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## Secret Charades: Reply to Hutto

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**Abstract:** *In reply to Daniel Hutto's "Getting Real About Pretense," I defend my theory of pretense against his claim that it is subject to counterexamples by clarifying the value of the analysis. Then I argue that the central challenge still facing Hutto's "primacy of practice" approach, as well as other 4E approaches to pretense, is to explain the link between pretense and deception.*

**Keywords:** pretense; pretend; deception; imagination

I am grateful to Daniel Hutto (this volume) for his careful consideration of my views on pretense and am pleased to have the opportunity to offer some brief replies as a part of this special issue on pretense and 4E approaches to cognition. Hutto and I approach these issues from different directions. He is a prominent defender of enactive and embedded views of perception and cognition (Hutto, 2015; Hutto & Myin, 2012, 2017) that generally eschew appeal to content-bearing mental representations. I am less skeptical of the utility and reality of mental representations and more doubtful of the ultimate explanatory reach of 4E approaches—even if I share some of his skepticism about certain (e.g., Fodorian) views of mental representation. Yet, happily, we both seem to be reaching across the aisle in our pieces for this volume, taking seriously the concerns and theoretical scruples of an alternative perspective, while still marking a line in the sand past which we aren't eager to tread. I will say a few things here in defense of where I draw the line.

I aim to give—and assign theoretical significance to—a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for pretense. Omitting some of the fine print, I claim that to pretend that  $x$  is  $y$  is to intentionally make some  $x$   $y$ -like, while believing that the  $x$  will not, in the process, become a  $y$ .<sup>1</sup> For instance, to pretend that I am a lion is to intentionally make myself lion-like, while believing I will not, in the process, become a lion. I think that this analysis usefully reveals what is shared among otherwise disparate activities that get labeled 'pretending'—including childhood games of pretense, theatrical productions, and nefarious deceptions. Further, the analysis clears away theoretical brush by avoiding appeal to a primitive concept PRETEND (as famously advocated by Leslie (1987, 1994)) or a *sui generis* cognitive attitude of imagination (as advocated by many others, including Nichols & Stich (2003) and Picciuto and Carruthers (2016)). While my analysis leaves much to be discovered about the nature of the relevant beliefs and intentions, and the developmental course of pretense generally, it provides a useful roadmap and set of constraints for finer-grained theoretical accounts to come. Or so I like to think.

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<sup>1</sup> I spell out the details of this proposal elsewhere Langland-Hassan (2014, 2020).

Hutto's main criticism of my positive account of pretense is that it is open to counterexamples--situations where the criteria are fulfilled but there is no pretense, and situations where there is pretense but the criteria are not fulfilled. From this he concludes that it would be a mistake to put too much weight on the importance of beliefs and intentions of the kind I highlight, even if they are good signs that a pretense is afoot. Instead he proposes we focus more closely on environmental and sociocultural factors that shape and support pretenses and aim to see pretense as a cooperative *practice*. Such an approach meshes with the enactive, embedded approach to cognition he favors, which does not see mentality (and indeed pretense) as something dissociable from environmental and sociological states of affairs.

The most important point I want to make in response is that, whether or not the examples Hutto provides are counterexamples, they do not impugn the value and theoretical relevance of my analysis. I fully agree with Hutto that we should be surprised if it really were possible to give exceptionless necessary and sufficient conditions for much of anything at all. Nature comes in shade of gray. Whether something is a river or a creek, a kitten or a cat, or even alive or dead will at times be indeterminate. What we should want from a reductive analysis is that it allows us to predict when there will be borderline cases to understand *why* they are borderline cases. (And, of course, we will want it to capture all the obvious instances, and to exclude all the obvious non-instances.) Here I think my account succeeds with Hutto's proposed counterexamples. His first example is of Teresa, an expert toolmaker whose efforts one day happen to be "utterly half-hearted and lackluster." Teresa intends to look busy in her tool-crafting but has no real expectation of successfully creating a tool. She seems to satisfy my criteria for pretense: she is making a piece of wood tool-like while believing it will not, in the process, become a tool. However, by Hutto's lights, Teresa is not pretending. Yet I think a case can be made that we do indeed have pretense here. We can imagine Teresa's boss cottoning on to her charade and barking, "Pretend to work and I'll pretend to pay you!" But all I need is that this is an ambiguous case and that the ambiguity traces to ambiguity in Teresa's beliefs and intentions. Does she really believe that she will not make a viable tool today, or does she merely suspect that her half-hearted whittling will not result in a tool? Does she really intend to make the stone tool-like, or does she just intend—more minimally—to look busy? So long as we can understand the ambiguity in whether Teresa is pretending as tracing to ambiguity in the states that—on my analysis—generate pretense, all is well. The account still provides more understanding of pretense than we would have without it, by revealing the source of the ambiguity.

Likewise for Hutto's example of Katrina, who aims to overcome her fear of flying by pretending to be the sort of person who loves to fly. She expects her method to have success. This, Hutto proposes, is a case of pretending that some *x* is a *y* where the agent believes that the *x* really will become a *y* in the process (the *x* being Katrina here, and a person who loves to fly being the *y*). In characterizing Katrina's method as "fake it until you make it," Hutto has provided my response for me. Katrina does not believe that her efforts at becoming a person who loves to fly by acting like a person who loves to fly will immediately succeed—this is the period when she is "faking it," or *pretending* to be a person who loves to fly. At some point, however, she starts to see success within her grasp. As she becomes more confident that by, day's end, she will be a person who loves to fly, she shades out of pretense and into acting, sincerely, like a person who loves to fly. Again, instead of obscuring the nature of pretense, my "mentalistic recipe" reveals the hinges in the transition from faking it to making it.

But the best defense, they say, is offense. Let us then briefly consider Hutto's "priority of practices" approach, where "the signature idea" is that:

Practices of pretense should be recognized as occupying the chief place in our analyses of various forms of pretense....Accordingly, we should focus on features of specific kinds of pretending practices before we attempt to understand or characterize any signature cognitive capacities required for such pretending and the familiar psychological profiles that are typically associated with it, and which may be needed to fully explain how such acts of pretense are carried off in particular cases....when it comes to clarifying the nature of pretense we should focus first on features of various practices of pretense – including games, deceptive activities, theatrical performances – and not primarily, and certainly not exclusively, on the psychological mindsets of individuals ("Getting Real about Pretense: A Radical Enactivist Proposal" (Hutto, 2022)).

The guiding thought here is that fruitful analyses of pretense must involve appeal to agents' surrounding environments and social contexts, and that talk of related mental states should only enter the picture secondarily, as a kind of overlay on agent-environment couplings. The goal, on this approach, is to stave off the conclusion that whether a person is pretending will mainly turn what is the case inside the pretender's head. (Though, notably, Hutto does not completely close the door on psychological states being important to the characterization of pretense, allowing that they "may be needed to fully explain how acts of pretense are carried off in particular cases." Nevertheless, his Radical Enactivism still "rejects any attempt to locate or understand contentful attitudes by focusing on what happens in the heads of individuals" ("Getting Real about Pretense: A Radical Enactivist Proposal" (Hutto, 2022)).)

I fully agree that we should *start* on the outside, considering how pretense emerges in childhood as a communal game, and investigate how it evolves from there into other forms—including theatrical and deceptive pretenses. (Hutto concurs in including the latter two practices as pretenses.) It is indeed unwise to fall back on unobservable posits—as I take beliefs and intentions to be—when the essence of the phenomenon to be explained is already present to perception. Yet, while the winks, nods, and scripted behaviors characteristic of childhood pretense games are ripe for interpretation as environmentally-afforded social practices—where *states of mind* need not enter the picture—it is far more difficult to see what kind of social and environmentally supported practice deceptive pretenses might be. In his celebrated paper 'Pretending' (Austin, 1958), Austin gives the example of a thief pretending to clean windows ("cleaning 'em a treat too") in order to catalog the valuables on the other side. How, exactly, is this secret charade a communal practice? On its face, it seems to be a paradigmatically *antisocial* behavior, notable for the lack of cooperation it requires for its success. In searching for a theory that binds deception to childhood pretense and to the theatrical arts, I have found no path other than a highway into the mind—to the very mentalistic recipe that I (still!) hold captures the essence of pretense. That is why I began my paper (this volume) with Lillard's example of the troll who only *appears* to be pretending, and with the shift that occurs around the age of six when children grasp the difference between behaving in ways typical of pretending and *really* pretending. That distinction immediately highlights the hidden elements such pretenses share with deception.

That said, I respect Hutto's—and, likely, other 4E theorists'—reluctance to settle for my mentalistic recipe. I will keep my ears open to other alternatives. Ultimately, we will need to hear more about how deception works and what its relation to childhood pretense might be. As I argued in my paper—and as Hutto concurs—4E theorists needn't disavow all understandings of the beliefs and intentions that characterize pretense. There are ways to incorporate those states into an explanation of pretense that avoid appeal to contentful mental representations. The difficult part—for them, and

indeed for everyone—is to articulate a conception of beliefs and intentions that both allows us to see how they are acquired and that reveals why the stick insect is not pretending to be a stick, while Austin's thief is pretending to wash windows.

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