

# Reading reflection 1

Critically analyzing and reviewing 'Plural self-awareness' by Hans  
Bernhard Schmid

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This text is supposed to be a reading reflection of the text "Plural self-awareness" by Hans Bernhard Schmid. First, there will be a quick placement into the field, or topic this text is about. After that, the central thesis of the text will be presented, as well as the arguments supporting this thesis will be summarized. Finally, the strength of Schmid's line of argumentation will be reflected critically.

## II. WHERE WE ARE

With regard to the course Philosophy of social minds, the text "Plural self-awareness" can be categorized into the field of collective intentionality. Collective intentionality refers to the cognitive and social processes involved in the shared understanding and shared goals of groups of people. Collective intentionality is the ability of a group of people to have a shared understanding of a situation, to coordinate their actions, and to work together towards a common goal. The concept of collective intentionality has been studied in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and sociology. It is closely related to the idea of collective action, which is the ability of a group of people to work together to achieve a common goal. Moreover, it is thought to be a fundamental aspect of human sociality, and it is important for many aspects of social life, such as cooperation, coordination, and communication. It is also thought to be important for the formation and maintenance of social groups, as well as for the emergence of social norms and institutions. The key feature of collective intentionality is the shared understanding and shared goals among the group members. People in a group with collective intentionality understand that they are all working towards the same goal, and they can coordinate their actions and communicate effectively to achieve that goal. It is also crucial that the group members share a common perspective and that they are aware of each other's intentions. Moreover, collective intentionality is also closely related to the concept of joint action, which refers to the ability of people to coordinate their actions in time and space. Joint action is thought to be a prerequisite for collective intentionality, as it enables people to work together to achieve a common goal. Generally speaking, collective intentionality is a complex and multidimensional concept that refers to the cognitive and social processes involved in the shared understanding and shared goals of groups of people. It plays a critical role in human sociality and enables people to cooperate, coordinate, and communicate effectively to achieve a common goal. Collective intentionality is closely related to joint action and it is crucial for the formation and maintenance

of social groups, as well as for the emergence of social norms and institutions.

## III. CENTRAL THESIS

Choosing a phenomenological approach, Schmid is claiming in his text that the so-called sense of us is plural pre-reflective self-awareness.

## IV. SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTATION

First, Schmid is referencing Searle's account. Specifically, he is analyzing his definition of what is needed in order to find a potential partner for collaboration. Searle says that it is necessary that the recognition of agency is mutual as well as there need to be an openness in terms of a common knowledge, or a mutual belief. Schmid is agreeing that these points are necessary, however not sufficient for a collaboration. Rather, he refers to Tomasello's insights of the shared intentionality hypothesis. Namely, that primates are recognizing each other as agents, but are not developing the capacity of shared intention. Schmid infers that social cognition is not enough to explain collective intentionality, but that there is something else required. Further, Schmid is discussing altruism since it is suggesting that there is some kind of benevolence needed to rely on the altruism of a partner. He concludes that neither one-sided altruism nor mutual altruism is the answer to the question, because one-sided altruism is only focusing on heightened agential powers of one side, whereas mutual altruism would end up in the prisoner's dilemma. As a consequence, Schmid says that potential cooperators need the capability of relating to each other's agency, whereas there is the need for something that can be joint. Searle is proposing that the mutual awareness of agency forms into one single sense of us. Schmid is concluding from that, that there is the need to define the so-called sense of us more specifically. In sum, Schmid is demonstrating that social cognition is not enough to answer the question of collective intentionality. Therefore, Schmid wants to focus on the so-called sense of us which emerges when there is a mutual awareness of agency as Searle phrased it. This argument is meant to prove as a basis for Schmid to define the sense of us.

In order to define the sense of us more specifically, Schmid differentiates between different meanings in terms of what does it mean that A is of B, namely he names the so-called object and subject account. He claims that neither account is satisfying. First, Schmid criticizes the object account denoting that B is the object, or content of A. Regarding the mutually open recognition of agency, the process where you and I

unify to 'us' appears therefore in the content of the attitude of the participating individuals. In particular, he is drawing attention to the fact that groups cannot be declared into existence by an act of self-categorization of individuals. So, when a community exists based on declaration, the act of declaration has to be done at a certain level jointly which means that the possibility of joint attitudes is supposed to be explained by the sense of us leading to a *petitio principii*. Moreover, Schmid also raises criticism against the subject. The subject account denotes that there emerges a coalescence of individual subjects into a plural subject when having mutual open recognition of agency. Schmid criticizes that when the plural subjects are the result of joint actions one is ending up in an infinite regress since a joint action is presupposing a joint subject. In other words, for every plural subject there exists another plural subject of the action or attitude, so that the sense of us has an infinite amount of 'us'. As a consequence, Schmid raised criticism against both subject and object accounts and therefore argued that none of them is satisfying. Based on that, Schmid introduces a third meaning which he claims is the better. Schmid says that it is more reasonable to argue that the 'us' is in the mode of the intentional attitude, or of the sense of 'us'. He argues that this notion has advantages over the subject and object because both of the issues they are causing are not given because no thoughts are needed to think over if we are a group or not as well as no creation of a plural subject would require a special communicative procedure. Even though he claims that the defined sense is "us" and relating us to each other as potential partners in cooperation, Schmid says that there is still the question of what this attitude is and how it relates to the 'us'.

Further, Schmid claims that the sense of us is plural pre-reflective self-awareness. In order to argue for this claim he first illustrates the main features of self-awareness by reference to Sartre and Shoemaker. Schmid defines self-awareness as a feature of an intentional act which is directed towards what the subject has in mind and as self-referential and immediate. He also emphasized that self-awareness is empty in terms of not questioning if the self I'm referring to is really me. Based on that, Schmid wants to argue for the feature of pre-reflectiveness of self-awareness. He argues that in philosophy self-awareness is conceived to be a priori and in psychology there is proof of cases where people have beliefs or experiences they are not conceiving as their own. Also when we take ourselves into the experience of someone else's sensations he argues that beforehand the sense of taking ourselves into this sensation and not another person is striking he argues and therefore the self seems to be a priori. Especially, Schmid raises the debate if self-awareness is constitutive for consciousness. Even though the answer is not relevant for his argumentation, he explains that when approaching the answer, it is proven that self-awareness is pre-reflective. Namely, according to the debate in philosophy Schmid argues that mental states become conscious through meta-representation, however self-awareness is not meta representational since it is not involving higher order mental states. So, we do not need to think about ourselves to

have a certain perception as ours, but if we do so, we become aware of that. Since Schmid has argued that self-awareness is pre-reflective, he has set the stage for the next claim he wants to argue for, namely that self-awareness is not only singular, but can also be plural.

To do that he first introduces three roles which self-awareness plays in the individual mind. He argues that self-awareness is unifying the mind and is constituting selfhood. His idea is that this unifying role of self-awareness is going beyond the individual mind and is therefore transferable to the plural. The first role he is introducing is ownership. Whereas he is characterizing self-awareness in terms of establishing ownership of one's mind. Therefore, it can be seen as a formal unity of the mind, and denotes that any occurring belief is presenting to us as our belief, so I am aware of the intentional states as my own. The next role he is presenting is perspective meaning that the mind draws a distinction in between what is the self and what is not and thereby constitutes selfhood. It denotes that my awareness and the object of my awareness are distinct from each other. Lastly, Schmid presents commitment in terms of the individual being compatible and underlying a normative stance. An individual cannot believe *p* and not *p* since it would be incompatible, which proves a normatively unified mind constituting proper beliefs and goal-directed attitudes. Hence, Schmid explained properly three key roles in self-awareness and subsequently he is connecting this knowledge to his superior thesis, namely he is provoking that the form of mental integration as introduced in the individual is not stopping there, rather that it constitutes a plural self and serves as an answer to make sense of the "sense of us".

Followed by that thought, Schmid is discussing the named three key roles also in the plural self. Plural self-awareness, as Schmid is introducing it, makes shared attitudes transparent as ours and consequently unifies our social mind denoting common ownership. This awareness of some views as ours involves an integrated perspective. Schmid argues that plural self-awareness is connected to the idea that a group is a plural self based on the sense of having some of their attitudes as theirs collectively and being aware that there is a difference in how we perceive things and how things are. Schmid is calling this shared perspective. Schmid concludes that plural self awareness plays the same role in the integration of a group as individual self-awareness plays in the integration of the individual mind. Finally Schmid is introducing joint commitment which he is referring to as a constant normative pressure for coherence regarding attitudes of individuals. In other words, plural self-awareness is a normative pressure leading us towards a unified shared perspective with coherent attitudes committing us jointly. Like the commitment in the self-awareness, the plural self-awareness has now developed to a pressure of conformity in order to be compatible with the plural self so to say. Schmid is using the named arguments in order to support his superior thesis, or claim, namely that the presupposition of joint intention is a background awareness of plural selfhood. Like there is no individual self in individual self-awareness, plural self-awareness is what the plural self

is. Schmid defines plural self-awareness as a pre-reflective awareness of our attitudes as ours collectively, whereas social sharedness of our attitudes become phenomenally transparent to us as well as constitute a shared perspective, and has a normative pressure leading us towards a consistent set of our attitudes.

## V. EVALUATION

What can be said about Schmid's argumentation and its strength? First, I would like to point to some potential problems which come with his approach. With problems I mean that Schmid is leaving a lot of questions unanswered, as well as counterarguments. For example, his account raises the question how the switch so to say from individual and plural self-awareness is done. It cannot be a reflective choice, so the question is, is it the content of our awareness, or is it the constitution of a plural subject? Generally speaking, Schmid has not covered the applicability of the awareness well, when I was reading his text I thought that some more examples would have been useful to see how the plural self-awareness comes into life, and how long it is lasting, or whether the sense is changing over time for example. Next to that, I also sensed that after reading Schmid's text I felt like even though the sense of us was explained in more detail that there is still room for interpretation for the 'us'. In his text Schmid is proposing that the plural self-awareness is what the plural self is. However what comes to my mind is, what exactly can be said about this plural self. And more importantly, in his text Schmid is saying that sometimes people have a sense of us even if they are not belonging to this group or actually if there is no group at all. What can be said about such circumstances? Is the plural self something constituted by one individual only that is thinking about an illusion of a 'we'? Picking up the example of Schmid's text again, let's say I know it is your intention to go for a walk. Instead of forming a private intention I understand a situation such as that 'we' together intend to go for a walk, whereas I as an individual considered the situation as such, but you haven't and wanted to go on your own. It would be interesting to consider a wide range from misunderstandings to role conflicts in the plural self-awareness account of Schmid since they are closely tied to the phenomenon of collective intentionality. Would the plural self only be created for me then? Is it possible that only one person has plural self-awareness? Can a person have plural self-awareness when it comes to objects or animals? Or another unclear fact is, what if two individuals share a plural self-awareness. What if they have a different notion of what the normative pressure of 'us' is in terms of joint commitment. Is it still the same plural self we are talking about? Next to these raised open questions I would also like to highlight the fact of credibility. Namely, Schmid has used a lot of theoretical, philosophical approaches. Generally speaking, his approach is highly theoretic in terms of working with philosophical accounts and how his notion is fitting into this framework. However, when I read his text I clearly sensed that more study or research is needed to support his arguments properly. Espe-

cially when Schmid is also introducing ownership, perspective and commitment for the plural I thought that more support of evidence would be helpful to strengthen his argument. He described the idea pretty well, however I sensed his explanations as less credible due to that. Moreover, the parts arguing for the fact that the objective and subjective account are not true were argued pretty well and nicely supported by examples and other philosophical accounts. Also in his introduction Schmid employed accounts of Tomassello and Searle properly, as well as psychological research to introduce his account. In his own text Schmid is giving objections against his proposed view that groups are selves constituted by plural self awareness in a similar way as individual selves are constituted by individual self-awareness. He even argues against two of them, nevertheless he admits that one objection is an important criticism which needs to be considered. Schmid introduces that the first person point of view comes with special authority. As in the individual self-awareness there is a "I talk" there is no "We talk" in the plural self-awareness. This means that the sense of us is not providing a incontestable identity. Different individuals may have different attitudes, or individual ones on top of that, so that in analogy to Schmid's spokesperson example, a spokesperson could not speak for a whole group since such an identity is missing. What can be said is that Schmid's account is not illustrating and considering the differences between singular and plural points of view well. Moreover, concerning Schmid's argumentation he did a good job in intuitively approaching his central claim. His arguments are building logically upon each other and he is supporting his arguments accordingly. All in all, it can be summarized that Schmid's text is leaving a few questions open and also failing to reveal and discuss differences in between plural and singular points of view. Nevertheless, his structure, or line of argumentation is in a logical fashion. Whereas it is important to note that the section introducing joint commitment, shared perspective and common ownership were not supported well by examples or scientific proof in terms of referencing philosophical accounts or psychological research. Schmid has argued well what issues come with the subject and object account and based on that proposed another as he called it 'more relaxed view'. Therefore, he proposed another useful approach to the current topic which was well elaborated.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Hans Bernhard Schmid 2013 Plural self awareness. doi: 10.1007/s11097-013-9317-z