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What is It Like to Have a Crappy Imagination

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The problem with human imagination is really two problems. One is that our imagination is very limited. Most importantly for this work, we have a very limited ability to imagine the lives of others and, by the extensions, future selves and potential selves. With others, it is the cause of endless misunderstandings, and the intra-personal version of the problem causes a lot of surprises and bad choices. The second problem is that we *trust* our puny imagination a great deal, enough that we accept its testimony despite perfectly good evidence to the contrary. Thus, for example, an academic with a young child might say things like "they told me that I won't get any research done the first few months but.... I guess I didn't take them seriously?". In other words, he received reliable information but dismissed it because his *imagination* told him he could just get work done when the baby is asleep.

My favorite cases involve disbelieving a person when she talks about the way she feels simply because one cannot imagine feeling as she claims to feel. Far be it from me to think that people are never wrong about their inner lives. Scientific studies can provide reasons to doubt, for example, that we remember our dreams as well as we think we do. However, when a person tells you she feels something, *the simple fact that you can't imagine feeling that way* should be regarded as a bad reason to doubt her, if it

should be regarded as a reason to do so at all. I once told a relative stranger that though I grew up in a certain country, I do not feel identified with it. The man said "that's highly unlikely". I am still a little angry at the person telling me what I feel, but I don't have the right to feel superior to him. After all, for decades, I believed that *any* person who claims to be "full after a salad" is either lying to me or lying to herself. To my defense, there exist some people who confess that they have kidded themselves on this particular topic, but I admit that I failed to believe anyone at all who claimed to feel satiated after eating only a salad simply because *I can't imagine* feeling that way – again, a bad reason.

This paper is about the epistemic impact of experience. Experience has immense epistemic power – we will not talk here of its other powers, fascinating though they are - and there are many, many contexts in which we feel that there is no epistemic substitute to having "been there", as when you seek people who have suffered the same problems you have because nobody else truly understands, when you wish, say, that male politicians were forced to spend one day as women, or when you finally do experience something that you have prepared for endlessly and find yourself utterly surprised. This power that experience has can lead a philosopher to posit that there is a special kind of "knowing what it is like", different from "knowing that" or knowing facts, that only experience can provide. The question I would like to pose is how far one can go in accounting for the epistemic power of experience without resorting to this view. I will argue that to a large extent, in a large number of cases, the epistemic power of experience can be explained by the fact that it provides an antidote to the Problem with

Human Imagination. That problem, in turn, is often enough to explain the seemingly insurmountable epistemic barrier we face when we try to figure out what a potential future self would be like, as in the cases, discussed by Laurie Paul¹, of choosing whether to become a parent or whether to become a vampire.

One question I will not discuss here is the general question of how one is to decide what to do when one knows that at least one choice will result in a change to one's desires². This question certainly arises in Paul's cases of becoming a parent or a vampire – parents and vampires have different desires than the rest of us - but I will assume that there is an answer to this question per se and only be interested in such cases if there is an extra problem: that the agent seems *not to know what it is like* to have the expected desire. Not all cases of desire change are cases of this sort. You might, for example, predict that if you'll accept a certain job, marry a certain person, or socialize with a certain group it will make you ambitious *again*. You have been ambitious before, so you can imagine quite well what being ambitious would be like, and so while philosophical questions are raised by this case, questions about what role the potential self's preference should feature in your decision, these questions are not epistemic and not fundamentally about experience.

There are (at least) two common types of situation in which the Problem with Human Imagination interferes with our ability to understand the lives of others. One is relatively

¹ Laurie Paul, 2014. *Transformative Experience*. New York; Oxford University Press.

² The problem appears, among other places, in Derek Parfit's case of the young nobleman. See Parfit (1984), *Reasons and Persons*. New York: Oxford University Press p 327.

simple. Another is more complex and involves a phenomenon I call *Runaway Simulation*. Let us start from the first type.

The Devil, they say, is in the details, and one might call cases of the first type I will discuss Devilish Details cases. I occasionally refer to them as “Giraffe Cases”, because of a meme I saw on the internet which asks if it ever occurred to you that when a giraffe has coffee, the coffee is cold by the time it reaches its stomach. It answers that of course it hasn't occurred to you, because “you only think about yourself”. Giraffes do not drink coffee, but the life of any human being who isn't you contains analogous facts that seem to make sense once you discover them but which would hardly ever occur to you on your own. Every person's life is shrouded in a cloud of little facts like these, and this accounts for a fair amount of the opacity of people to each other.

I have read that if you are a poor child in America, you can fail a course at school because your parents can't afford crayons, or, later, because you don't have enough gas to drive to the library. If one has never been in a similar situation one cannot simply *imagine* these facts. Now think of how many little facts like that there are – facts about being a poor child in America that, if you have always been rich or middle class, or if you grew up in a country that has a much better safety net, haven't occurred to you any more than it has occurred to you that coffee would get colder before it reaches the stomach of a giraffe. While ignorance of each of these little facts feels like a simple case of failing to “know that”, the cloud of ignorance that consists of not knowing many, many such facts can give a distinct impression that the child of affluent parents has about as

much of an idea of what it is like to be a poor child in America as she has of what it is like to be a bat. Sadly, due to the nature of the Problem with Human Imagination, she is nonetheless fairly likely to think she knows what poverty is like, which can be a problem if she becomes, say, a lawmaker in charge of economic policy.

Devilish Details cases are relatively simple. More curious cases in which the Problem with Human imagination raises its ugly head are cases of what I would like to call *Runaway Simulation*. When we try to understand another person, we often imagine ourselves in her situation. Many psychologists and philosophers have referred to this method as “simulation” and took to be central to the way we “read” other people³. I will use the term “runaway simulation” to refer the all too common process in which the working assumption that, in a specific situation, the other person would do, think, feel, or want the same thing that you would do, think, feel, or want stops being a working assumption and becomes instead a stubborn belief that resists glaring counter-evidence. I am especially interested in cases where the work-assumption-turned-belief is that the observed person will *not*, in a particular situation, do or think or feel or want something that the observer, in the same sort of situation, never would. The case involving me refusing to believe that other people can sometimes feel full after eating only a salad, and believing so simply because *I* never feel that way, is a case of runaway simulation, and it can be used to demonstrate the way in which such stubborn false assumptions can snowball into even bigger misunderstandings. If you can't

³ I do not commit myself here to any of the theories espoused by these philosophers and psychologist, nor even to the general view that simulation is all, or most, there is to the way we “read minds”. I am only committed to the commonsense view that we do, not too rarely, try to understand others by “putting ourselves in their shoes”, whatever exactly that means.

imagine anyone feeling full after a salad, you will find yourself believing very strange things about people who claim to feel that way. You will perhaps think they are liars, or that they are vain, or that they don't want to allow you to buy them more food – perhaps they can't wait to leave, or they hate owing favors? Or alternately, you will suspect that they have an eating disorder, or at least some unrealistic ideal of freedom from lust and gluttony. Like a twisted Holmes, you will believe the improbable (*she's lying*) to avoid believing the impossible (she really is full after a salad, despite such fullness being unfamiliar to me). This is one way in which deep misunderstandings between humans can propagate quickly.

Sometimes runaway simulation is fairly harmless: you enjoy looking at pictures of your children, and so you fail to imagine that others might not enjoy looking at pictures of your children, or children in general, and so you post more pictures of your children in social media than your fellow users would prefer. At other times, I will shortly demonstrate, the misunderstandings that come from runaway simulation are nothing less than tragic. Before turning to that, though, one needs to distinguish runaway simulation – and, for that matter, the Problem with Human Imagination in general - from three things that can cause one to misrepresent other people in one's mind. These are: wishful thinking, sweeping generalization, and garden variety prejudices such as racism, sexism and homophobia.

Start with wishful thinking. Wishful thinking, they say, is a type of *motivated* irrationality: the wishful thinker believes what she wants to be the case. Runaway simulation, despite

the fact that it can lead to bad behavior, need not be motivated any more than the gambler's fallacy. It is, of course, possible for the person who misunderstands another due to Runaway Simulation to *also* be guilty of believing what she wants to believe. After all, we often want other people to be like us. The belief that other people will enjoy looking at pictures of your children is a natural result of Runaway Simulation, but it is also a belief that can come into existence through wishful thinking. However, the Problem with Human Imagination in general and runaway simulation in particular is a separate cause of false belief from wishful thinking (and also from elaborate self-deception, if such there be, in which one fools oneself into believing what one wishes to believe). This can be seen when one looks at cases where the Problem with Human Imagination leads agents to beliefs that are downright *uncomfortable and disagreeable* to them.

Let us look at a relatively low-stakes case. I am a night owl for whom staying up until dawn is a common occurrence in the summer. Sometimes I talk to people and they start yawning. I feel bad: am I boring them that much? Then, slowly, people start saying they have to go. I feel terrible: did I say something wrong? Then someone mentions the obvious fact that it's midnight and she is tired. I know, of course – “theoretically”, as they say - that not everyone is a night owl like me, and yet, after all these years, my visceral feeling is something like "you're half my age. You can't possibly be tired at midnight. Are you *sure* I haven't said something wrong?", and my credence that the lateness of the hour in fact explains my interlocutors' behavior is never as high as it should be. I detest the feeling that I am boring someone and detest even more feeling that I have

done something wrong. Were I to believe what I *wished* to be true, I would have happily accepted the more flattering explanation for the yawns around me (“this person is tired”) instead of the less flattering (“I am boring her to death” or “I said something wrong”). Yet, years since I have first noticed the phenomenon, I still cannot rid myself completely of my suspicion (“good night! Wait, are you *sure* I didn’t say something wrong?). This is the work of Runaway Simulation.

Another cousin of the Problem with Human Imagination is good, old *sweeping generalization*. A man who is indifferent to sports, a teenager who is not interested in teenage culture, any human being who prefers rainy days to sunny days or who hates sweets, all face the burden of having to incur, again and again, false perceptions and disbelief, simply because they are members of a small minority. But the Problem with Human Imagination is not the same problem as the human tendency to generalize. Unusual people have a hard time imagining the lives of mainstream people just as much as the other way around, though seeing representation of mainstream life on TV can be a partial (but very cheap!) substitute for imagining it. I often feel I have no idea what people in corporate offices do all day, as their working hours are full of Devilish Details to me - regardless of the fact that there are more corporate workers than academic philosophers. Runaway Simulation also goes in both directions. As I have mentioned earlier, I know very well that most people *are* tired at midnight, and yet when a person yawns at midnight in my presence I have trouble believing that he’s not as awake as I am. A person I have known who never felt hunger was forever flabbergasted by the fact that her family wanted to eat three times a day (“already? You’re crazy!”).

On to *prejudice*. Runaway simulation cases *and* Devilish Details cases need to be distinguished from cases in which a person is opaque to another due to the latter's racism, sexism or other prejudice of this type. The Problem with Human Imagination – whether we are talking about Devilish Details cases or Runaway Simulation cases - does not in itself discriminate against oppressed or marginalized groups. Just like a rich person would by default be likely to have a ridiculously false idea of what the life of the poor is like, due to a failure to imagine it well, a poor person will also by default have a ridiculously false idea of what the lives of the rich is like, for exactly the same reason. However, as the testimony of members of marginalized groups is widely regarded as less credible⁴, and as we often distrust people against whom we are prejudiced about as much as we trust our imagination, it is to be expected that a member of a marginalized group who is misunderstood by a more privileged person as a result of Devilish Details or Runaway Simulation will tend to have more trouble removing the misunderstanding – having her story believed, as it were - than a privileged person would have if he was himself so misunderstood.

Misunderstandings can be tragic, and I would like to take a more detailed look at the special way in which misunderstandings stemming from Runaway Simulation can ruin lives. For a few years, I volunteered in an informal setting to chat with people with mood disorders. I didn't keep statistics, but the most common, and most desperate, complaint the chatters had about their environment – even more common and more desperate

⁴ See Miranda Fricker (2007), *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. New York; Oxford University Press

than the complains about the American health care system – was the complaint about people who fail to believe sufferers of depression that they in fact feel the terrible way they say they feel. Three common versions of the complaint are “My husband is convinced I’m just doing it to get his attention”, “my wife is convinced I’m just doing it to avoid my responsibilities” and “my parents think I should finally grow up and snap out of it”. “It”, in all of these statements, refers to acting like a person who is going through a moderate to severe episode of clinical depression.

The neurotypical party in these cases – usually a partner or a parent - often sticks to the conviction that the patient is faking (or, at best, semi-consciously, childishly dramatizing) his condition even though the patient has not been hiding feelings: the patient has been crying all day, getting into all manner of trouble for being unable to work or study, and avoiding favorite activities. He confessed openly to feeling of deep despair. Yet all of this seems to go into one of the neurotypical party’s ears and out the other. After all, she seems to think, nobody has died, the patient is not getting a divorce, his professional life is going fine, and so it doesn’t stand to reason – that is, is not *imaginable* to the neurotypical - that anyone in the patient’s position is in fact as miserable as he seems to be. The disbelieving too often continues even after the patient protests that he would *love* to snap out of it, that he would if he could, that it hurts like hell. It persists after the patient specifies his feeling that he is an unbearable burden on his family and friends who would be happier and better off without him.

Sometimes, after the patient attempts suicide and goes through ghastly procedures such as stomach pumping, a diagnosis from the doctor in the hospital solves the matter. The doctor assures the neurotypical party that the patient is in fact suffering, and at times, our tendency to trust doctors trumps even our tendency to trust our imagination. At other times, even the “doctor’s note” fails to help, and the partner or parent concludes from the suicide attempt that the patient would go *very far indeed* to get attention or avoid responsibility or avoid growing up – even risk death! “I wish you didn’t waste all this time and money on doctors and medications”, the partner or parent might say, “just grow up already!”. In short, in the very moments in which sympathy is most urgently, desperately needed, the very moments in which lack of sympathy can be lethal, the at-risk patient is told that he is a manipulative bastard.

If one is a friend of such a patient and hears from her about the unsympathetic treatment she received, it is often inclined to be angry at the unsympathetic neurotypical party, and thus it is very tempting to find some moral fault with him. This, in turn, encourages us to think of the person’s withholding of sympathy as somehow intentional, with seeing the patient as a manipulative bitch being a convenient excuse for him to act selfishly and “shut her out”. Alternately, one might accuse the unsympathetic neurotypical of vice without attributing intentional motivation to her. “If she loved her more, she would have sympathized more”, one thinks, or even “he would sympathize with him if he were capable of sympathy”. At times one might think there is some kind of wishful thinking at play: the neurotypical party does not want to deal with the horrible

reality of depression and prefers to think that the patient is manipulative or immature or both.

Despite the urge – which I personally feel - to shake the neurotypical who accuses the suffering depressive of manipulation or immaturity, Runaway Simulation (“I could never be so sad without a reason, so she can’t be either”) can explain many of these cases, and explain them in a way that is, as it were, charitable to the uncharitable.

Take the suggestion that the offending neurotypical refuses to believe the patient’s suffering because of wishful thinking. In many cases, there are two basic problems with that explanation of the neurotypical’s behavior. One has to do with fact that the content of what the neurotypical party *does* believe is not clearly more pleasant to her than the content of an accurate representation of the situation would be. Take the case of the partner whose belief is “she does it to get attention”. The woman in question is believed to have faked, at a real risk to herself, a suicide attempt, complete with social stigma and medical costs, in order to make her partner fear for her, having already put on a long and elaborate charade intended to make people fear for her, on top of such things as refusing to do her share in the relationship or care for the children. If this were in fact the patient’s behavior, it would indeed be manipulative and frightfully inconsiderate. If the neurotypical partner married her because he loved her, or at least liked her, is it that plausible to think that he now *wishes* to believe that the nice woman he chose to marry is now a terrible, shallow manipulator? The belief that one has married a manipulative bastard or bitch is not a comforting one, and it’s not clear one would wish to think such a

thing. The even more significant problem with the wishful thinking explanation is that the same person who refuses to believe that her partner is depressed without some kind of reason to be depressed, infuriating as he is in this case, can be perfectly sympathetic and display very caring behavior if his partner develops a problem (medical or otherwise) that he has no trouble imagining, and even more sympathetic if his partner develops a problem that she herself experienced in the past. Given these two problems, and given the magnitude of the Problem with Human Imagination, it stands to reason that many of these tragic cases of misunderstanding can be explained by overconfident failure of imagination on behalf of the neurotypical parties without resorting to the accusation of wishful thinking or convenient self-deception.

Both devilish details and runaway simulation make it the case that one of the hardest things to imagine is having intrinsic desires (or likes and dislikes, or concerns) that you in fact do not have (especially, but not only, if you have the opposite desires). The lover of baseball (“how could anyone not love it?) and the person deeply indifferent to baseball (“it’s like watching paint dry!”) find it extremely hard to imagine each other, and an old joke states “I am glad I hate spinach because if I didn’t hate it I would eat it, and it’s yucky!”. I would like to point out that imagining having different intrinsic desires is even harder than it first seems.

I do not think that desire is itself an experience (though craving might be). However, having a desire greatly changes the way(s) one experiences the world. Most clearly, it influences what we experience as pleasant and what we experience as unpleasant – if

you desire that a certain team win, you are happy when it does and sad when it does not. Elsewhere I argued that all of our experiences of pleasure and displeasure depend on our desires (even pleasure at eating a peach occurs only if you intrinsically desire certain taste experiences). A person with different desires will enjoy and suffer through different things, which is hard enough to imagine. This, however, is not all. Having or not having a particular, strong intrinsic desire matters to the *cognitive* world of the agent: it determines, to a large extent, what the agent notices, remembers, learns. To properly imagine the life of someone with a certain strong desire one has to imagine the things that she would notice, remember and learn – and if one does not have the desire oneself, it's very, very difficult. Here is a somewhat detailed example. I love owls. I am not a knick-knack collector, but I desire to see owls (or at least their photographs) and to learn fact about owls. Due to this desire, I notice, for example, that the word “knowledge” contains the word “owl”. Most people do not, even if they are philosophers and have seen the word “knowledge” in writing many times. A person who merely tries to imagine what it is like to be an owl lover would probably fail to see the “owl” in “knowledge”. Having the desire, rather than just imagining having the desire, is usually required to notice such things. To the extent that she does not have the desire, a person who does not have the desire to see and learn about owls is unlikely to know how I see the world. Such opacity exists to an even greater extent when one has a considerably stronger desire to which a wider variety of circumstances is relevant, such as a parent's desire for the wellbeing of a child. To give an analogy to the “owl” example, it seems that very often, where I see a boring place, a parent sees a myriad of potential dangers to a child. Knowing that in principle does not, however, give me much of an ability to

guess – or imagine – what potential dangers he sees. As the difference in desires between me and a loving parent is more significant in various ways than the difference between you and a person who loves owls, a parent’s cognitive life, as well as her pleasures and displeasures, is even more opaque to me than mine are to you.

To recap: there is a Problem with Human Imagination, consisting of people having very limited imaginations but very high confidence in what their imaginations tell them. Devilish Details cases and Runaway Simulation cases are all cases in which the Problem makes it hard for us to understand other humans. But the Problem with Human Imagination does not only sow misunderstanding between existing humans. It also interferes with our attempts to understand future selves and potential future selves.

If one plans to become a parent, one might fail to predict a great mass of Devilish Details, and often does, resulting in shock and confusion. It might be less obvious how Runaway Simulation can occur when attempting to imagine a future self, but it is just as common. Consider the common warning against shopping while you are very hungry, as you will buy more than you need. In such a case, a hungry Monday self runaway-simulates a Thursday self and predicts that he be just as hungry, which results in his overestimating the amount of food that will be required on Thursday. hilariously, a friend of mine suffers from the converse difficulty. Many times, when he packs lunch for the next day, he packs too little, because at the time of the packing he had just had dinner. If it is that easy to “over-simulate” your predictable next day self as resembling today’s, it is all too easy to imagine your unfamiliar future or potential parental self as more

similar to your current self than she has the right to be – especially as she has significant intrinsic desires that you now do not have. For example, when imagining a potential or future self who has a small child, it is still hard to imagine that self as able to read aloud from a book called *Moo, Baa, La-La-La* for the 40th time in one weekend rather than as unable to stop screaming when a 5th time is called for.

The closest thing we have to a reliable cure for the ignorance imposed on us by the Problem with Human Imagination is *experience*. Normally, experiencing is believing. No matter how many years you have believed that nobody ever feels full after a salad, once you have felt so yourself – that is, experienced it - you will most likely think it is possible, after all. I say that experience is the closest thing we have to a reliable cure because it is not in fact *that* reliable a cure. People can fail to learn from experience because of tricks of memory (“I forgot just how painful I find these things”) or just plain foolishness. To complicate things even more, there are conditions under which experience can change a person’s beliefs but leave her *visceral expectations* intact. Mood swings provide a handy example. A person with mood swings – and these mood swings need not involve psychotic features - knows from experience that her moods will change, and yet depression, by nature, *feels* like it will last forever even if it is not severe enough to cause the person to *believe* that it will last forever. High moods, too, can make a person *feel* invincible – and so make it hard to imagine being in a low mood, even if one knows from experience what a low mood is like and that a low mood is likely to descend on one at some point⁵. Despite cases like this, experience is fairly often the antidote to the

⁵ For an elaboration of the concept of visceral expectation, see Tim Schroeder (2004), *The Three Faces of Desire*. New York. Oxford University Press. The relevant discussion is in chapter 2.

ignorance created by the Problem with Human Imagination – which, as I have pointed out at the beginning of this paper, explains why people who have had a certain problem can feel so understood and “validated”, as the colloquialism goes, in the presence of those who have had it too.

My proposal, then, is that the Problem with Human Imagination explains, in many cases, the power of experience to surprise us and our failures in anticipating what life would be like after a major change, especially one that involves a change in our desires. When I say “many cases” I mean to exclude primarily cases that involve exposure to radically different sensory stimuli, especially those involving acquiring a new sense modality, whether one is a deaf person acquiring the ability to hear or a person with typical sensory powers acquiring some of the abilities of a bat. Seeing color for the first time when one had seen no colors at all probably also falls in that category.

Why? Consider the rich person who is surprised to hear that a poor child in America can fail a course because she can't afford crayons. There is a sense in which “she should have seen” that: she knows that crayons cost money, that some school projects require crayons, and that schools in America do not give them away. The dots are there to be connected, and when the rich person discovers the fact, she might think something along the lines of “I suppose that would make sense”. Or consider the man who says “they told me I won't get any research done with a baby, but I guess I didn't take them seriously”. This person is a bit comical. He *should have known* that “they” are probably right. Why should they be lying? In what relevant way is he different from them? Something similar is true about cases of runaway simulation. The man who answered my statement that I don't identify with my place of birth with “it's highly

unlikely” should have known better. Even the tragic cases can have this comical side. Imagine the person, the sort of whom is mentioned above, whose partner shows all the signs of severe depression and tells him about the depressed way she feels but who fails to believe that anyone can feel so bad if nothing is wrong. Sometimes, I have said, after a doctor diagnoses the partner with clinical depression and explains the concept to the couple, the neurotypical party would say “I’m sorry, honey, I didn’t realize what suffering you were going through”. The partner would have a point if she replied “but why didn’t you realize it? I was *telling you every single day!*”. Even where the majority of humans will suffer the same failure of imagination or a similar one there is a sense in which the person whose imagination fails can be criticized. Things are different when a person is missing sensory experience. A blind person who cannot imagine seeing red or a typical person who cannot imagine using sonar like a bat cannot be accused of “not connecting the dots” as there are no “dots” available for her to “connect”. She cannot be said to have a bad imagination any more than a person can be fairly said to lack physical fitness because she cannot fly like a bird.

When one decides to become a parent, or a vampire, one is clueless. Will some people be less clueless than others about the lives of other people and potential and future selves? The evidence suggests that the answer is that some people might be a little bit less clueless about some things than other people are. Some people have better imaginations: as an absent-minded and bumbling person I can testify that Nabokov, who was neither absent-minded nor bumbling, imagined the inner life of the absent-minded bumbler Pnin remarkably well. Unlike Paul, I think that a truly outstanding book or movie can bring us closer to understanding other lives (though I agree that not every

run-of-the-mill vampire book does!). Of course, even the most imaginative people can fail at imagining – in fact, not unlike the best baseball players, they fail at it most of the time. For example, it has been noticed by many recently that female characters in novels written by men are more likely than real women to enjoy things that straight men enjoy imagining – and one suspects, among other things, runaway simulation.

In addition to people who are better at imagining, some people – more of them – have less imaginative capacity than Nabokov but a better-than-average epistemic humility that occasionally rescues them from the pitfalls of trusting their imagination too much. When they are told that it's impossible for all but a few academics to both do their fair share of childcare *and* do research during the first year of their baby's life – they are forewarned, and when it happens, they are not surprised. Some people with depression are lucky enough to find one or two friends or relatives who never had depression themselves but who believe them when they report their feelings (and such a friend, who “gets” clinical depression but is not susceptible to it in the least, can be of immense help in many ways). When I asked many acquaintances whether they were surprised by the realities of parenthood I received a wide range of answers. Some people reported a shock of sorts, a few reported no surprise at all, and most were in the middle, including one person who said “I was surprised, but not, you know, *Laurie Paul surprised* or anything”. One could stipulate that those who were unsurprised or less surprised were just lucky, but one must not rule out the possibility that some of the variety has to do with people having better or worse imagination and varied levels of epistemic humility.

By and large, though, we are clueless. Though I have argued that, philosophically speaking, there can often be a simpler explanation of Paul's phenomena than explanations that involve a special type of qualitative knowledge, I do not, practically speaking, have a lot consolation for anyone who faces the choices Paul describes. We have a crappy imagination, we trust it too much, and we will forever be blown away or rudely awakened or otherwise blind-sided by experience.