

Why We Need Imagination

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The importance of imagination in human life is well recognized. At the individual level, imagination helps us to understand ourselves and our motives, to entertain ourselves, to set goals, and to plan for the future. As Peter Langland-Hassan has recently put it, "Imagination is too central to who and what we are to remain ourselves without it." (Langland-Hassan 2020, 1)¹ It plays an equally important role at the societal level, where it underpins interpersonal relationships – enabling us to understand one another and navigate social interactions. And one might even attribute it a transformative role on a more global scale. In his *Salon of 1859*, French poet and literary critic Charles Baudelaire famously claimed that "imagination created the world." More recently, Shaun Nichols has expressed similar sentiments, noting that imagination has undoubtedly been a key factor in the growth of civilization itself (Nichols 2006, 1).

Traditionally, the recognition of imagination's place of importance in human life was matched by a recognition of its place of importance in accounting for the human mind. Alongside such mental states as beliefs, desires, and intentions, imagination has long been considered to be a primitive mental state type (or group of types), irreducible to other mental state types.² Recently, however, the category of imagination has come under attack, with challenges emerging from a multitude of different directions. Some philosophers think that imagination is best understood not as a distinct mental state of its own but only as a subtype of a broader mental state type that includes supposition and/or conceiving. Some have argued that we should not recognize belief and imagination as distinct states but rather on a continuum, whereas others have argued something similar with respect to belief and memory. And yet others have suggested that we can reduce imagination to other mental states, whether mental imagery, belief, supposition, or some combination. In this paper, I address four of these challenges in more detail in an attempt to show why they are mistaken.

The plan for the paper is as follows. In Section I, I start by attending to the question of what imagination is. In doing so, I will endeavor to be as neutral as possible, so as not to beg any questions against my opponents. In Section II, I address two related challenges that arise from attempts to collapse the distinction between imagination and related mental states – what I call the *imagining/supposing collapse* and the *imagining/conceiving collapse*. Though some of the arguments I employ are familiar ones, I believe that we can best see the problem with these collapses by attending to an important set of considerations that have not yet been adequately addressed in this context, namely, those arising from the fact that imagination is a skill. In Section III, I turn to a challenge that arises from recent

¹ See also Edmund Casey's claim that "imagining remains inseparable from the life of mind as a whole, essential to its welfare, indeed to its identity and very existence." (Casey, 4)

² Sometimes "mental state" is used so as to contrast with other elements of our mental life such as mental activities and mental processes, whereas sometimes it is used in a more generic way to capture all of these elements together. I am using it in the second generic way.

attempts by philosophers such as Andy Egan (2008) and Susanna Schellenberg (2013) to see imagination and belief on a continuum. In response, I suggest that the challenge rests on a mistakenly rigid treatment of the functional roles of these mental states. In Section IV, I address a fourth challenge, one that arises from Peter Langland-Hassan's reductionist approach to imagination. Though one would need (at least) a paper of its own to do full justice to this challenge, I here take a big picture approach. In particular, by attending to Langland-Hassan's opening characterization of imagination, I show how his purportedly neutral starting point is actually considerably more contentious than he allows. Finally, the paper concludes in Section V with some very brief reflections on why it is important that we resist giving in to these challenges.

I. What Imagination Is

In order to successfully fend off the various attacks on the category of imagination, we first need to understand what imagination is. But this turns out to be a surprisingly difficult and fraught task. Though one can find various definitions of imagination in the philosophical literature, many of them are not theoretically innocent. To take just one example, consider Eva Brann's definition of imagining as the "activity of forming fictional image complexes or imaginal worlds." (Brann 1991, 18) This kind of definition seems to beg the question against those who want to collapse the distinction between imagination and other mental states that don't seem to require mental imagery (e.g., supposition).

That said, we can find some recent attempts at defining imagination that do seem to succeed in providing an informative (if relatively minimal) characterization of the phenomena while still steering clear of theoretical commitment. Shen-yi Liao and Tamar Gendler offer one such definition to open their entry on imagination in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: "To imagine is to represent without aiming at things as they actually, presently, and subjectively are." The psychological literature also seems to rely on definitions along similar lines, e.g., Marjorie Taylor's characterization of imagination as "the capacity to mentally transcend time, place, and/or circumstance." (Taylor 2013, 3) These definitions may not be equivalent to one another. One possible difference stems from the way they describe the targets of imagining. Since we may aim to represent something without succeeding in that aim, it may be that the range of subject matter turns out to be different on Liao and Gendler's definition of imagining from what it is on Taylor's characterization. Still, despite this difference, I take both definitions to characterize the phenomenon of imagining in roughly similar ways.

It is hard to say much beyond these minimalist characterizations without treading into substantive, and hence controversial, matters. For example, though there is considerable agreement in the scholarly literature that imagination is heterogeneous in various respects (see, e.g., Kind 2013), attempts to spell out the various dimensions of this heterogeneity have led to a proliferation of different taxonomies, with each taxonomy adopting a different way of distinguishing varieties of imagination from one another. Though I won't survey all of these cross-cutting distinctions here, I do want to pause for a moment to discuss one common taxonomy that is especially relevant for the project of this paper: the tripartite distinction between propositional, imagistic, and experiential imagination. When I imagine that my dogs have wriggled out beneath the back gate and are partying with the other neighborhood canines at the park down the street, my imagining takes a propositional form. Propositional imagining thus seems best understood on analogy with belief; in fact, it is often referred to as *belief-like*

imagining.³ In contrast, imagistic imagining seems best understood on analogy with perception.⁴ When I imagine the guilty-looking faces of my dogs, my imagining takes an imagistic form. The notion of imagery should not be thought to be confined to the visual domain, but rather as applying to all sensory modalities. Just as there are visual images, there are also auditory and gustatory images. Though in the canine imagining just mentioned the imagistic form is likely to be visual in nature, I might also imagine the dogs' happy barks as they cavort at the neighborhood canine party or the feel of their matted and dirty fur once they've returned home. Finally, experiential imagining is best understood on analogy not with belief or perception but with experiences. When I imagine being overcome with intense anxiety and panic upon discovering my dogs missing from the backyard, my imagining takes an experiential form, one similar to the experience of actually being overcome with intense anxiety and panic.

In practice, this tripartite distinction often functions as a bipartite distinction, since imagistic imagining and experiential imagining are often grouped together in discussion. I will adopt this practice going forward, referring to both as *sensory* imaginings. One way we might motivate this grouping by treating imagistic imagining as a subtype of experiential imagining. An imagistic imagining of the dogs' faces, for example, might be thought of us as an imagining of the experience of seeing them. We might also motivate this grouping by stretching the notion of imagery beyond the sensory domain so that we treat experiential imaginings as involving pain imagery, emotional imagery, and so on.⁵ Though I prefer this second motivation, we won't need to take a stand on this issue for the purposes of discussion of this paper.

Having recognized this distinction, philosophical theorizing about imagination typically proceeds in one of two ways. Some philosophers narrow their focus to just one of these varieties of imaginings (see, e.g., Stock 2017). Others focus more broadly on both these varieties, but in doing so, offer a different kind of account for sensory imagining from the one they offer for propositional imagining (see, e.g., Langland-Hassan 2020). There are exceptions of course, with the most notable one coming from those who take a recreative or simulationist approach to imagination. On this kind of account, all imagining can be seen as a recreation or simulation of other kinds of mental state, with propositional imagining being a recreation of belief and sensory imagining being a recreation of perception (see, e.g., Currie and Ravenscroft 2002). But though this allows for a unified treatment of propositional and sensory imagination, it raises additional complications by way of its introduction of numerous other varieties of imaginative states. In brief, if beliefs and perception can be simulated, then presumably so too can all sorts of other mental states such as desire and emotion (to name just two). The postulation of imaginative analogues to all these other kinds of states has been the matter of considerable controversy, thus undercutting the benefits achieved by the unifying approach.⁶

Before closing this section, it will be useful to make two points about how my own philosophical theorizing here will proceed. First, I want to acknowledge in advance that this theorizing does not amount to a fully developed account of imagining – either of one variety on its own or both varieties together. Providing such an account is not the aim of this discussion. That said, given the nature of the

³ For some worries about the robustness of the notion of propositional imagination, see Nanay's contribution to this volume.

⁴ See Nanay 2016 for a helpful discussion of perception and sensory imagination.

⁵ See Nanay 2017 for a discussion of pain imagery.

⁶ Among those who postulate the existence of imaginative analogues of desire are Currie 2002 and Doggett and Egan 2007; among those who argue against postulating these states are Kind 2011 and Spaulding 2015.

challenges outlined earlier, my attempt to fend them off will require me to reflect on the nature of imagining. Second, though I take the relatively neutral definitions outlined above as my starting point, I will not be able to stay neutral for long. The arguments I will offer in subsequent sections in my attempt to fend off the various challenges to the primacy of imagination will often require various theoretical commitments, commitments that go beyond these minimalistic definitions.

With this preparatory work in place, we are now ready to turn directly to the challenges.

II. The Challenges from Supposition and Conception

Imagination is often grouped together with other speculative mental states such as supposition and conception. In ordinary language, these words are often used more-or-less interchangeably.⁷ The first challenges I'll address come from discussions that collapse the distinction between imagination and these other mental states – what I'll refer to as the *imagining/conceiving collapse* and the *imagining/supposing collapse*. Sometimes these collapses proceed via a direct identification of the relevant states, i.e., the terms “conceiving” and “imagining” (or “supposing” and “imagining”) are treated as picking out the very same kind of mental state. Sometimes they proceed by treating one of the relevant states as a species of the other, i.e., conceiving (or supposing) is seen as a species of imagining. In either case, however, we have an instance of the kind of collapses I'm interested in.

The Imagining/Conceiving Collapse

The imagining/conceiving collapse dates back at least to the 18th century. In his *Treatise*, David Hume offers a claim about conceiving that he calls an established “maxim in metaphysics,” namely, that “whatever the mind clearly conceives, includes the idea of possible existence.” He then immediately restates the maxim in terms of imagination: “nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible.” In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, when we look at the work of philosophers who specialize in philosophy of imagination, it is less common to see these two words being used interchangeably as Hume did. But this usage is considerably more common in other philosophical contexts, specifically in discussions of our modal judgments and about when and how such judgments can be justified. In an attempt to explore the link between conceivability and possibility, Paul Tidman (1994) argues that we should use the terms “conceivable” and “inconceivable” as picking out what can and cannot be imagined. David Chalmers distinguishes between two different senses of conceivability: negative conceivability and positive conceivability. A statement is negatively conceivable when it “is not ruled out by a priori, or when there is no (apparent) contradiction” in it (Chalmers 2002, 149). In contrast, for a statement to be positively conceivable on Chalmers' view, we must form some sort of positive conception of a situation in which that statement is the case. He then cashes this out in terms of imagination: a statement is positively conceivable when one can imagine (in some sense) a situation in which that statement is the case (Chalmers 2002, 150). As Chalmers himself notes, his discussion was heavily influenced by Stephen Yablo's treatment of related issues, and we there see a similar collapse. On Yablo's account, “conceiving

⁷ Though I don't think one can entirely discount facts about ordinary usage when engaged in philosophical work, I don't think we should put too much weight on it. After all, most philosophers of imagination do not want to put too much weight on the fact that in ordinary language one often talks of imagining in terms of “inner pictures” or “the mind's eye.” See Nanay's contribution, this volume, for a discussion of the dangers inherent in relying too much on language to understand the mind.

that p is a way of imagining that p ; it is imagining that p by imagining a world of which p is held to be a true description.” (Yablo 1993, 29)

To understand why it is a mistake to collapse imagining and conceiving, or even to treat one as a subspecies of the other, let's begin by noting that when it comes to engagement with the actual world, we typically recognize two different ways that it might go – via perception or via intellection. These activities have importantly different profiles, not only different functional profiles but also different epistemic profiles. It would be natural to expect that one might find comparably different activities when it comes to engagement with the non-actual world.

And indeed, we can meet this expectation by distinguishing conceiving from imagining. Sometimes when we want to engage with the non-actual world, we are aiming at achieving a kind of *conceptual understanding*. It's part of the very purpose of the exercise that we explore our concepts, both their interrelations and their limits. This kind of mental activity corresponds to conceiving. Other times, however, this isn't our aim. Instead, we aim to get what's naturally described as a *sense* of a given proposition or state of affairs. This sense can be broad-based or nuanced, but it is a different way of apprehending the content than engaging with it via a conceptual exploration. It's this kind of mental activity that corresponds to imagining. Note that this is not to say that imagination must be non-conceptual in content. Though concepts may well be involved, it need not be the aim of imagining to unpack them.

One might try to resist this distinction by pointing to cases in which we consider a given scenario where it is hard to classify as one or the other, as either imagining or conceiving. But these cases do not force us to conclude that there is no difference between these two activities. Rather, we can conclude instead that *both* imagining and conceiving are going on.

Here's another way to put the basic point I'm putting forward. I have recently argued that imagination is best understood as a skill – it is something that some people are better at than others, and something that one can get better at over time (Kind 2020, Kind forthcoming a). But when we think about conceiving and imagining, we see that they are *different* skills. What it takes to be good at conceiving is different from what it takes to be good at imagining; someone might well be very good at one activity without being good at the other.

Drawing the distinction between conception and imagination in a manner analogous to the distinction between perception and intellection has considerable historical precedent. We see it in Descartes, for example, who distinguishes between acts of “pure understanding” and acts of imagination. The latter, on his view, requires a special “effort of mind” that the former does not (Descartes 1641/1986, 50-51). It also helps us make sense of several related facts about these two speculative mental states. First, it explains why we frequently encounter talk of conceiving in philosophical discussion involving modality. It's in this context where we're engaged in conceptual unpacking and where conceptual limits prove critical. In contrast, when we're engaged in games of pretend, or engagement with literature, or fantasizing, we're generally not at all interested in conceptual unpacking, and so it's not at all surprising that in these contexts we see talk of imagining and not conceiving. Second, and relatedly, this way of drawing the distinction explains the fact that imagining can be put to all sorts of whimsical purposes that conceiving does not seem well suited for. Though it's natural to imagine the glass of wine or chocolate soufflé you'll be treating yourself to at the end of the day, it's much less natural to conceive of this.

For all these reasons, then, I think we do best to see the imagination/conception distinction as a rough analog to the perception/intellection distinction. Just as we recognize two different ways of engaging with actuality, and don't collapse them into one another, we should recognize two different ways of engaging with possibility. Moreover, just as we are not required to see perception as non-conceptual in virtue of accepting the distinction between perception and intellection, we are not required to see imagination as non-conceptual in virtue of accepting the distinction between imagination and conception. Though concepts can be involved in both imagining and conceiving, they are involved in these mental states in different ways. This also doesn't require us to require that imagination involve something analogous to sensory presentations. Though I think it would be natural to do so – and in fact my own preferred view of imagination does so – we don't need to draw the analogy to perception quite so tightly.

The Imagining/Supposing Collapse

Unlike the imagining/conceiving collapse, the imagining/supposing collapse does commonly occur in the work of philosophers who specialize in philosophy of imagination. Though there is a strong consensus among philosophers of imagination that imagining is a distinct state from supposing, this consensus is far from unanimous.⁸ Alvin Goldman, for example, distinguishes two different varieties of imagining: *suppositional imagination* and *enactment imagination* (Goldman 2006, 47-48). In his sense, suppositional imagination corresponds to what we earlier called propositional imagination while enactment imagination corresponds to sensory imagination. We see a similar correspondence in the recreative account offered by Greg Currie and Ian Ravenscroft (2002). More recently, Margherita Arcangeli (2019) has argued at length for a view on which supposition constitutes a third type of imagining alongside propositional and sensory imagining.

As a first step towards showing why we should reject the imagining/supposing collapse, I want to highlight one interesting fact: Despite the occurrence of the two related collapses under discussion in this section, one doesn't tend to find examples of the third possible collapse, i.e., the supposing/conceiving collapse. Though we probably shouldn't make too much of this, it is suggestive. If both conceiving and supposing collapse into imagining, then one would expect that they would collapse into one another as well. Thinking about why this collapse is not tempting sheds light on the nature of supposing.

One reason that it's so common for the imagining/conceiving collapse to occur in philosophical discussions about our judgments of possibility is that this is the main philosophical context in which we find discussion of conceivability at all. It's precisely because the notion of conceiving seems to carry with it a sense of the possible – what is it to conceive of something, except to think of it as in some sense possible? – that it gets invoked there. But the notion of supposing, in contrast, does not at all seem to carry with it a sense of the possible. One can suppose all sorts of claims for the sake of argument, and when one does so, one remains neutral not only on whether they are true but also on whether they are possible.

This points us toward the central problem with the imagining/supposing collapse. Reflection on the act of supposing shows us that it is completely unconstrained. It is an easy activity, and one that engenders

⁸ Those holding the consensus view include Peacocke 1985, White 1990, Moran 1994, Gendler 2000, Kind 2001, Doggett and Egan 2007, and Balcerak Jackson 2016.

no resistance. This sets it apart from imagining, which can at times be hard and can at times prompt resistance. The phenomenon of imaginative resistance is often exemplified by consideration of a famous example from Walton: “In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all it was a girl.” (Walton 1994, 37; see also Gendler 2000). When we encounter this sentence, perhaps while engaging with a work of fiction, we might be willing to imagine that a scenario in which people think, mistakenly, that female infanticide is morally acceptable, but we resist imagining a scenario in which female infanticide is actually morally acceptable.

Tyler Doggett and Andy Egan offer a nice encapsulation of these differences:

We think imagining is distinct from supposing. Though we think that it is hard to imagine that killing babies for fun and profit is permissible, we have no trouble supposing this. We can easily suppose it for reductio. Though we think it is hard to imagine that Robert Stalnaker is the smallest prime number, we have no trouble supposing that he is. (Doggett and Egan 2007, 1)

Alan White characterizes the difference between imagining and supposing in a similar way: “Imagining, but not supposing, is something one can try to do and either succeed or fail in doing. ... To imagine that p , but not to suppose that p , requires the exercise of a power, which some people may possess in greater degree than others. One can be good or bad at imagining, but not at supposing.” (White 1990, 138) This recalls the point made in the previous subsection: imagination is a skill. One can improve it by way of training or practice. But supposition does not seem to be a skill. What would it mean to train or practice supposing?

Teasing this cluster of points apart, we can summarize them as follows:

Imagining	Supposing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty level comes in degrees • Ability level comes in degrees; improvable by training or practice • Ability level differs from one person to another • Sometimes engenders resistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty level does not come in degrees • Ability level does not come in degrees; not improvable by training or practice • Ability level does not differ from one person to another • Never engenders resistance

Various other considerations have been raised in support of the claim that there is a fundamental discontinuity between imagining and supposing. Some of these are phenomenological. In particular, it is claimed that imagining has a different kind of phenomenal character from supposing. (Indeed, one might think that supposing lacks phenomenal character altogether.) Others are functional. To give one example, imagining seems to give rise to affective states while supposing does not. When I imagine the world’s being hit by another global pandemic, I am gripped by feelings of anxiety. When I merely put this claim forward as a supposition, I have no affective response whatsoever.⁹ Supposing also seems to require a purpose whereas imagining does not. Though we can just find ourselves imagining something, we can’t just find ourselves supposing something.

⁹ For development of these considerations, see Moran 1994.

Personally, both the phenomenological and functional considerations strike me as compelling, and I think they add considerably to the case that imagining and supposing are fundamentally different kinds of mental states.¹⁰ But not everyone agrees. Some defenders of the imagining/supposing collapse argue that, since the phenomenological and functional considerations have an especially firm grip with respect to sensory imagination, supposition should be identified with propositional imagination (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002). Others simply reject the postulation of these differences. For example, Arcangeli argues that once we correctly understand the phenomenological and affective profile of supposition, the way is clear to see it as a *sui generis* type of imagining, distinct from both propositional and sensory imagination (Arcangeli 2019).

I won't here engage with these arguments. In my view, even if we set aside all the phenomenological and functional considerations, however, the considerations laid out in the above table are sufficient to show that we should reject the imagining/supposing collapse. Importantly, the features in the left-hand column apply not just to sensory imagining but to propositional imagining. Attempts to engage in propositional imagining can be met with resistance, as in Walton's *Giselda* example, and ability level can differ with respect to propositional imagination just as it can with sensory imagination. Moreover, these same considerations undermine the claim that supposition can be a *sui generis* kind of imagining. If imagining is by its very nature a skill and supposing is not, then we cannot see the latter state as a kind of the former.

A Different Kind of Collapse

Even if one accepts the arguments that I've made in this section, even if one rejects both the imagining/supposing collapse and the imagining/conceiving collapse, one might still think there's another way of understanding the collapses in the vicinity that's more promising. The suggestion I have in mind goes something like this: Ultimately, there is a deep similarity among all three of these mental states, for all three of them are fundamentally cases of having some content in mind; thus, all three of these mental states ultimately collapse into the more general category of entertaining a particular content.¹¹ To my mind, however, this collapse is no more plausible than the other two. As Kendall Walton has noted, imagining some content is not simply to entertain content or to have that content in mind but to *do* something with the content that one entertains or has in mind (Walton 1990, 20). Likewise for conceiving and supposing. In fact, this point falls directly out of the discussion of this section, for one way of understanding the difference between these three types of mental states is in terms of a difference in what we're doing with the content that we have in mind.

That said, it's worth noting one last point before moving on to our next challenge. In arguing for the fundamental difference between imagining, conceiving, and supposing, I do not want to deny that there are many similarities between them – even deep similarities. After all, as I said at the start of this section, all three of them can be seen as speculative activities. But, of course, recognizing similarities between these states is perfectly compatible with insisting that they are distinct categories. Consider the various similarities between belief and desire – for example, the fact that they are both propositional attitudes. Given this similarity, one could adopt a very broad-brush system of mental state classification that grouped them together. And sometimes that broad-brush taxonomy is useful. But

¹⁰ See my *Kind* 2001 and *Kind* 2013 for development of this point.

¹¹ This is often put in terms of as *having a proposition in mind* and as *entertaining a proposition*. I have put the point in terms of content rather than in terms of propositions since not all imagining is propositional.

when we're cataloguing distinct mental states, we work at a different, lower level. My claim about imagining, conceiving, and supposing should be seen as operating at that same level. Though there are various similarities between these three speculative activities that might make it useful to group them together at a high level of theorizing, when we're operating at a taxonomic level at which belief and desire are treated as distinct mental states, these three mental states should be treated as distinct from one another as well.

III. The Challenge from Belief

The challenge that I consider in this section arises from the claim that belief and imagining are not fundamentally different types of mental states but instead should be seen as existing on some sort of continuum. This view, often referred to as the *continuum hypothesis*, has been associated with work by Greg Currie and Jon Jureidini (2004), Andy Egan (2008), and Susanna Schellenberg (2013).¹² To defend this hypothesis, its proponents point to certain phenomena such as delusion and imaginative immersion that they claim cannot be adequately explained unless we reject the view that there is a sharp division between imagination and belief. Instead, we should see imagination and belief as lying on a continuum, with at least some of the intermediary states along this continuum best thought of as imagination-belief hybrids.

Understanding and then defusing the challenge posed by the continuum hypothesis requires us first to look more closely at the differences between imagination and belief, at least as they have traditionally been understood. To highlight one especially important difference, recall that the minimalist definitions of imagination that we considered in Section II made clear that imagining involves representing things other than as they actually, presently are. One can thus imagine something that one does not take to be true. In contrast, when an individual believes a certain content, they must take that content to be true. Sometimes this difference between belief and imagination with respect to truth is put in normative terms. Beliefs, but not imaginings, *ought* to be true. But sometimes the point is put in functional terms. With respect both to mental state formation and revision, for example, belief seems to be both dependent on and responsive to evidence in a way that imagination is not.

This divergence in their relationship to evidence is not the only way that the functional profiles of belief and imagination have traditionally been thought to differ. They also differ with respect to their relationship to action and emotion. Generally speaking, belief is thought to have a more expansive role with respect to guiding behavior and generating affective responses, while imagining is thought to have a much more circumscribed role in these regards. For example, suppose that Jackson has a hankering for something sweet to eat. In that case, his belief that there is some ice cream in the freezer will likely make him happy and cause him to go to the kitchen to get the ice cream from the freezer. But his imagining that there's ice cream in the freezer is unlikely to have either of these effects. A related functional difference stems from the inferential role played by these mental states. As a general matter, the inferential role played by belief is thought to be considerably more expansive than the inferential role played by imagination. When Jackson comes to believe that his partner bought ice cream on this

¹² Though there are some important differences across the ways that these philosophers characterize the view, I will not discuss those here. I sketch these differences more fully and suggest that Currie and Jureidini are best understood as arguing for a different kind of view in Kind forthcoming b. The arguments and examples of this subsection were initially developed in that paper. I will not discuss Currie and Jureidini's view here.

morning's trip to the store, he will also come to believe that there's ice cream in the freezer. But when Jackson imagines that his partner bought ice cream, this will not have any effects on his beliefs about whether there is ice cream in the freezer. This point is often put in terms of quarantining: Though an imagining is typically quarantined off from one's set of beliefs, a belief is not.

Now consider delusions, and in particular, Capgras delusion. In cases of this kind of delusion, a person sincerely reports that their spouses or other family members have been replaced by identical impostors. On Egan's view, the mental states involved in Capgras delusion don't line up nicely with either the functional profile of belief or with the functional profile of imagining.¹³ Someone with this delusion takes themselves to be aiming at truth, and their mental states impact their behavior and affect much more than one finds in cases of imagining. They are often extremely scared and angry, and they behave accordingly in interactions with their spouse and other loved ones. So there is a mismatch when it comes to the functional profile of imagining. At the same time, however, the mental states also don't match up well with the functional profile of belief. Perhaps the most obvious discrepancy concerns evidence dependence and responsiveness, since the delusions are formed without connection to any evidence and persist in the face of contrary evidence. But we also see important differences with respect to the delusions' inferential role. For example, as Egan notes, someone who has Capgras delusion and believes that their spouse has been replaced by an impostor is unlikely to adopt an overall worldview according to which this makes sense – their delusion isn't well incorporated into their overall belief system (Egan 2008, 266). Ultimately, Egan suggests that the best way to account for such cases is to postulate some mental states midway between imagining and belief. More generally, he suggests that there's "no principled reason to think that we can't get a spectrum of cases, from clear totally non-belief-like imaginings to clear, full-blooded paradigmatic beliefs, with intermediate, hard-to-classify states in the middle." (Egan 2008, 274)

In my view, however, Egan's argument is unsuccessful. The problem is that the functional profiles of imagining and belief are not quite as rigid as the argument seems to require. We normally tolerate a fair amount of give in both profiles. This can be seen especially clearly when we consider newly acquired beliefs that are particularly disruptive to one's cognitive network. Consider, for example, someone whose spouse has just died. They believe that their spouse is dead. But they keep acting in ways that don't fit well with this belief, and they manifest other beliefs that don't fit well with this one. They shut their alarm off quickly in the morning so as not to wake their spouse. They pour two glasses of wine when making dinner. When their phone buzzes, they expect it to be a text from their spouse. The underlying mental state doesn't have the usual behavior-guiding role that beliefs normally have, but it doesn't seem to force on us the acceptance of a state that's in some way between imagining and belief. Rather, it seems immensely plausible to think of this as a case where the individual has inconsistent beliefs – though they believe their spouse is dead, they haven't quite lost the belief that their spouse is alive. In accounting for the inconsistency, we might note that their belief that their spouse is dead hasn't yet been fully integrated into their overall belief network or fully incorporated into their cognitive

¹³ Egan also considers Cotard delusion, a phenomenon in which someone sincerely reports that they are dead. As the considerations he raises with respect to Cotard delusion parallel the considerations he raises with respect to Capgras delusion, I will not rehearse them here.

network. But even though their belief that their spouse is dead doesn't match well with the functional profile of belief, I don't think we're inclined to deny that this is genuinely a belief.¹⁴

It is not just with respect to beliefs that we tolerate a fair amount of give with respect to functional role. We are similarly tolerant with respect to the functional role for imaginings. This can be seen especially clearly when we consider imaginings that are unwelcome. Consider a child who at bedtime starts imagining that there is a monster in the closet even though they know full well there's not; they even made sure by having their parents do a comprehensive closet check just before saying good night. Or consider an adult who, unable to reach their partner by phone or by text, starts imagining that their partner is having an affair even though they know full well that it's an especially busy time for their partner at work. While these states likely manifest the usual circumscribed inferential role of imaginings, they often do not have the usual circumscribed role with respect to affective response, and similarly with respect to behavior guidance. The child likely feels fearful or maybe even terrified, has their parents do another under-bed check, and insists that the lights be kept on. The adult starts feeling anger and resentment towards their partner, sends panicked texts, and leaves increasingly hostile voicemails. Yet despite the fact that these states have an atypically expansive role with respect to affective response and behavior guidance, we are willing to recognize them as imaginings nonetheless.

Insofar as consideration of imaginative immersion likewise depends on assumptions about the rigidity of the functional roles assigned to belief and imagination, the preceding discussion will apply in this context as well. But Schellenberg's discussion raises a further worry: In cases of immersion, we sometimes slip from a state of imagining to a state of belief by way of a seamless transition from one to the other. Consider a case of immersed pretense. Suppose that two children are pretending to be cats. At the start, they are fully cognizant of the fact that they are only playing a game and that they are not really cats. Even while engaged in this activity, thoughts about other things – the homework and chores they are avoiding – may be front and center before their mind. But, sometimes, as the game goes on the children become more engrossed by it. Those other thoughts recede and the pretend world comes alive. They no longer need to think, "What would a cat do now?" but can simply and effortlessly engage in cat-like actions.

With this kind of case in mind, Schellenberg notes that as the children become immersed in the game of make-believe, their mental states sometimes start to take on characteristics more typical of belief. They may "start to take it to be true" that they are cats. (Schellenberg 2013, 508) More generally, "In cases of imaginative immersion, the imagining subject has mental states that are belief-like in that the imagining subject comes close to taking the subject matter of her imagination to be true." (509) And, importantly, the move from the initial state of "pure imagining" to the later state that is more belief-like is a seamless one. As Schellenberg notes, the ability to make this transition seamlessly is part what makes someone a good pretender or actor. She then argues that accounting for this kind of transition,

¹⁴ This is not the only way to push back against Egan's view. For example, one might treat the Capgras delusion as a genuine belief but one that amounts to treating the belief as having a good evidentiary warrant when it doesn't. On this position, the problem isn't that the individual with Capgras delusion is being mistakenly unresponsive to evidence but rather is mistakenly thinking there is evidence (and being responsive to it in just the ways believers should be) when there isn't. Thanks to Jonathan Cohen for this point.

i.e., for a seamless transition from a state that is a pure imagining to a state that is belief-like, requires us to posit a continuum between imagining and belief.

To see why this argument is mistaken, we need to reflect further on what happens one when becomes immersed. It seems likely that the children immersed in their cat pretense won't respond (in English) when others talk to them but instead simply meow; they persistently refuse to respond to their human name; they persistently "paw" at the door rather than opening it; and so on. But even though there are all sorts of ways in which they don't break character, what happens when a bowl of cat food is put down in front of them? I doubt that they start to lap it up. Likewise, when their parents start to stream their favorite video, I doubt they keep "pawing" at the door for long. Rather, I suspect they're more likely to stand up from all fours and settle in on the couch to watch. It doesn't take much reflection to see the implausibility of the suggestion that they've really stopped believing that they're a little human and started to believe that they're a cat. Yes, they are immersed in their make-believe game, but this immersion is perhaps best described as a kind of investment or commitment than as a case where they've lost sight of the truth.

Perhaps there are other cases of pretense where it would be more plausible to describe things this way. Such cases are, I expect, quite rare, though maybe it's the kind of thing that happens in method acting.¹⁵ Still, the existence of cases in which someone starts off imagining P and ends up believing P, even via a seamless transition, doesn't mean that we have to see this transition as a gradual movement along a continuum. Rather, there might have simply been a change from being in one mental state to being in another. Compare the change from believing P to not believing P (or from not believing P to believing P). Some belief changes happen instantaneously, but many do not. But even when a belief change is best described as taking place over time, we don't typically think that this demands that we recognize a continuum between belief and not-belief. We can see the same thing in all sorts of other mental state transitions. One can move from love to hate without being in a state that's sort of love-like and sort of hate-like. One can move from enjoyment to disgust without being in a state that's sort of enjoyment-like and sort of disgust-like. So why can't the same thing be said for the change from imagining P to believing P? And if it can, then we have no reason to worry about the distinctness of imagination and belief.

IV. The Reductionist Challenge

I turn now to what's perhaps the most direct challenge to the primacy of imagination, one that stems from the reductionist approach developed by Peter Langland-Hassan. Interestingly, though various philosophers have been tempted by the other challenges I've outlined here, most have not been tempted by the reductionist challenge.¹⁶ The idea of reducing imagination to other mental states like belief has generally been rejected as a non-starter. But in a series of papers and his recent book, Langland-Hassan suggests that this pessimistic attitude towards reductionism gets it hold only because we're thinking about the possibilities for reduction in overly simplistic terms. In his view, once we recognize the vast resources available to the reductionist, we can develop a reductionist view that is both viable and plausible.

¹⁵ Or perhaps not. After all, even method stage actors are not surprised that there's an audience watching them or that some of their remarks are greeted by applause. See also Liao and Doggett 2014.

¹⁶ Gilbert Ryle's treatment of imagination (1949) might also be considered reductionist.

To do full justice to Langland-Hassan's reductionist challenge would require considerably more space than I have here. The arguments range across a variety of imaginative contexts, with differing reductionist strategies employed from context to context. Since I can't hope to address all of these arguments individually, I will instead take a big picture approach and focus my critique on the way Langland-Hassan frames his project. This framing rests on a distinction between what he calls *attitude imagining* (or *A-imagining*) from what he calls *imagistic imagining* (or *I-imagining*). Given that similar-sounding distinctions are common in the literature, it may appear that his framework is relatively uncontroversial. But this appearance is mistaken. Though he himself emphasizes the importance of adopting a neutral starting point, closer inspection of his distinction shows that it departs in important ways from those other similar sounding distinctions; in fact, it is both idiosyncratic and substantive.

For Langland-Hassan, I-imagining "refers to the use of endogenously generated mental states that appear image-like, or to have sensory character, to the people having them." (2020, 5) I-imaginings are "cases of thought that involve mental imagery as a proper part." (2020, 54) A-imagining, in contrast, is "a kind of thought process that allows us to step outside of what we really believe to consider mere possibilities" (2020, 6). As he subsequently goes on to note, it is "rich, elaborated, epistemically safe thought about the possible, fantastical, unreal, and so on." (2020, 7)

Again, at first glance, these definitions may not seem problematic. Granted, they leave open the possibility that not all imagistic imaginings are attitude imaginings, and vice versa, but Langland-Hassan is far from alone in proceeding this way. What sets him apart from other philosophers working on imagination is his failure to recognize any commonality between these two types of imagining. There is no overarching sense of imagination that captures both I-imagining and A-imagining, and as characterized, they don't seem to have anything fundamentally in common with one another. Despite the fact that they both include "imagining" in their names, these two mental states might as well be entirely distinct mental state types.

Recall the minimalist definitions of imagining that we started with above, i.e., that imagining represents without aiming at things as they actually, presently, and subjectively are, or that imagining allows us to mentally transcend time and place. This characterization is meant to apply to *all* acts of imagining, both sensory and propositional. Given how Langland-Hassan defines i-imaginings, he can't simply adopt this characterization. But one would expect that he develop some parallel kind of general characterization – perhaps, to use one of his own terms, a characterization along the lines of epistemically safe thought – and then a division into two kinds of such thought – the imagistic kind and the attitude kind.¹⁷ Alas, no such general characterization is on offer.

This points us to a second and related issue. Why should we think that the class of I-imaginings as defined by Langland-Hassan is really a class of imaginings at all? As he notes, the notion of I-imagining explicitly includes as acts of I-imaginings *all* thoughts that involve images. By "thought" Langland-Hassan means to pick out a stimulus-independent kind of mental activity. How exactly we're going to specify what counts as stimulus-independent may well be a trickier manner than Langland-Hassan allows – after all, cases where I imagine alterations to what I'm seeing seem dependent on what I'm in fact seeing. But let's suppose that the distinction can be made out as Langland-Hassan wants. Perceptions thus won't be included in the class of I-imaginings. But imagistic memories, intentions, and

¹⁷ Note that given how Langland-Hassan defines i-imaginings, he can't simply adopt this characterization.

judgments all count as instances of imagining – as do imagistic desires, hopes, and fears. Suppose, for example, that I see my dogs lying snuggled together on the couch. Looking at them, I think “these dogs are so darn adorable.” If an imagistic element is involved in this thought, then Langland-Hassan classifies the mental state as an instance of imagining. Tomorrow, when I (imagistically) recall them snuggling on the couch, that too is classified as an instance of imagining. And suppose I have a desire that a third dog join my household, or an intention to this effect, or a hope that someone will make this happen for my birthday. If any of these varied mental states include an imagistic element, then they too get treated as instances of imagining.

In short, as these brief reflections suggest, what seems like innocent stage-setting on Langland-Hassan’s part ends up smoothing the way towards reductionism. It’s not surprising, after all, that image-involving desires could be reduced to desires and that image-involving beliefs could be reduced to beliefs – after all, that’s just what they are. The important question is whether image-involving *imaginings* can be reduced to these other kinds of states.

Langland-Hassan recognizes that he needs to address this issue when he considers whether we should posit “an imaginative version of I-imaginings, corresponding to cases where we would say a person has imagined (but not judged, desired, or decided) that X, and where their doing so involved mental imagery.” (2020, 87) It’s this very question that’s at the heart of the matter, i.e., whether to postulate an irreducible such state, is precisely what divides the non-reductionists from Langland-Hassan. But by including all the other states within the class of I-imaginings, Langland-Hassan has made the issue somewhat diffuse. My worry, put somewhat ungenerously, is that he seems to be hiding the ball.

Consider how Langland-Hassan motivates his “no” answer to this key question that we just identified.¹⁸ His discussion proceeds by considering what he takes to be the most likely candidate for such image-involving imaginings, namely, daydreams. Because daydreams are not closely connected to one’s judgments or to action, they would seem to pose an especially sharp challenge to a reductionist project. Langland-Hassan’s strategy for dealing with them is to divide and conquer. There’s nothing problematic in and of itself with proceeding this way if it actually succeeds. But does it? To my mind the answer is no.

Consider some of the further details. Some daydreams are treated as image-involving desires: someone’s daydream that they’ve won the Publisher’s Clearinghouse Sweepstakes, for example, might be understood as an image-involving desire to that effect, where this desire includes an image of Ed McMahon showing up at their door with a giant check. Others are treated as image-involving judgments: someone’s daydream about their mid-life crisis might be understood as an image-involving judgment that the car that would best resolve things would be a deep metallic blue Tesla Model X, where this judgment includes an image of the car itself. On Langland-Hassan’s view these kinds of treatments can be extended (and combined with one another) so as to capture all daydreams – and, presumably, all other sorts of image-involving imaginings one would be tempted to offer up as potential counterexamples.

¹⁸ It’s worth noting that Langland-Hassan grants that we might want to refer to states as imaginative i-imaginings (or just as imaginings) in the way he refers to other states as judgment i-imaginings and desire-imaginings, but he is explicit that reference to any such state does not commit us to a new and distinct folk psychological category – ultimately, any such states can be wholly characterized in other folk psychological terms.

To see what's wrong with this, I think it would be helpful for a moment to step outside Langland-Hassan's framework. Let's focus on one of these daydreams, intuitively described:

Chris is at home, thinking about how to snap out of their midlife crisis and scrolling through the Tesla website. They then imagine (imagistically) themselves driving a Tesla Model X.

To my mind, this mental exercise does not seem either like a judgment or a desire. It's considerably less committal than either of those. One way to see this perhaps, is to note that this kind of daydream might often be followed by the judgment that the imagined car is *not* the right choice to resolve one's midlife crisis. For example, though in Chris's case the Tesla-imagining might be followed by a positive judgment about its impact on their crisis, it might also be the case that the parallel imagining about a '67 Mustang is not followed by such a judgment. Moreover, Chris can engage in those imaginings without doing any judging at all – not even making the judgment that one or the other cars *might* resolve their midlife crisis. And likewise for desiring. Desiring too is a more committal state than the one Chris was engaged in. It's hard even to understand what a non-committal desire would be like. So in engaging in these imaginings, it's not that Chris is making a non-committal (or epistemically safe) judgment or engaging in non-committal (or epistemically safe) desires; rather, they're simply not making judgments or adopting desires at all. Even if at the conclusion of the daydream they form committal judgments and desires, we need to explain the states they're in while the daydream is going on.

As these reflections suggest, Langland-Hassan's diffusional approach, and his grouping of all image-involving states together in one category, encourages us to lose sight of the intuitive difference between image-involving states that are imaginings and image-involving states that are not. Though I don't have the space to develop the point here, I also think that something analogous happens with his treatment of A-imaginings; in that context, we are encouraged to lose sight of attitudes that are properly considered imaginings and other attitudes that are just in the nearby vicinity. As such, with respect to both I-imaginings and A-imaginings, the path towards reductionism appears easier than it in fact is. Though I can't hope that the incomplete reflections of this section were sufficient to definitively show that his reductionist approach fails, I hope they have at least suggested that we have strong reason to be skeptical about it.

V. Concluding Remarks

The discussion of this paper has endeavored to fend off four different challenges to the primacy of imagination. As I have suggested, we should identify imagination as a distinct kind of speculative mental state in our mental taxonomy. While there are other challenges that have been and could be raised, it's my hope that the discussion here lays the groundwork for fending those off as well.

Before I close my discussion, however, I'd like to take a step back to address a big picture concern that has likely been looming in the background. In particular, one might wonder what we lose if we don't maintain imagination as a distinct and robust category. Though the goal of accuracy in one's mental state taxonomy is valuable in and of itself, one might wonder whether there is any special significance about being accurate in this particular respect.

My own answer, which I suspect comes as no surprise, is yes. Recall how the discussion of this paper began, namely, by noting the importance of imagination in human life. Moreover, this importance is not

limited to a single context or sphere of activity. We rely on imagination in activities ranging from the more fanciful, such as pretending and fantasizing, to the more practical, such as planning and decision-making. Imagination is implicated in discovery and invention, in the creation of fiction and art and our engagement with them, and in our attempts to understand one another. Without an accurate understanding of imagination and how it functions we will not be able to achieve an accurate understanding of these activities – either an understanding of how they normally work or an understanding of what we can do to make them work more successfully. In short, it’s precisely because we so desperately need imagination that we also desperately need the category of imagination.¹⁹

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