingly utters the word 'banana' before she carefully peels it open for the child. The child may then try to explore the peeled banana – sniffing it, tasting it, grabbing a chunk of it and turning it into mush and perhaps throwing it around. These latter actions are of course inappropriate so the caregiver may give a frowning notice to the child and proceed to show her how to properly handle and eat the banana. The curious child upon

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 11.

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observing the caregiver's actions may express a desire to 'join in' by enthusiastically imitating the caregiver's actions. The caregiver obliges and shares the banana with the child. In doing so they both take part in the simple yet socially significant joint activity of eating together. This is the exploratory – and at the same time conspicuously playful – disposition the child displays during joint attention. For her to learn about this curious yellow object the child must have fun with it and engage with it in a sustained way with her caregiver. And the child doesn't just learn about an object here; more meaningful is how the child also learns to engage in the shared meaningful practice of eating together.

There are of course moments where the child plays all on her own. So not all instances of play are instances of joint attention. At the same time, not all learning in the child involves joint attention. Children can of course also learn through stimulus-response conditioning. But this kind of learning is trivial since this is also present in other animals and it is informative only insofar as it offers the barest of adaptive perceptual and causal information to the child. Normative and affective valences that attach to the objects are not conveyed. To learn these, the child needs to engage with others in joint attention. But again, for any episode of joint attention to reap the educational gains of conveying meaning and value to the child, it seems that the child must be motivated enough to participate. It is difficult to identify a more natural motivation or dispositional quality that can get a child engaged other than the desire to play for from within this play perspective we find the tension, mirth, and fun that is manifest in the life of the child. This is not to say that joint attentional episodes cannot be conducted in all seriousness or in a straightforwardly didactic manner in terms of explicit instruction given to the child. These of course are also ostensible instances of joint attention but the seriousness does not automatically mean that the play-element is absent in them. After all, we can't deny that play isn't just a light-hearted activity for it can also include intense and very serious involvement amongst its participants. Play can also be profoundly serious. But when talking especially about the prelinguistic child, seriousness seems to be an inappropriate demeanor.

Let me now proceed with Huizinga's third characteristic that portrays play as being limited in terms of locality and duration. This is plain to see in many types of games and its significance perhaps stems from the context within which a game can take place. For the child engaged in joint attention, play marks how the child gets more attuned not just to particular objects of attention but also to the surrounding context or practice in which the use of the object is

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appropriate. Hence in the earlier example, learning about a banana is also about learning the proper practice of eating together. A child learns that any particular object, activity, and practice has its proper time and place. A mother for example tells her child that a spoon belongs in the dining room and not in the toy chest. A child that wants to visit her grandmother and eat her delicious cookies at 1 a.m. in the morning cannot do so because it is a time for sleeping. A church or movie theater isn't the appropriate place for a child to play with her ball. Through this contextual framing of objects and practices the surroundings of the child is perceptually transformed in ways that allow her to properly participate in joint activities. These joint activities take place within a context of shared spaces which serve as 'play-grounds' that allow the child to attend and be attuned to relevant practices and objects of attention.

It is important to emphasize here the phenomenological themes articulated earlier. The kind of attunement to one's environment relevant here isn't straightforwardly representational nor inferential but a perceptual one. More phenomenologically apt in these joint attentional episodes is the perceptual attunement and familiarity to a shared environment that develops in the child's perceptual experience. The child's perception is shaped in such a way that she becomes more attuned to shared normative significations present in her environment allowing her to engage in meaningful joint activity with others. The way she sees her surrounding environment in this sense is transformed into a world of shared meaning. This perceptual attunement to a socially mediated environment marks out the 'play-ground' that orders and constitutes the world in which the child inhabits. The child of course also acquires concepts along the way primarily through language but these concepts are to be understood not for their representational property but for what they are able to open up for the child in perceptual experience. This is precisely the kind of conceptual capacity the child acquires; it is a conceptual capacity that enables the child to see the world a certain way.

Consider again the child that learns to properly handle and eat a banana. On learning the word 'banana', what is important is not that she acquires a mental representation of a concept but that she has gained access to a new aspect of the world. She now perceives bananas in a different light. She now has an idea what it is for, how to handle it, what it feels and tastes like and so on. What she acquires aren't representational qualities but a perceptual affordance. But an objection can be made here. Even if we suppose that the child gains perceptual affordance to objects through concepts she acquires, shouldn't that also presuppose some representational or intellectual

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component such as being able retrieve the concept 'banana' in thought and using it in more straightforwardly inferential contexts such as the child being able to categorize the banana as an object that falls under the general category 'food' and that it further falls under the subcategory 'fruit' and so on? Doesn't this presuppose that along with a perceptual affordance, the concepts acquired also afford the child some rational structure in the way she views the world? As noted previously, thought and concept use lies not in a 'modality of detachment' but in a 'modality of openness to the world'.<sup>36</sup> Conceptual capacities as portrayed here cannot be used simply for purposes of reliably describing or representing one's environment; rather, it serves the purpose of enabling a skillful engagement with one's surroundings. This more skill-based view of conceptual capacities is hardly appreciated by many thinkers in different quarters. Phenomenologists think that conceptual capacities unnecessarily intellectualize our experiential openness to the world while nativists tend to rely on an overly intellectualized picture of the child's encounter with the world. Though coming from different philosophical persuasions, both tend to view thought and concept use in strongly intellectual, mentalistic terms but fail to see how concepts primarily grant the child with abilities that enable a skillful engagement with a shared context. Upon acquiring conceptual capacities, the child gains intelligence but this intelligence is at its core a social and skill-based intelligence than a purely intellectual one. One hears for example in many sports commentaries about an athlete's IQ. It's wrong of course to interpret this IQ in purely cognitivist, intellectual terms. The intelligence at work here is the engaged intelligence displayed by an athlete while playing the game. This more practice-based notion of IQ also applies to the kind of intelligence displayed by the child as she learns to skillfully engage with the world through the conceptual capacities she acquires.

We can further cash out this skillful engagement with the world through Huizinga's fourth characteristic of play: that it creates order and structure. We can see this in joint attentional episodes again through the socially-mediated perceptual attunement to the environment the child acquires. This perceptual attunement structures experience in a way that the child's attentional focus is trained towards salient and socially significant aspects of a shared context. Again for Huizinga, the order in play isn't a rational one but one that manifests a patently aesthetic dimension. Insofar as play creates and demands order, the structuring involved isn't informed

<sup>36</sup> Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, 34.

by a rational consciousness but by an aesthetic perception that brings into consciousness orderly form. This aesthetic perception ‘animates play in all its aspects’ and may underwrite the motivating disposition in the child’s natural desire to play.<sup>37</sup> An aesthetic experience is the kind that neatly describes our experience of play for play ‘casts a spell over us; it is “enchanting”, “captivating”’.<sup>38</sup>

This rich aesthetic phenomenology can explain the child’s intense focus on objects during joint attention and leads us further away from asserting the necessity of rational capacities being exercised in the learning encounter. This play perspective and its rich aesthetic phenomenology suggests for us that the central capacity exercised during joint attention is more an aesthetic than an intellectual one. The natural capacity that accompanies aesthetic experience is of course the imagination. It is the work of the imagination that allows one’s perceptions to be shaped in a way that the child acquires a view of the world flushed with meaning. Reasoning capacities may be employed in some instances of joint play but these do not capture play’s essential aesthetic and meaning-providing quality.

Let me now proceed with the aspect of play that I have previously set aside: that it is a moment where we exercise and experience freedom. I put it off because the notion of freedom is tricky philosophical terrain and that it is a more problematic aspect to capture in joint attention. It is problematic because we encounter this worry: isn’t the child deeply dependent on her adult caregiver during joint attention for inputs on what to make of the objects of attention? If so it is unclear how autonomy is exercised by the child in joint attention. Here I should clarify the kind of attention that is relevant during joint attention. The attention displayed by the infant during joint attention is visibly endogenous; that is, the attention is focused, sustained, and voluntarily controlled. This is significant since infants usually exhibit what is called exogenous attention which is less focused and is usually directed by outside stimuli.<sup>39</sup> Unlike exogenous attention, endogenous attention allows the infant to attend to objects in a more engaged and purposive manner. Here we can find a minimal basis for the child’s embodied agency through a purposive and voluntary exploration of her surroundings. This is something that cannot be forced on the child from the

<sup>37</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> A. Gopnik, *The Philosophical Baby: What Children’s Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009), 111.

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outside; she has to be genuinely engaged with an object in the environment for her to exercise this kind of sustained control of her attention and actions.

But this kind of minimal agency is not what we're after, what we want the child to develop is a fully rational kind of autonomy where she is able to act for reasons she appreciates and endorses and can thus be considered responsible for what she thinks and does. If in joint attention the child depends on the adult in discovering the meaning and value of objects around her, isn't the child put in a position in which what she thinks and does is dictated to her by her adult companion? In this sense we have to concede that children cannot yet be considered fully autonomous and responsible for their actions precisely because they lack the rational resources to make such kind of autonomous, responsible judgments. But this is just a natural attitude we take towards children. The fact is that we don't usually hold them fully responsible for their actions. P. F. Strawson draws us to this fact about our practices of holding people responsible. According to Strawson, certain individuals including children lack the proper kind of emotional responsiveness we rely on when we engage with individuals we treat as morally responsible agents.<sup>40</sup> Strawson goes on to claim that our ability to participate in normative, reactive relationships enable us to engage in practices of holding each other responsible to which the domain of autonomy belongs.

What does this imply about joint attention and the development of the child's autonomy? The above considerations suggest that the child engaged in joint attention cannot yet possess full rational autonomy. However, insofar as joint attention grants the child an entry into a normative community characterized by reactive relationships, it offers the child a foot in the door. Seen through the phenomenological perspective of play, we can begin to see how the child engaged in joint attention acts in a more purposive, discretionary, and spontaneous manner; that she isn't merely acting out of brute necessities or reacting to stimuli but is instead acting with a sense of purpose. It is through play that the child can get her first taste of freedom. Of course this taste of freedom begins with a minimal exercise of endogenous attention but as the child moves on to more complex and more normative forms of play this freedom develops as well. The child's sustained yet evolving life of play can develop this sense of freedom from the minimal sense of embodied agency

<sup>40</sup> P. F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', *Proceedings of the British Academy* **48** (1962), 187–211.

to the more full bodied sense of rational autonomy to which we aspire. Through play, we can naturally trace the child's growing familiarity with and mastery of the normative dimensions of shared practices which at the same time enables skills for responsive engagement which allows her to act with discretion and spontaneity. These are features of freedom that open up to a child engaged in joint attention and which adhere more to our everyday understanding of it. This picture of autonomy I suggest is a more compelling and natural alternative to Rödl's more metaphysically motivated account.

Now let's go back to the hard question of learning: What particular resources are available in the child that enable her to be responsive to norms of correct practice? Does my discussion of play as it instantiates in joint attention offer a picture of the learning encounter that does not presuppose reasoning capacities? I suggested following Huizinga that an imaginative faculty, the ability to see things in different ways, is a central capacity at work in the child during joint attention and that rational capacities are not necessary. Let me be clear about the type of rational capacity that is at stake here. The type of rational capacity we want to account for is the one that sharply distinguishes us from other animals including our closest primate relatives. Hardcore rationalists like Luntley argue that this rational capacity is already present in the child which suggests that humans on his view will significantly outperform other animals in reasoning tasks. However, many different non-human animals have displayed complex forms of reasoning skills. It's been found that apes, octopus, crows to name a few display remarkable reasoning and problem-solving abilities. In one particularly vivid case, it's been established that prelinguistic children and chimpanzees fare roughly the same on reasoning tasks dealing with the physical world involving quantities and spatial-temporal-causal relations between objects.<sup>41</sup> If this is so, then it cannot be that humans simply possess more reasoning power than other animals for these other animals also exhibit sophisticated rationality.

Now it isn't clear if Luntley is referring to this strictly inferential form of rationality but we can try to be more charitable. Luntley also talks about our reasoning capacity in terms of our reasons responsiveness. Perhaps this responsiveness implies for Luntley a critical social component in the way we recognize or read pedagogical cues

<sup>41</sup> E. Herrmann, J. Call, M. V. Hernández-Lloreda, B. Hare, and M. Tomasello, 'Humans Have Evolved Specialized Skills of Social Cognition: The Cultural Intelligence Hypothesis', *Science* **317** (2007), 1360–1366.



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and inputs from others. This again brings us back to our discussion of the type of engagement or meeting of minds in the learning encounter. The study of Herrmann et al. cited above claims that what explains the remarkable difference between humans and our closest primate relatives is our superior social intelligence.<sup>42</sup> To be sure, many of the other cognitively sophisticated species are also intensely social. But even if the other great apes also do have some kind of social cognition, this does not involve the unique cultural participation we find in humans. This cultural participation include (1) language learning through social interaction, (2) subsistence skill acquisition learned through recognized experts and cultural practices, and (3) skill acquisition learned through formal education and the use of written language.<sup>43</sup> What makes us different, if this study is correct, is our ability to interact and transmit ideas through cultural artifacts and practices. This is a more sophisticated kind of sociality than can be observed in other animals. It is our ability for cultural transmission rather than our general smarts that makes the difference. Accordingly, we can characterize joint attentional episodes as exhibiting this feature of cultural transmission. This is the aspect of joint attention Jerome Bruner wants us to take note of: 'joint attention is not just joint attention, but joint participation in a common culture'.<sup>44</sup> The understanding formed during joint attention isn't merely about representing one's environment but an immersion into shared practices which attunes us to features of a shared world.

Granting this, one can still ask whether this 'cultural intelligence' presupposes a model of learning in which some form of rational or inferential capacity is necessarily employed. Perhaps Luntley's idea of responsiveness can appropriate such kind of cultural intelligence. If that is conceded however, Luntley's further step in endorsing a rationalist model of learning isn't as obvious anymore. His best bet is to endorse mindreading approaches to social cognition. His position on this isn't clear but if he does go down that route he will have to reckon with the intellectualist critique articulated above. He thus owes us a more specific account of what occurs and what mental faculties can be naturally inferred from the learning encounter. Rödl's treatment of 'shared consciousness' on the other hand offers a more

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1360.

<sup>44</sup> J. S. Bruner, 'From Joint Attention to the Meeting of Minds: An Introduction', in C. Moore and P. J. Dunham (eds), *Joint Attention: Its Origins and Role in Development* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995), 11.

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specific enough description of the learning encounter. He suggests that our capacity for shared consciousness (perhaps accommodating the kind of cultural intelligence adduced above) is precisely an instance of a higher form of rationality, one that captures a 'consciousness of the general'. I have however argued that this intellectualist, mentalistic treatment is also phenomenologically suspect. I have stressed that joint attentional episodes are best understood under the phenomenological framework of play in which capacities other than reasoning are more salient. I will however expressly deny that some reasoning capacity cannot enter the picture during the learning encounter. There could be instances during joint attentional episodes where reasoning is also exercised (i.e. involving quantities of objects like in teaching a child to add) but I doubt the reasoning capacities employed here significantly differ from those also available in other animals; it's just that we are employing it in a joint attentional context. I suggest, following my discussion of play, that this cultural intelligence is constitutively non-intellectual in character. They could also involve rational capacities we share with other animals but they are not necessary.

This leaves nativists with two unsavory options: (1) maintain that humans still innately possess a special kind of rational capacity distinct from other animals or (2) accept the cultural intelligence claim but interpret that as presupposing a kind of rational capacity. As we have seen, option one is an empirically risky move while option two carries heavy interpretive burden; we have a *prima facie* phenomenological case to suggest that joint attention is less about rational instruction and more about play. Adding a rational component therefore risks over-attributing a capacity that is not necessary to a child absorbed in play.

Now all this talk of the play in joint attention leaves unaddressed the question of how to explain the remarkable feats of intellect that sharply divides us and other animals. We have science, mathematics, and ideas about justice. These are cultural feats but don't they at the same time rely on quite a whole lot of intellectual horsepower? We can't just play our way to achieving all of these things.

We can try to trace these intellectual achievements through the history of human civilization with each generation of humans building on and passing to the next this vast store of knowledge. But the critical question really isn't how we got from primitive stone tools to sophisticated smartphones but more about how we are able to be part of that inheritance and participate in its ongoing evolution and expansion. What we're looking for here are ontogenetic factors that allow us to not only pick up on these social-cultural cues but also

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have rational mastery over them and subsequently build on them to reach greater intellectual heights.

One rather obvious but important thing to note here is that the learning process can't be rushed. It's a slow and steady process. Saxe for example has shown that mothers carefully calibrate and modify activities to their children based on their increasing behavioral capacity to understand relevant goals.<sup>45</sup> As the child becomes more behaviorally competent at a certain task, the mother adjusts accordingly and can proceed with tasks with a higher degree of complexity. The task can be intellectual but need not be so. This can apply to a broad range of activities but what they all share is that they introduce the child to a normative practice that is more or less sustained by a normative community.

Note however that for the child to be sensitive to the normative structure inherent in any practice a co-reactive relation must first be established with an experienced adult. Co-reactivity involves the dynamic affective exchange between agents that embeds their sense of being participants in a normative community.<sup>46</sup> Building such co-reactive relationships with an adult allows the child to be sensitive to the normative structure of shared practices. This is a critical condition for mastering a shared practice because this co-reactivity can eventually grant the child, once she has mastered the practice, a self-appreciating and reflective sensitivity to norms that apply to the practice. So what is truly significant about the child's increasing understanding of particular tasks, whether intellectual ones or otherwise, is really the capacity of the child to be normatively and affectively responsive to her caregiver. This increasing sophistication in the child's understanding of a task isn't just about building on a minimal set of skills but also importantly about building co-reactive relationships. The developing co-reactive relation between the child and caregiver reflects the gradual way in which the child is integrated into the everyday practices of the people around her eventually allowing her to become a full participant in the normative community.

This growing capacity of the child to be responsive to others can be characterized as having a scaffolding structure that allows a set of minimal 'animal' capacities innately available to the child (analogous

<sup>45</sup> G. B. Saxe, 'Studying Cognitive Development in Sociocultural Context: The Development of a Practice-Based Approach', *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 1 (1994), 135–157.

<sup>46</sup> V. McGeer, 'Co-reactive Attitudes and the Making of Moral Community', in R. Langdon and C. Mackenzie (eds), *Emotions, Imagination, and Moral Reasoning* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012).

to the elementary mental functions articulated by Vygotsky) to acquire a more normative and reflective complexion. The piecemeal manner in which the child is scaffolded into a shared normative space captures what Bakhurst describes as the child's transition from a 'non-rationally secured conformity with correct practice' to the state of 'rational command of the grounds of correct practice'.<sup>47</sup> This scaffolding adds a rich dimension of normativity and reflective awareness to the child's thoughts and actions and forms the basis of her uniquely human mode of understanding. This understanding is not necessarily intellectual in nature; it's an understanding that opens her to a socially-mediated and hence intersubjectively dynamic mode of comportment with her surroundings. Elementary capacities of perception, thought, and action gain new normative light under this understanding. The simple act of eating for instance is no longer merely about nutritional sustenance but a way of life. This basic biological function is transformed into an elaborate normative practice. But of course this understanding can also instantiate in more intellectual pursuits. It opens us to intellectual practices and traditions. It allows us to imagine theories about what the world is like or construct elaborate symbolic systems. These intellectual activities aren't simply about making brute causal or conceptual inferences but about making judgments within a space of reflective, normative awareness. The more sophisticated skills and reasoning capacities the child gains here arise not from some special inborn mental faculty but from her growing familiarity of and competence to navigate this shared normative space. What these more intellectual practices share with non-intellectual ones is that they flow from this normatively scaffolded form of understanding; an understanding that makes possible goal-oriented, self-conscious, and voluntary forms of thought and action.

And this is where the play that accompanies joint attention finds its purchase. This perspective of play provides that normative scaffold which grants the child entry into these shared practices. Play helps structure and shape the child's view of her surroundings into a normative space which enables self-conscious, responsive, and intelligible thought and action. Her growing familiarity with this shared normative space reflects her increasing competence in participating in these shared activities and practices. As such, this perspective of play can serve as the platform Luntley is looking for in explaining our responsiveness to the reasons of others. Play offers the child the normative platform from which she can relate with others in a

<sup>47</sup> Bakhurst, *The Formation of Reason*, 138.

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co-reactive manner thereby allowing her to be sensitive to the normative features of a shared practice. Contra Luntley, no reasoning capacity is necessary in this perspective. As the child develops and participates in increasingly more sophisticated forms of joint activity she at the same time exercises her imaginative faculty in ordering the available space around her which facilitates a recognition of relevant norms thus allowing her to demonstrate her competence at a shared practice. The normativity that informs the experience of play in the joint activity opens up a shared normative structuring of the world that gradually comes into fuller view for the child. This view of the world gradually resembles that of the adult's as the joint activity, the socially-informed perceptual attunement, takes its course. Here we see how the child is able to enter into a world of shared significations, a shared view of the world, from the seemingly simple and playful act of joint attention.

### 5. Concluding Thoughts: On the Nature of Human Learning and Development

I'd like now to proceed beyond joint attention and talk about what this implies regarding the nature of learning. I've already indicated how rationalist models are phenomenologically implausible and unconvincing. Empiricist models on the other hand are unacceptably crude and inadequate. In place of these two tired models of learning I'd like to promote what I call a participatory play model of learning. Unlike the rationalist model this play model is not just about the cultivation of innate mental faculties and unlike the crude empiricist model this model is more than just a matter responding and adapting to environmental stimuli. A distinctive feature of the participatory play model is that it is constitutively non-intellectual not least because it is primarily about directing a child's immersion in a community. But it's not just about immersion, it also scaffolds the formation of a truly rational, autonomous agent, which leads us to perhaps this model's most remarkable feature: it's singular capacity to forge a being whose mode of life thoroughly exceeds her status as a biological creature. This I suggest is what makes this model of learning truly intelligent. Its intelligence is not to be found in having more sophisticated powers of reason. Instead, its intelligence stems from the distinctively human mode of understanding that it makes possible. It is distinctively human not because of its intellectual component but because it provides the grounds or platform for an interactive and relational engagement with the world. This mode of

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understanding enables humans to acquire conceptual capacities (founded in language and tradition) which give them the opportunity to share, engage with, and build on each other's judgments. These conceptual capacities open humans to create a shared and normatively structured space both ideal (in terms of thoughts, ideas, and judgments) and material (in terms of tangible artifacts) within which they can pursue aims and modes of life beyond a mere animal existence. It allows humans to lead lives marked with meaning and reflective awareness. We aren't just biologically determined creatures (though this still remains a fact about us), we are also creatures with consciously considered goals and concerns. We don't just adapt to or build a habitat, we create and dwell in a world.

The conceptual capacities learned are passed on from generation to generation not so much by way of hereditary transmission but more in the form of a cultural and historical inheritance. We learn more about our distinctively human ways of thinking and acting by exploring our lived and collectively narrated history instead of merely looking at our evolutionary past. While the latter can draw out the animal aspects of our existence it is in the former that truly unveils the most meaningful and significant aspects about our humanity. It is in our reflexive engagement with our collective history and our chance to participate in it that builds our sense of self. It is when we realize that we are 'players' taking a part on a 'stage' of shared significations that we become truly human. The participatory play model is a natural step that facilitates this realization and prepares us for this uniquely human way of life.

A closer look at our attitudes and practices towards children vindicates this model of learning. We usually send a child to a formal educational setting only when she's around four to six years of age. Before this the child is simply not ready for formal schooling. But this doesn't mean that no learning occurs in the child at this early stage. In fact, this early period is where a whole lot of learning takes place. This would seem paradoxical on a customary view of learning idealized as a kind of direct formal instruction. On this view, learning involves a kind of systematic and straightforward providing of information and explanations to which the child tries to grasp in an intellectual manner. Luntley's rationalist model motivates such a view of learning. His model commits us to think that the child already has the power to grasp explanations which furthers this view of education as plain instruction. This is not the kind of education the early prelinguistic child receives or ought to receive.

Participatory play however aspires to a different view of learning. Its emphasis is in building co-reactive relationships and participation

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in shared practices and modes of living. The learning here is about sensitivity to shared norms and rules that allow one to take part in a community as a fellow competent participant. This sensitivity to shared norms isn't a mechanical following of instructions or rules but the acquisition of a skill which allows for competent engagement with a shared practice. It is not merely an impersonal imparting of information nor making inferences regarding another's mental states but a venue in which co-reactive relationships with fellow participants are developed. In this sense, the participatory play model is also a relational model of learning. The more relevant understanding produced here is of the engaged, practical, and socially situated kind rather than a representational or explanatory one. What the child learns aren't just mere descriptive facts nor explanations (though these can also play a part) but a mode of comportment with a shared world. The child is more like an athlete learning the ropes of a game than a scientist trying to represent the world as accurately as she possibly can.

By the time the child begins formal schooling we expect her to have a pretty good grasp of the ways of the world she shares with others. If we suppose that the early engagement with the child is simply about a rational grasping of explanations given to her then there is no reason for us to not let that child proceed immediately to a more strictly didactic, formal education. But of course imposing this form of education on young prelinguistic children is futile. The child's natural place is the playground, not the lecture room. This should lead us to believe that a markedly different model of learning is at work in the educational encounter with a pre-school child. This period in the child's life is one that is thoroughly dedicated to play. It is only through the context of play that children can be genuinely engaged in an activity. Information and explanations may also of course be given but they are usually done within a context of understanding a certain practice or mode of life. This understanding is again more social and practice-based than intellectual in nature. To suggest a rational capacity at work here is to betray obvious facts about the playful life of the child and sets a high bar regarding the child's ability to grasp reasons and explanations very early in life. If we pay closer attention to the life of the child, the participatory play model seems more appropriate. To initiate a joint attentional encounter with a young child, the caregiver has to engage the child in a context of play. This isn't just supported phenomenologically but empirically as well. Developmentalists maintain that play is a significant precursor and indicator of later intellectual and emotional development and that this period of play in fact should be prolonged and formal

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education start later in the child's life. Many philosophers on the other hand have hardly paid attention to this well-known fact and as a consequence has stuck with a narrowly intellectualist approach to education.

On the participatory play model I advance, getting to more advanced forms of intellectual activity is more importantly a matter of giving the child relevant practical skills of normative engagement with a particular intellectual practice. Learning to engage with a particular practice offers a scaffold which opens up a shared interactive space and transforms elementary cognitive abilities (which can include the kind of reasoning skills we share with other great apes) by giving them a normative, reflective complexion. The participatory play model thus offers the child a gateway to these normative forms of thinking which include these more sophisticated intellectual pursuits. Reasoning and thinking within this space isn't anymore a mere mental operation but a reflective, interactive activity in which participants can share and build on each other's judgments. To be sure, more sophisticated reasoning skills are acquired here but these skills are not strictly biologically endowed but are instead gained by the child's learning to participate in a shared normative space

Another significant feature of participatory play is the proleptic, anticipatory nature in which adults attribute understanding in the child. What this means is our treatment of the child is determined by our projection of what kind of person the child can become in the future.<sup>48</sup> We expect that human children will mature into responsible rational agents so we prepare them for that future by gradually letting them participate in normative practices. We view the child as someone who will potentially be part of a normative community though not yet fully there. Pär Segerdahl describes this in terms of our attitude to children as 'living in the dimension of becoming'.<sup>49</sup> The pedagogical importance of this proleptic attitude lies in how

<sup>48</sup> This capacity for proleptic attribution can only happen in a cultural-historical context as argued by Michael Cole: 'Only a culture-using human being can "reach into" the cultural past, project it into the future and then "carry" that conceptual future "back" into the present to create the sociocultural environment of the newcomer's development.' M. Cole, 'Culture and Development', in H. Keller, Y. H. Poortinga, and A. Schölmerich (eds), *Between Culture and Biology: Perspectives on Ontogenetic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 310.

<sup>49</sup> P. Segerdahl, 'Can an Ape Become Your Co-author? Reflections on Becoming as a Presupposition of Teaching', in M. A. Peters and J. Stickney (eds), *A Companion to Wittgenstein on Education: Pedagogical Investigations* (Singapore: Springer, 2017).



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we perceive the child not as destinies (as someone who already is) but as beginnings (as someone who can possibly be).<sup>50</sup> Here we do not presuppose that the child already has resources for understanding normative demands but we nevertheless expose the child to an environment that scaffolds a way of life that makes this possible. Within this dimension of becoming, direct instruction to the child is abandoned in favour of letting her become teachable.<sup>51</sup> In letting her become teachable what is important is to let the child be like one of us, that is, participate in human modes of living. And it is through play where we let the child participate and experience what it is like to become the kind of human being that she can potentially be. Child's play isn't just fun, it's also a preparation for a truly human way of life.

The idea of participatory play, as I hope to have shown, offers an alternative picture of the kind of intelligence that significantly sets humans apart. This I maintain vindicates the transformational view of human development. This developmental detour through play sanctions a child's transition from being a mere animal to becoming a cultural creature. This unique developmental trajectory allows us to be a unique kind of being, still an animal but can transcend our biology to focus on pursuits that go beyond mere survival. Through participatory play traditionally biologically directed and determined functions like perception, motor reflexes, and general cognition are opened to conscious reflective awareness and acquire a normative dimension allowing them to be shaped and structured in ways that biology cannot fully predict.

This unique being that we can become sees the world in a qualitatively distinct way. Our subjective life isn't one lived in terms of brute sensations and receptivity to environmental stimuli. Our consciousness is instead suffused with imagination. Our subjectivity persists on a plane of imaginative reflexivity; we can open up new ways of seeing things and discover other possible horizons and ways of living through our interactions with similarly minded beings. Through our engagement with and growing mastery of shared practices, our consciousness is also affected in a deep and fundamental way. Consider for example Di Paolo et al.'s account of how our experience is transformed as we grow from novice to expert:

As we make the journey from beginners to experts through practice, not only is skillful performance improved, but experience is

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 545–546.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 544.

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also transformed... Becoming a wine connoisseur is certainly an achievable goal but expertise in this field (as in any other) is not obtained through gaining the right kind of information but through the right kind of transformation.<sup>52</sup>

So engagement with shared practices transforms our subjective lives. They open us not just to our present environment but to a shared world of significations and horizon of possibilities. The space that a shared practice opens up is therefore also a space where our conscious lives can intersect and interact creating a truly intersubjective horizon for understanding the world. Human mindedness as such is a kind of tapestry, a cacophony, of intersecting and interacting horizons embedded in a shared world. We can't possibly start out that way, but we can get there through imaginative and participatory play. Participatory play is our developmental entrance into this unique form of being.

These reflections motivate and support the idea that what makes us truly human is not that we have a distinct biology but the fact that we can exceed our biology. The point about our uniqueness cannot be reduced to some genetic quirk we've inherited. Instead, what sharply distinguishes us from other animals stems from the distinctive developmental trajectory that is made possible for us. We've acquired a unique mode of development that is not entirely directed by our genetic inheritance. It's an idiosyncratic, non-biologically directed mode of development that foregrounds our culture and sociality in shaping the kind of being that we are (or more appropriately, can become). Our maturation as humans goes through this social-cultural detour in which learning from others marks a necessary developmental step.<sup>53</sup> This is not just the learning we can also find in other animals in terms of adapting to one's environment. The learning in our case involves the shaping of a shared space within which we

<sup>52</sup> E. A. Di Paolo, M. Rohde, and H. De Jaegher, 'Horizons for the Enactive Mind: Values, Social Interaction, and Play', in J. Stewart, O. Gapenne, and E. A. Di Paolo (eds), *Enaction: Toward a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 44.

<sup>53</sup> Other animals are social as well but their sociality does not affect their maturation. Their maturation can be said to go through the same developmental trajectory as can be observed in other non-social animals. What they have is a biologically determined sociality; their biological maturity directs their sociality. In the case of humans, while this may also be true, what makes our sociality distinct is how our sociality itself fundamentally directs our maturity and as such is deeply integrated in the course of our development.

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can take part in meaningful practices. So unlike other animals our maturation comes with an acquisition of a second nature. Humans mature not merely as biological beings but as a being with a hybrid nature: animal but at the same time exceeding it.<sup>54</sup> This hybridity marks our distinctive transcendental condition as a unique kind of being. Yes, the human being has an animal nature but she also possesses a second nature that dwells in a world of shared meanings and consciously considered concerns. On the strength of these considerations, we have good reason to think of human development as a truly transformational one.

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<sup>54</sup> I appropriate this notion of the hybrid nature of the human being from Cole, 'Culture and Development', 317.