

## **IMAGINATION AND MENTAL IMAGERY**

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### **1. Introduction**

Our imaginative activities often exploit our ability to produce sensory mental images. Indeed, putative links between mental imagery and the imagination are enshrined within the definitions issued by respected lexicographers: the *OED* states that, on one usage, ‘imagination’ is ‘the faculty or action of forming ideas or mental images’. Philosophical attempts to identify the imagination’s nature have also often traded upon its supposed links to mental imagery, as we will see below.

Very many of us would respond to, say, the instruction to ‘imagine an explosion’ by entertaining visual and auditory mental imagery that presents the sights and sounds created by something exploding. Similarly, the imaginings in which many of us engage while reading fiction revolve around mental images that illustrate the scenes being described. One important way in which mental imagery and the imagination seem to be connected is thus as follows: *what we imagine*—the ‘content’ of our imaginings—is often significantly shaped by what is shown in mental images.

Suppose that an imaginative episode features some mental imagery that plays a part in determining what is being imagined. Then the imagining is *imagistic*. So, suppose that I imagine a wooden table by visualising a wooden table. My imagining of a wooden table is imagistic, as the imagining’s content derives partly from the details of the visual image that I produced. As we will see in the next section, though, what is shown by the mental images featuring in imagistic imaginings can relate more or less straightforwardly to the contents of

those imaginings. This fact raises interesting questions about the precise nature of the ways in which the mental images that occur within imagistic imaginings may affect the contents of the latter.

Another fundamental question about the relationship between the imagination and mental imagery is whether there can be *nonimagistic* imaginings. Are there imaginings, that is, whose contents do not derive in any way from the contents of mental images? Indeed, can there be imaginings that do not feature mental images at all?

Here is the plan for what follows. The next section sets things up for later parts of the chapter by distinguishing some of the different ways in which mental images may contribute to the contents of imaginative episodes. Sections 3 – 5 consider some interesting philosophical questions concerning imagistic imaginings, questions that are raised by the especially sensory nature of mental images. Sections 6 – 8 then broaden the discussion, by examining whether mental images are essential to our imaginative abilities.

Before proceeding, a caveat. The following sections often focus upon questions about the nature of the relationships obtaining between the contents of mental images and the contents of imaginings. A fuller survey of the imaginative consequences of the contents of mental images would need to reckon, though, with the additional question just what sorts of contents mental images may possess.

Can our visual images literally show cats as such, for instance—that is, as falling under the concept *cat*—or are they rather limited to portraying ‘colour, light and shade, shape, size, motion, and spatial relations’?<sup>1</sup> Can they display Bertrand Russell as such, say, rather than merely showing someone who is visually indiscernible from Russell himself? Can we conjure auditory images of Three Blind Mice as played on a trombone, rather than merely a series of imaged sounds that share certain audible properties with a trombone’s rendition of Three Blind Mice?

Those questions about the potential contents of mental images parallel related questions about the potential contents of sensory experiences themselves: do we literally seem to see cats as such, for instance?<sup>2</sup> And one might suspect that the previous correspondence is no accident, for the potential contents of mental images seem to be closely related to the potential contents of suitable experiences.<sup>3</sup> The previous questions thus lead rather inevitably to tricky questions in the philosophy of perception. Thankfully, however, the following pages will be able to avoid becoming embroiled in the latter debates.

So, produce a visual mental image 'of a cat'. It is a good question whether the visual mental image that you have just produced really displays a cat or rather just displays some item that looks the way that a cat might look. But it is, for communicative purposes, helpful to waive that question and simply to indulge one's inclination to speak of the image's being 'of a cat'; the resulting description is, after all, acceptable enough by ordinary standards. By contrast, there probably isn't any similar license for the claim that your image characterises the cat that it displays as once owned by Bertrand Russell.

For the purposes of what follows, then, I will talk of mental images that display things like cats and people, without meaning to incur a commitment to the view that mental images are genuinely capable of explicitly presenting such items as such; instead, I will just be exploiting some handy ways of talking. I will also rely upon some hopefully appealing claims about what particular mental images *do not* display; but if the reader is not convinced by the claims thereby made about the examples being discussed, he or she should feel free to substitute more convincing ones of his or her own devising.

## **2. Varieties of imagistic imaginings**

Imagine a cat, just by producing a visual mental image of a cat. The nature of what you have imagined—whether the cat is a thin black one or a fat tabby, whether it was face-on or in profile—depends entirely upon what was displayed by the visual image that you produced. Or imagine a trombone playing a tune, simply by producing some auditory mental imagery of a tune being played on a trombone. Again, what you have imagined—the tune’s dynamics, the trombone’s timbre—depends entirely upon how things ‘sounded in your inner ear’.

Both of the imaginings that you just produced were alike in being *purely imagistic*: their contents were entirely fixed by what was presented in the mental imagery featuring in the imaginings. Purely imagistic imaginings are, in terms of the role played by sensory mental imagery within them, the simplest variety of imagistic imaginings.

Now use some visual mental imagery just like that which you recently produced, to imagine a cat of exactly the same visible kind as the cat that you just imagined; but imagine in addition that the cat is one whose owners have recently jetted off to Paris. In this case, the visual mental imagery that you produced settles some but not all of the content of your imagining. The imagery fixes the cat’s visible features, but there is nothing in the image itself that determines that the cat’s owners have lately departed for France. This last imagining is thus imagistic but not *purely* imagistic.

The visual mental imagery in the previous imagining settled some but not all of the imagining’s content. What else played a part in determining what it was that you then imagined?

A natural thought is that you did something roughly like this: you made various suppositions concerning what was displayed within the visual image, where those supposition-like elements served to extend the content of what you imagined beyond what the

image strictly showed.<sup>4</sup> Thus Christopher Peacocke says, in a well-known paper discussed further below, that the differences between distinct imaginings that nonetheless feature the same mental imagery arise through ‘differences in which conditions are *S-imagined* to hold’, where the initial ‘S’ in his term is for ‘suppose’<sup>5</sup>. He distinguishes S-imagining from supposing in general; but he remarks that ‘it shares with supposition the property that what is S-imagined is not determined by the subject’s images’.

While the imagining that we just considered was not purely imagistic, each of the details of its accompanying mental imagery was nonetheless directly reflected by a corresponding feature of what was imagined: the various ways that your visual mental imagery showed the imaged cat as looking corresponded to features that the cat was imagined to have. But imagistic imaginings do not seem always even to work like that.

Suppose, for instance, that you were asked to imagine a regular heptagon. If you are like me, you would be unable to generate a visual mental image that simply displays a regular heptagon, as you cannot quite visualise the precise array of sides and angles needed for the job. Yet you could surely obey the request ‘to imagine’ a regular heptagon, by combining visual mental imagery with suitable supposition-like elements. So, you might produce a visual mental image of a regular hexagon and then ‘S-imagine’ that there is some shape of the same general kind as the one that you have visualised but which has seven sides rather than six.

In this last case, the six-sidedness of the visualised shape would not be directly reflected by an imagining of a hexagon; the imaginative task on which you had embarked would lead you instead to leave six-sidedness out from among the properties belonging to what was ultimately imagined. As Bernard Williams puts in, in another well-known paper discussed below, your ‘imaginative project’ would have led you to perform an imagining that illustrates how ‘when we imagine by way of visualising’—that is, when we perform imagistic

imaginings employing visual mental imagery—‘we can properly be said to imagine something lacking an element which is present in what we visualise’.<sup>6</sup>

The three examples of imagistic imaginings considered above illustrate just some of the ways in which mental imagery may help to fix the contents of imagistic imaginings. In particular, the final two cases illustrate how supposition-like elements can interact with mental imagery to yield imagistic imaginings whose contents derive in potentially rather complicated ways from the images’ contents. These potential complexities will be relevant at numerous points in what follows.

### **3. Mental images and experiences**

The previous section briefly cited a well-known paper by Williams. The paper’s primary aim is to shed light upon the extent to which the imagination might reasonably be hoped ‘to provide a reliable road to the comprehension of what is logically possible’ ‘with regard to the self’<sup>7</sup>. But it starts with an extensive investigation of some questions concerning the relationship between mental images and the contents of imagistic imaginings.

Williams starts by considering a famous argument of Bishop Berkeley’s for the conclusion that one cannot ‘conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without the mind’<sup>8</sup>. The details of Berkeley’s argument need not concern us here, but Williams suggests that the argument gains some superficial attractiveness from the fact that ‘it is plausible to say that if I visualise something, then I think of myself seeing it’<sup>9</sup>.

Suppose it is true that ‘if I visualise something, then I think of myself seeing it’. Then it may seem that one who, say, imagines a cat by visualising a cat must ‘think of himself’ seeing the cat; and hence that he must have imagined the cat as being seen by someone. More

generally, it may seem that whenever we imagine a scene of some sort on account of producing mental images showing a scene of the relevant kind, we must thereby be imagining the relevant scene as witnessed by someone.

That line of thought goes too fast, though. To bring out the crucial point here, let's assume that mental images are 'subjective', in that they meet the following condition:

(A) Consider a mental image that shows things as looking or sounding or smelling or tasting or ... a certain way. Then the image shows things as looking or sounding or smelling or ... that way *in the course of a sensory episode*.

Now suppose that somebody imagines a cat, in the course of an imaginative episode that features a visual mental image which shows a cat. Given (A), the relevant visual image shows things as looking a certain way in the course of a sensory episode: the visual image captures a visual encounter with cat. But that does not immediately imply that the *imagining* is an imagining of a cat that is being seen. For the imagining's overall content might have been affected by additional supposition-like elements, as noted in the previous section.

So, for instance, the person doing the imagining might have produced the visual mental image and then, on top of that, S-imagined a cat looking just like the one shown in the image but which is located in a situation in which there are no observers.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the contents of imagistic imaginings may be affected by supposition-like elements thus means that assumption (A) does not in itself imply that imagistic imaginings are always imaginings of scenes that are witnessed by someone. But what about those imagistic imaginings that don't feature supposition-like elements? That is, what about purely imagistic imaginings?

Suppose that somebody performs a purely imagistic imagining; suppose, for example, that the person imagines a cat merely by producing a visual mental image of a cat. Then, by (A), the visual image shows things as looking a certain way in the course of a visual episode. The image thus characterises the cat that it presents as being seen. But the person's imagining of a cat is purely imagistic; so the imagining's content is just inherited from the content of the visual mental image by means of which the person performed the imagining. In this case, the person therefore has imagined a cat as seen.

More generally, the truth of (A) would ensure the following:

(B) Any purely imagistic imagining of an *F* is an imagining of an *F* as witnessed by someone.<sup>11</sup>

Is (B) to be accepted? Must we accept that anyone who imagistically imagines some scene, without imagining it as being witnessed, must be engaged in the sort of relatively complicated imagistic imagining that we considered two paragraphs back? Or are there reasonable grounds for rejecting both (A) and (B)?

#### **4. Purely imagistic imaginings and imagined experiences**

One concern that one might have with (A) is that it threatens to overgeneralise. Sensory mental images are just one family of representations that show things as looking or sounding or otherwise standing sensorily certain ways. Many pictures show things as looking certain ways, for instance, and playbacks of audio recordings can show things as sounding certain ways. The idea that, say, visual mental images must always show things as looking certain ways to an observer accordingly seems at first glance to be on a par with the thesis that



ordinary pictures have to be subjective in the same manner. Yet that last claim is somewhat implausible: we do not automatically assume that the ways that things are shown to us as looking in pictures are meant to reflect the ways that things look to a viewer.

Williams seeks to block the derivation of (B) from (A) by exploiting the sorts of analogies just indicated. He suggests that ‘I as perceiver do not necessarily belong inside the world that I visualise, any more than ... the painter in the scene that he paints; or the audience in the world of the stage’<sup>12</sup>. He claims that, for instance in cinematic and theatrical contexts, we are shown things from certain perspectives although ‘[w]e cannot say, at least without great care, that it is *our* point of view. ... In the standard case, it is not anyone’s point of view. Yet we see the characters and action from that point of view’<sup>13</sup>. Correspondingly, Williams holds that there is ‘no reason at all for insisting that the point of view’ involved in a visualisation is ‘of one *within* the world of what is visualised’<sup>14</sup>.

Martin argues, in response to Williams, that ‘the point of view in [imagistic] imagining must be part of the imagined scene’.<sup>15</sup> He holds that visualising inherits a crucial feature of visual experience itself, as it presents ‘objects as oriented within egocentric space: they are presented as above one, below, to the left or to the right’. Martin points out that, for example, ‘[o]ne can visualise a red light to the left and a green light to the right. If you now visualise the reverse—a green light to the left and a red one to the right—how you are visualising is different from the first case.’

How best to explain why it is that the contents of the two imagistic imaginings just cited are distinct? Martin observes that we can account for the differences between the two cases only if ‘there is a point of view [within the imagined scene] relative to which the one object is to the left and the other to the right, or *vice versa*’. Williams must therefore be wrong, he claims, in holding that the perspectives involved in what we are shown by visual mental images need not be present within the scenes that are being visualised. Yet, Martin

claims, 'if one does have to imagine a point of view within [a visualised scene], one thereby must be imagining an experience within the scene'.<sup>16</sup>

Why so? Well consider the status of the perspective from which things are shown within a certain visual mental image. That perspective is not generally among the items that are explicitly shown by the visual mental image that one has produced. Rather, its inevitable presence within the visualisation results from the fact that the items shown in the visual mental image are oriented in relation to it: 'if one can fix the location of those objects, one thereby determine[s] the location of' the perspective. So, Martin urges, the items that are explicitly shown by the visual mental images are 'being imagined as presented to a point of view within [the imagined] situation, and hence as being experienced' from that perspective.<sup>17</sup> Is this correct?

## **5. Perspectives and experiences**

Martin is right to hold, I think, that the perspectives that he is discussing are present within the scenes that are being imaginatively imagined. But it is less clear that their presence within the relevant scenes requires that the scenes are being imagined *as witnessed*.

To take an analogous case, pictures commonly show things as looking certain ways from certain perspectives; that is, they capture the ways that things look from orientated positions in space. And part of what one appreciates when one looks comprehendingly at such pictures is that the relevant perspectives are being characterised as bearing certain relationships to the explicitly pictured items. The relevant perspectives are, in that sense, in the world that is pictured. But it does not seem to follow that the perspectives are inevitably characterised as occupied: pictured scenes are not always represented as viewed by someone.

It thus seems that representations such as pictures and mental images can show things as, say, looking certain ways *from perspectives* without thereby showing things as looking the relevant ways *in the course of experiences*.<sup>18</sup>

Unless we assume that visual mental images do characterise visual experiences, though, how are we to explain Martin's observation that there is a definite difference between, first, visualising a red light to the left and a green light to the right and, second, visualising a pair of such lights in the opposite orientation? Well, we need merely assume that the relevant visual mental images show things as looking certain ways from suitable perspectives. Any perspective from which things look the way that the first visual image shows things as looking must be distinct from a perspective from which things look the way that the second visual image shows things as looking.

But what exactly is the difference between, say, a visual image that shows things as looking a certain way 'from a perspective' and one that shows things as looking some way 'in the course of a visual episode'? Indeed, and more fundamentally, what is it for things to look some way 'from a perspective'?

Consider the way that things look to you right now. Given that your current visual sensation is a genuine seeing, the way that things look to you really is a way that things look from your current perspective. For things look to you to be *thus*; and, relative to the perspective that you actually occupy, things are indeed *thus*. More generally, then, a way for things to look is a way that things look 'from a perspective' just in case the visual appearances involved in that way for things to accurately reflect what things are like relative to the relevant perspective. By contrast, a way for things to look is a way that things look 'in the course of a visual episode' just in case the relevant visual episode is of a suitable type. And parallel distinctions are available for nonvisual modes of sensing.

Now, consider a purely imagistic imagining that features a visual mental image that shows things as looking a certain way in the course of a visual episode. The visual image's content characterises a visual episode as being one in which things look the relevant way. But the imagining is purely imagistic; hence its content is fixed entirely by the content of the visual image that it involves. In this case, then, the purely imagistic imagining is indeed an imagining of a visual episode in which things look some way. Some purely imagistic imaginings are thus indeed imaginings of experiences.

By contrast, though, consider a purely imagistic imagining that features a visual mental image that merely shows things as looking a certain way from a perspective. This time, the visual image's content characterises a perspective as being one whose surroundings are correctly reflected by the visual appearances involved in the relevant way for things to look. In doing that, however, the image's content merely characterises the nature of some portion of the world; it does not characterise the relevant situation as being seen. Some purely imagistic imaginings therefore are not imaginings of experiences.<sup>19</sup>

The distinction just exploited—between showing things as, say, looking some way 'from a perspective' rather than 'in the course of an experience—is one whose importance isn't restricted to the imagination.<sup>20</sup> For there are many additional forms of representation that are analogous to visual mental images in certain ways and to which the distinction seems to be applicable. (While many pictures just represent portions of the world, for instance, others are used to capture what things once looked like to subjects.) Our initial and relatively narrow question concerning the contents of purely imagistic imaginings—whether purely imagistic imaginings must always be imaginings of experiences—thus has wider ramifications than one might expect. But just how extensive is the category of imagistic imaginings; and how does it relate to the totality of imaginings as a whole? The next few sections focus on those questions.

## **6. Are images essential to the imagination?**

Just how important are mental images to our imaginative capacities? More specifically, do they always play some part in fixing the contents of our imaginings? Or can there be nonimagistic imaginings—that is, ones whose contents are not even partly determined by what is shown in accompanying sensory mental imagery? Can there even be imaginings which do not have *any* accompanying mental images?

Many philosophers, of very different persuasions, have regarded it as fairly clear that imaginings need not feature accompanying mental imagery: Ryle fairly swiftly dismisses the view that imaginings require imagery fairly quickly, for instance, as does Walton.<sup>21</sup> But some rather venerable philosophers presumed that mental images must feature in imaginings. So, Descartes states in the second *Meditation* that ‘to imagine is nothing more than to contemplate the figure or image of a corporeal thing’<sup>22</sup>; while Hume identified the imagination as that faculty by means of which we conjure the most ‘faint and languid’ ‘images’ of our ‘impressions’—under which last term Hume ‘comprehend[s] all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul’.<sup>23</sup>

Descartes and Hume were thus *simple imagery essentialists*<sup>24</sup>—they subscribed to the following principle:

- (C) Necessarily, a mental episode is an imagining only if it includes some mental imagery.

Note that while simple imagery essentialism entails that imaginings must always feature mental images, the view says nothing about what those images *do* within imaginative episodes.

Other accounts of the relationship between imagery and the imagination go further. One possible reading of the earlier quotation from Descartes, for instance, would take him as having meant to communicate something like this: ‘to imagine [an *F*] is nothing more than to contemplate the figure or image of [an *F*]’. But given that, first, any imagining must be an imagining *of* something<sup>25</sup> and, second, the content of any imagining is determined by what it is an imagining *of*, it would then follow that Descartes is committed to the following—which implies (C) but it not implied by it:

(D) Every possible imagining is such that, first, it features some accompanying sensory mental images and, second, its content is determined entirely by the contents of its accompanying mental images.

Now, the view that (D) captures—the view that imagery is the sole source of all imaginative content, so that imaginings must always be *purely* imagistic—is implausible. For it ignores the evident possibility of some of the kinds of cases discussed in section 2 above. In particular, it overlooks the way in which supposition-like elements often put the contents of our imaginings at some distance from what is explicitly shown in the mental images that accompany them. (Recall the discussion of an imaginary cat whose owners are holidaying in Paris.)

A weaker relative of (D) is less immediately problematic, however:

(E) Every possible imagining is such that first, it features some accompanying mental images and, second, its content is at least partly determined by the contents of its accompanying mental images.

The view that (E) holds—the view that every possible imagining is imagistic, but not necessarily *purely* imagistic—is consistent with all of the examples of imaginings that were presented in section 2. For, in each of those cases, the imagining featured mental imagery which played some role in fixing the imagining’s content.

There are other interesting principles besides (C) – (E) concerning the relationships between mental imagery and imaginings in general.<sup>26</sup> But two of the principles just introduced—namely, (C) and (E)—will suffice for what follows. The next section will discuss whether simple imagery essentialism should be endorsed; the question whether there can be nonimagistic imaginings will join simple imagery essentialism as the focus of section 8.

## **7. Challenging cases**

It is clear that mental images often figure in our imaginings. But why would one assert or deny simple imagery essentialism? What reasons might one have, that is, for taking a stand on whether, necessarily, a mental episode is an imagining only if it includes some mental imagery?

Some of the most compelling reasons for *denying* simple imagery essentialism flow from putative examples of imaginings that do not essentially feature mental imagery. Ryle considers the example of a child ‘playing bears’, for instance. The child ‘roars, he pads around the floor, he gnashes his teeth, and he pretends to sleep in what he pretends is a cave’. Now assume that simple imagery essentialism holds. Ryle notes that, ‘according to this view, only if [the child] sees pictures in his mind’s eye of his furry paws, his snowbound den, and so on, is he imagining anything’. But, Ryle suggests, this is ‘patently absurd’.<sup>27</sup>

Upholders of simple imagery essentialism might reasonably respond to this case by insisting that what Ryle finds to be ‘patently absurd’ is in fact true. While we would tend naturally to assume that a child playing bears is engaged in all sorts of vivid imaginings, those imaginings are not themselves constituted by the child’s overt behaviour—by his roars, his teeth-gnashings, and so on. The mere bodily actions involved in the child’s pretense at being a bear thus do not themselves seem to necessitate any accompanying imaginings; just, of course, as they also do not necessitate any accompanying mental images. While there might not be any mental imagery present in Ryle’s example, then, there might not be any imaginings present either. But, simple imagery essentialists might now fairly ask, what is absurd about the suggestion that, for imaginings certainly to be present in the case Ryle envisages, some mental imagery would need also to be found?

But additional examples can be used to put further pressure on simple imagery essentialism. Kind suggests that ‘[t]he most plausible counterexamples’ to her own view that mental images play an essential role in imaginings are provided by ‘predicative object-directed imaginings in which what [one] predicates of the imagined object seems to be something that cannot be imaged’.<sup>28</sup> So, to take one of Kind’s own examples, one cannot produce a mental image that shows ‘Bill Clinton having a secret desire to be a rock and roll star’: no image will explicitly portray Clinton as having that secret desire. Yet one can surely imagine Clinton as having that secret desire.

As Kind notes, though, the fact that one can imagine Bill Clinton’s secret desires yet one cannot produce mental images that actually display them does not establish the falsity of simple imagery essentialism; nor does it even establish the falsity of the view that imaginings must be imagistic. For defenders of those positions may claim that imaginings of Clinton’s covert wants must at least involve mental images that feature *Bill Clinton*, even if what is shown by the images does not completely settle the contents of the relevant imaginings. They



may claim, that is, that the envisaged cases merely establish the falsity—yet again!—of the view that imaginings are always purely imagistic.<sup>29</sup>

It is worth noting that the response just suggested derives whatever plausibility it possesses from the specific nature of the mental imagery—as at least featuring Bill Clinton—that it cites. So, suppose that some defender of simple imagery essentialism just stubbornly insists that imaginings of Clinton’s secret desires must feature some mental imagery; but suppose that the person is also happy to allow that what the imagery shows may have nothing whatsoever to do with Clinton. Then that person would surely be mounting a wholly unsatisfying defence of simple imagery essentialism. If an imagining’s accompanying mental imagery may have nothing at all to do with the imagining’s content, why couldn’t the imagining occur without the imagery?

This all suggests the following: if sensory mental images must indeed always accompany imaginings, that is because they must always play some part in determining what the imaginings are about. It suggests, that is, that simple imagery essentialism (as given by (D)) holds only if (to summarise (E)) imaginings must always be imagistic.<sup>30</sup> The next section therefore focuses directly upon the question whether there can be nonimagistic imaginings.

## **8. More challenging cases**

Kind’s response to the sorts of examples considered towards the end of the previous section—‘predicative object-directed imaginings in which what [one] predicates of the imagined object seems to be something that cannot be imaged’—trades on an important role which sensory mental images often play in relation to the contents of imaginings relating to specific objects: the images often serve to single out the particular things that are being

imagined. Many of our other imaginings do not relate to individual items so directly, however; and it is less clear that mental images play an essential role in fixing the contents of those imaginings.

Thus consider imaginings involving negative claims featuring properties that cannot be displayed using mental images: imagine that, say, nothing at all has any secret desires. There is no particular thing—no particular individual like Bill Clinton—that must be displayed by some mental imagery that accompanies an imagining that everything lacks secret desires. And, as remarked by Kind, facts concerning the presence or absence of secret desires are not the sort of thing that can be displayed by mental images. But nor are facts to the effect that nothing has a certain property: while an image may not display anything that is square, for instance, the image does not thereby show that *nothing at all* is square.

Any mental image which occurs alongside an imagining that everything lacks secret desires will therefore bear a notably indirect relationship to the imagining's content. One might produce a mental image of a person and then make the additional supposition that the person shown in the image, along with everything else, lacks secret desires. But why would one insist that an imagining of a total absence of secret desires *must* work in that baroque manner, unless one is already convinced that imaginings necessarily feature mental imagery?

One might respond to the case just discussed by mobilising an observation commonly made in the literature on the imagination: namely, that mere 'supposition' is to be distinguished from imagining proper.<sup>31</sup> (So, I can *suppose* for the sake of argument that it is raining and it is not raining; my supposition licenses both the conclusion that it is raining and the conclusion that it is not, for instance. But I cannot *imagine* that it is raining and it is not raining.) It might thus be claimed that, while we can suppose that nothing has secret desires, we cannot literally imagine that nothing has secret desires.

The distinction between supposing and imagining is a helpful one. But this does not seem to be a case in which it applies. Just intuitively, putative imaginings that nothing at all has any secret desires do not seem to be problematic in the way that, for example, ostensible imaginings that nothing has secret desires but something has secret desires seem to be. More generally, there are no apparent grounds for always insisting on the inevitably suppositional status of putative imaginings of negative claims featuring properties that cannot be displayed using mental images. (It is worth noting that counterparts of all the points just made in relation to suitable apparently imaginable *negative* claims also apply to apparently imaginable *universal* claims featuring properties that cannot be displayed using mental images, such as the claim that everything has secret desires.)

To summarise, then, numerous philosophers have held that imaginings can occur without accompanying mental images. They have often argued for this view by supplying ostensible examples of imaginings that need not be accompanied by sensory mental images. Many of those examples do not prove the required point, however: the relevant cases merely refute the view that imaginings must be purely imagistic. Yet further examples suggest that the weaker thesis that imaginings must be imagistic is in fact problematic, as also is the simple imagery essentialist view that imaginings must be accompanied by mental imagery.

## **9. Conclusion**

This chapter has just focused upon one broad strand of the pressing philosophical questions concerning the relationships between sensory mental imagery and the imagination: it has been dominated by questions concerning the roles played by mental images in relation to the *contents* of imaginative episodes. But there are other important questions that might also have been discussed.

In particular, a huge amount of work by psychologists and philosophers has examined the neurological bases for sensory mental imagery; its main focus has been the question whether the forms of mental representation underlying visual mental imagery are ‘pictorial’ in some sense.<sup>32</sup> Given that mental images play important roles in imaginative episodes, this work also has consequences for thought about the imagination. More specifically, it has consequences for questions about the nature of the cognitive processes that underlie many of our imaginings.

While those issues are important ones, though, their precise bearing upon our understanding of the imagination depends upon the nature of the relationships between sensory mental imagery in general and the imagination. The topics broached in this chapter are thus in a sense more elementary than the ones just described.

To conclude, sensory mental images play important roles within many of our imaginative activities. But one must be wary of oversimplifying those roles. In particular, interactions between mental images and supposition-like elements mean that the contents of even those imaginings to which sensory mental images are essential cannot simply be read off what is shown within the sensory mental images that accompany the relevant imaginings. And there are, too, reasons for thinking that sensory mental imagery is not essential to the imagination, even though some of the cases that have been held to support that view do not really do so. The relationships between sensory mental imagery and the imagination are thus notably complex and—like so many of the philosophical areas to which the imagination is central—ripe for further investigation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Armstrong (1962): 5).

<sup>2</sup> See (Macpherson 2011) for a helpful survey of the issues in this area of the philosophy of perception.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, (Gregory 2013, chapter 3) and (Nanay forthcoming) for discussions of the relationships holding between the contents of mental images and of experiences.

<sup>4</sup> The precise nature of these additional content-fixing elements—and, in particular, their precise relationship to suppositions proper—is a matter that deserves more attention than it can receive here; I will fudge the issue by talking of ‘supposition-like’ elements of imaginings.

<sup>5</sup> (Peacocke 1985: 25). Something like the same idea is appealed to by Anscombe, in her discussion of what it is to imagine ‘a rabbit coming into being without a cause’; although she puts the point in terms of one’s ability to ‘form an image and give [one’s] picture that *title*’ (Anscombe 1974: 150—italics added). (Kung 2010) appeals to both labels and stipulations in presenting a nicely refined picture of the manner in which the contents of our imaginings may be based upon, while yet extending, what is shown within the mental images featured in the imaginings.

<sup>6</sup> (Williams 1973: 33): the case in the text is based on Williams’s example of a man whose imaginative powers have been skewed by his recent exposure to Bonnard’s paintings of his wife in the bath.

<sup>7</sup> (Williams 1973: 45)

<sup>8</sup> (Berkeley [1734] 2008: 182)

<sup>9</sup> (Williams 1973: 27). As we will see, Williams himself thinks that the previous claim’s plausibility is misleading.

<sup>10</sup> Williams recognises this sort of possibility: he writes that ‘on this account [the view formulated as (A) above] a man can imagine an unseen tree, and by way of visualising a tree; but he does not, and cannot, visualise an unseen tree, and the reason why what he visualises is different from what he imagines is that he is allowed to discard elements from his visualisation incompatible with the essentials of his imaginative project’ (Williams 1973: 34). See also (Martin 2002: 417) for a related treatment of imagined visual hallucinations.

<sup>11</sup> Principle (B) corresponds to an ‘Experiential Hypothesis’ discussed by Peacocke, which states that for ‘imaginings describable pre-theoretically as visualisations, hearings in one’s head, or their analogues in other modalities ... to imagine being  $\phi$  in these cases is always at least to imagine from the inside an experience as of being  $\phi$ ’ (Peacocke 1985: 22) and that ‘for such forms as “imagining a valley”, we can say that to imagine an F is always at least to imagine from the inside an experience as of an F’ (23); see also the ‘Dependency Thesis’ discussed by Martin (‘to imagine sensorily a  $\phi$  is to imagine experiencing a  $\phi$ ’ (Martin 2002: 404).

<sup>12</sup> (Williams 1973: 35)

<sup>13</sup> (Williams 1973: 36 – 7)

<sup>14</sup> (Williams 1973: 36)

<sup>15</sup> All the quotations in this paragraph are from (Martin 2002: 408).

<sup>16</sup> This quotation and the one in the previous paragraph are from Martin (2002), p. 409. The view that the perspectival nature of imagistic imaginings implies that imagistic imaginings are always imaginings of experiences has commonly surfaced in discussions of the imagination: it seems to underlie aspects of the discussion (Peacocke 1985), for instance; while Currie cites Walton as arguing in conversation that the perspectival nature of ‘perceptual imagining’ means that perceptual imaginings are imaginings of sensory episodes (Currie 1995: 188).

<sup>17</sup> All quotations in this paragraph from (Martin 2002: 410).

<sup>18</sup> As also noted by (Wollheim 1987: 103).

<sup>19</sup> See (Gregory 2010) and (Gregory forthcoming) for more detailed discussion of these ideas, in relation to the imagination and forms of sensory memory.

<sup>20</sup> (Gregory 2013) uses the above distinction in articulating an account of the special nature of the contents of a very broad family of ‘distinctively sensory’ representations that includes mental images, pictures, and many further cases.

<sup>21</sup> See (Ryle 1949): 243 - 4) and (Walton 1990: 13). Other writers who have explicitly denied that imaginings must include imagery include (Scruton 1982), (Thomas 1997), (White 1990); also, the approach to the imagination developed by Nichols and Stich (see, for instance, (Nichols 2006)) doesn’t accord an essential role to mental imagery.

<sup>22</sup> See (Descartes [1641] 1993: 53); see the chapter on Descartes in the current volume for further discussion of his views.

<sup>23</sup> See (Hume [1739 – 49] 1978: 8 – 9), plus (Hume [1739 – 49] 1978: 1); see the chapter on Hume in the current volume for further discussion of his views.

<sup>24</sup> (Kind 2001) also defends imagery essentialism; see below for more discussion.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, (Kind 2001: 90).

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<sup>26</sup> (Kind 2001) proposes that imagery is essentially involved in the imagination because it has ‘the role of capturing the object of the imagination’, for instance, just as the role that paint plays in a painting is that of ‘captur[ing] the object of [the] painting’ (Kind 2001: 108). One potential way of developing this analogy would lead to an identification of Kind’s view with that expressed by (E) above; but there may be other interpretations available which would put her position at a distance from (E)

<sup>27</sup> All the quotations in this paragraph are from (Ryle 1949: 243).

<sup>28</sup> (Kind 2001: 103)

<sup>29</sup> See (Kind 2001: 103 – 5). On p. 101 of her article, Kind quotes a series of examples owed to (White 1990): each of them only really speaks to whether imaginings are always purely imagistic. But I think that some other cases that White mentions—in particular, he briefly notes that we can imagine that ‘no men or all men have red hair’—are closer to being genuinely problematic; see below.

<sup>30</sup> (Kind 2001) presents a positive argument for holding that imagery always plays an essential role in the imagination: she argues that, by assuming that to be true, we can explain certain crucial features of the imagination identified in section III of her paper. In particular, Kind holds that the representational character of mental imagery explains why imaginings are also representational. In line with the suggestion made in the text, this explanatory argument for imagery’s essential role appears to assume that the contents of imaginings are partly determined by the contents of accompanying mental images; that is, it apparently assumes that imaginings must be imagistic. For why otherwise would the representational character of mental imagery be relevant to the imagination’s representational character?

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, (Gendler 2000: 81), (Gregory 2004: 329), and (White 1990: 139); see (Meskin and Weinberg 2006) for a relatively detailed exploration of the relationship between supposing and imagining, which leads them to claim (108) that ‘imagination and supposition are simply different ways in which one representational system may be used’.

<sup>32</sup> See the ‘further reading’ section below for some introductory references.

<sup>33</sup> I owe many thanks to Amy Kind and an anonymous referee, who provided very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.