Imagining Oneself Being Someone Else

- the role of the Self in the shoes of another

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Abstract: Proceeding from a distinction between imagining oneself in another person's situation and imagining oneself being someone else, this article attempts to elucidate what the latter type of imagining consists in. Previous attempts at spelling out the phenomenon fail to properly account for the role of the self, or rather every individual's unique point of view. An alternative view is presented, where the concept of imagining oneself being someone else is explained in terms of a distinction between and a co-running of the imaginer's own perspective and that of the target individual. It is further argued that while we can imagine about an individual without imagining her having any of her actual properties, to meaningfully imagine oneself being someone else the imaginer needs to ascribe at least some qualitative property to the target individual for the imaginative project to get off the ground. Finally, the concept of empathy is used to illustrate the analysis provided, and the imagining oneself being someone else is in turn used to cast light on what is to be understood as genuine empathy.

Keywords: philosophy of mind; imagination; empathy; simulation theory; other minds; understanding

1. Background

Imagination is a fascinating feature of our mental life. We can imagine many things, even what is clearly physically impossible. It is probably also an uncontroversial truth that much of our imagining revolves around ourselves in some sense. One kind of imagining we often engage in is *imagining being someone else,* for instance in daydreams, attempts at understanding one another, or when reflecting upon a fictional character. But as Walton notes in his *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, even imagining of this kind seems to involve ourselves. And it seems acceptable to say that it comes natural to most of us to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, if only for a while. But what does

imagining being someone else really consist in? This article will attempt to make that clear, elucidating the importance of two things: the nature and presence of the imaginer's own perspective or the imaginer's self, and the distinction between the self and the target individual one imagines oneself being.

I will proceed from the assumption that an assertion like "I imagine that I am Napoleon" can be understood in at least two distinct ways:

(*A*) I imagine myself in Napoleon's situation (or some situation I assume Napoleon to have been in).

(*B*) I imagine myself *being* Napoleon.

Let us stipulate that there is a real difference between *A*-type and *B*-type cases. They are both exercises of the imagination that make sense and that we meaningfully engage in. The nature of case *A* is comparatively easy to understand. In essence, it seems to be an imagining about myself and my own behaviour in a (as of yet, at least) non-actual situation. In the case of *B*, on the other hand, some identity-relation seems to be implied, carrying with it several complications. This article will argue that a distinction between the two types of cases can and should be maintained, and since the proposed analyses of *B* in the literature so far are found to be at least partly inadequate with respect to their treatment of the imaginer's own perspective, I will suggest a candidate view.

But first, some clarifications and notes on the boundaries of the claims in this paper. It should be noted that the argument will not proceed on an ontological level but rather on a conceptual one. I will set aside the intricate puzzles of personal identity over time, and the ontological difficulties of objects and their properties, and for now just assume that there are distinct and self-identical objects and persons in the real world such as cats, horses, Napoleon, and Saul Kripke, and also that we can think of and meaningfully refer to fictional objects and persons such as unicorns, Patrick Bateman, and Prince Myshkin. What actually holds true for such entities and the relations between them is not my present concern; instead the paper will be occupied with what we *imagine* and how we conceptualise these entities in relation to ourselves when we imagine being them. Also, some basic things about the self-consciousness of agents and their ability to refer to themselves on a conceptual level will be presupposed.

1.1. Other accounts

Other philosophers have discussed the notion of imagining oneself being someone else, and among them we find accounts by Bernard Williams (1973), Kendall Walton (1990) and François Recanati (2007). Despite their respective virtues, they are all found wanting. Basically, what they lack is an adequate acknowledgement of the role of the imagining subject's self in the account of

what it is to imagine oneself being someone else.

But how to evaluate such an account? Well, if we look at the case of "I imagine myself being Napoleon" and ask ourselves what is going on, it is at least *prima facie* likely that the imaginer's self figures in the imagining somehow. Similarly, it is *prima face* likely that if the imaginer's self figures in the imagining, it does so in relation to the imagined target individual. On the surface, we have the self, the target, and a relation between the two. So there are two questions to be asked of each account: (1)What is the role of the imaginer's self in the imagined situation?; (2) What is the imagined relation between the imaginer's self and the target?. In addition to this, one must, in our present context, also ask: (3) Is the distinction between *A* and *B* maintained?

These questions need answering, and my claim is that in answering (1), one must make proper room for the imaginer's self in the imagining, and therefore also coherently give an account of the relation asked for in (2). The importance of answering (2) properly will gradually become evident below in sections 2 to 4, but it is also crucial in that it enables one to maintain a genuine distinction between *A* and *B* imaginings. Reasons for keeping them apart, and thus preferring an account answering (3) in the affirmative, is given mainly in sections 5 and 6, but additional support is provided by research in social psychology and cognitive neuroscience (e.g. Stotland 1969; Batson, Early & Salvarani 1997; Ruby & Decety 2003; Decety & Grèzes 2006; Decety 2011). The same research also supports the need for a clearly represented distinction between self and other in imaginings like these, as an overlap would result in confusion, over-identification and personal distress (Decety & Grèzes 2006: 12; Decety 2011: 73), providing a clue to what a good answer to (2) may look like. Let us now see how our three accounts fare with respect to (1)-(3).

Now, all three seem motivated by the trouble with answering (2). The trouble arises from the joint assumption that one cannot imagine the metaphysically impossible, and that it is metaphysically impossible that the empirical me could be identical with Napoleon. From this it seemingly must follow that there is something fishy about the statement "I imagine myself being Napoleon". Either 'myself' cannot refer to the imaginer's empirical self, or the statement must be translatable into one that does not involve an identity claim between the imaginer's self and Napoleon.

Williams argues that the 'myself' in the statement "I imagine myself being Napoleon" is really redundant. Such an imagining does not concern the imaginer herself, and the whole phenomenon is more appropriately expressed as an instance of 'imagining being Napoleon' where 'being' is understood as something like 'playing the role of' (Williams 1973: 42-5). Recanati

largely agrees with Williams in a 2007 lecture on the subject[1], and provides the following helpful terminology: Although there seem to be three components to imagining oneself being someone else – the subject doing the imagining (the imaginer), the person imagined to be Napoleon (imaginee) and lastly, Napoleon – we should discard the imaginee in our analysis since it only gives rise to confusion. In other words, Williams dismisses question (1) and so hopes to evade the problems that arise in (2).

On this view, our imagining does not concern ourselves, it concerns only Napoleon, and there is no question of any identity claim between imaginee and Napoleon: "It is as unproblematic that I can imagine being Napoleon as that Charles Boyer could act the rôle of Napoleon" (Williams 1973: 45). He arrives at this conclusion by the following reasoning: imagining the empirical me with all of my properties to be Napoleon with all of his properties involves an overwhelming number of contradictions and does not seem possible. So if the empirical me is not what 'myself' refers to here, we have "the only apparent alternative: that this 'I' is a Cartesian one" (44). What would then be the difference between this world *TW*, and an imagined possible world *PW* "which contained a Napoleon exactly the same as the Napoleon that our world contained, except that he would have been me" (42)? The only intelligible additional thing I ascribe to Napoleon in *PW* seems to be a Cartesian centre of consciousness and as Williams says: that, the real Napoleon has already. So there seems in fact to be no difference.

However, Williams' conclusion does not have to be the one drawn from the analysis of the difference between *TW* and *PW*. There are various reasons for this, but most clearly we can say that something is missing – in the act of imagining I do not ascribe just any Cartesian centre of consciousness to Napoleon: I ascribe *my* centre of consciousness, and this is *not* the centre of consciousness that Napoleon already has in *TW*. Examples of the potency of this intuition abound and emerge from various exercises of imagination: that there might have existed a person with all my actual properties that still was not me, that *I* could have existed having a completely different set of properties, our conviction that our personal identity stays intact over loss and gain of properties, that love is an attitude we have towards a particular person, which would be affected if our beloved was substituted by an exact copy, etc.

So, motivated by the impossibility of numerical identity between empirical self and Napoleon, and the (incorrectly) supposed interchangeability between the "attenuated I's" that were proposed to replace them, Williams puts forward his suggestion that *B* imaginings are really something like mental role-playing. Although the account indeed evades the metaphysical

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[1] It should be noted that Recanati's text proceeds on a more technical and linguistically interested level than does Williams' and Walton's.

impossibility problem, I will argue that by disregarding the importance of the imaginer's self in the imagining, it ultimately cannot distinguish between *A* and *B* imaginings.

First of all, it is questionable whether it is at all possible to engage in role-playing without at least a minimal awareness that *oneself* is playing someone that she is not[2]. Without such an awareness, it seems we are dealing with some kind of delusion or temporary breakdown of personality (cf. Decety & Grèzes 2006: 12), and that is neither what I nor Williams are after. This means that in trying to avoid one allegedly impossible kind of imagining Williams comes up with another equally impossible one. Even if it *was* possible, mental role-playing of this kind is not enough to characterise imagining oneself being another. In shouldering the role of Hamlet for a play, I need to learn the lines, say what Hamlet says, move like Hamlet moves etc. My theatre performance might be a lot more convincing if I take the time and effort to effectively *imagine myself being Hamlet*, but this I need not do. I could just go through the motions. It may be that my playing the role of Hamlet greatly benefits another person's imagining that she is Ophelia, or the audience's imagining that they are witnessing a certain conversation in a castle in Denmark etc., but this has little to do with *my* imagining that *I* am Hamlet. Summing up, Williams' suggestion originally seemed to be able to distinguish *A* from *B*, but his analysis turns out to be conceptually untenable with respect to (1) in particular, and at best it describes *A* rather than *B* imaginings.

Walton on the other hand keeps the imaginee, indeed he has to since he also puts forward the claim that *all* imagining is necessarily and essentially *de se* – about the imaginer herself[3] (1990: 28-9). Thus he needs to answer (2), i.e. provide an account of the relation between self and target individual. In contrast to Williams, Walton does not immediately rule out that the imagined relation between imaginee and target is one of identity, but recognises that many authors have found it offensive since it seems metaphysically impossible. He therefore suggests that the self that is involved in imagining that one is Napoleon could be something like a "bare Cartesian I", or at least need not be a very "rich or full one" (31). Indeed it is so bare that it can be included only in virtue of imaginings always being *de se*: When I imagine that I am Napoleon fighting the battle of Waterloo, no representation of myself need figure *explicitly* in my thoughts, nor do I normally *believe* that I am Napoleon in these cases – but this is still always in some sense a case of imagining myself fighting the battle of Waterloo. I need not pick out myself as the object of my imaginings – this is already given by the essential *de se* nature of imagination. This is Walton's answer to (1).

Walton avoids the overwhelming number of contradictions involved in imagining the

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[2] I am very grateful to the anonymous referee who pointed this out to me.
[3] To be distinguished from *de re* imaginings about oneself that are not essentially about oneself and do not, as *de se* imaginings do, involve a first-person mode of presentation only available to the subject herself.

empirical self being identical with Napoleon, but if he wishes to claim that my "attenuated I" is imagined to be identical with Napoleon's, he seems to encounter Williams' complaint: if Cartesian selves are interchangeable then there is no difference between the real world and the one which I imagine.

Taking stock: Walton, unlike Williams, actually answers (1) since the self is present on his account. He could also be said to answer (3) in the affirmative since the self involved is so stripped down in *B* imaginings, and thus they differ from *A* imaginings in this. However, his answer to (2) seems incoherent since he suggests an imagined *identity* between the "attenuated I"s of the self and the target, and thus falls prey to Williams' complaint. While Walton keeps the imaginee, he strips her too severely of all properties in order to fit her into the account. Indeed, Cartesian solutions are in general riddled with problems and previously rejected by many, see for instance Shoemaker (1968) and Anscombe (1975). However, it keeps popping up, and this is probably because it does preserve the above mentioned strong intuition that there is a unique *thisness* to each of us, that is not dependent on any one of our qualitative properties. The grains of truth in that intuition we will return to later.

Turning finally to Recanati, his account is based on and develops that of Williams, and suggests that we rid ourselves of the imaginee, and so avoid the problematic (2) by dismissing (1). He explicitly rejects the claim that all imagining is essentially *de se* and coins the term quasi-*de se* for cases when what one imagines is to be ascribed to someone else rather than to the subject herself. He contrasts imagination with memory in this respect: *actual* memory is always and essentially, even if the content of the memory is selfless, one's own memory. Although we can have "quasi-memories" that are in fact not our own but presented to us as if they were, these are not actually memories. (Recanati 2007: 17). Imaginings, like memories, typically involve a first-person mode of presentation. Due to this, and to the general fact about imagination that it seems immune to error through misidentification since no external factors are involved in the determination of who or what an imagining is about, one might think, like Walton, that imagination works like genuine memories. But that is a mistake according to Recanati.

> I do not self-ascribe, in the pretence mode, the property of being in a situation such that the
> state of affairs in question holds. *Napoleon*, rather than myself, is the person to whom the
> imagined property is ascribed (2007: 20)

This is a genuine imagining, but it is quasi-*de se*. It might well be that Recanati is right in claiming that not all imagination is essentially *de se*, i.e. that what is imagined need not in all cases essentially concern the imaginer. But I claim, pace Recanati, that *the specific cases of imagining considered here* (the imagining oneself being someone else) *needs to do so.*

All three authors seem to hold that some kind of Cartesian self is the only possible answer

to (1). But on Williams' and Recanati's accounts, the Cartesian selves are conceived of as too thin to do any work anyway, they are considered to be notions of interchangeable viewpoints – everyone has one but we could swap and no one would know the difference. So this answer to (1) makes trouble in answering (2), and is therefore dismissed. But as Walton stresses, there is always *a* point of view involved, and this viewpoint is *mine,* and occupies the imaginee-position. But the "attenuated I" involved in my imagining that I am Napoleon is essentially and necessarily different from the real Napoleon's "attenuated I" that was involved when *he* imagined that he was someone else, say, Maria Walewska. The experience he had then is presumably different from the experience *I* have if I imagine myself to be Maria Walewska. So even if Cartesian selves in some sense are the right answer to (1), they need not be like the Cartesian selves Williams and Recanati have in mind. And there is no *identity* imagined between my self and Napoleon's, pace Walton.

As for the question of what 'myself' *refers* to in general if it refers at all, it is not our present concern. But whether or not one wants to re-write or translate the statement "I imagine myself being Napoleon" into something else in one's favourite theory of reference, I hold that when analysing the concept of imagining oneself being someone else we cannot disregard the importance of the imaginer's self. My own candidate view, which I will begin to sketch out in the next section, aims to not only include the imaginer's self in the analysis of what it is to imagine oneself being someone else, but also to elucidate its role and importance. Thus, my suggested account will proceed in a manner where motivation and explanation mutually support each other and form a coherent and, hopefully, plausible picture. And if I was pressed to provide a translation of "I imagine myself being Napoleon" that implied what the important sense of 'myself' is in my account, it would be something like "I imagine my point of view being Napoleon's point of view", so that the use of 'myself' recognises and implies, to quote Frege, that "everyone is presented to himself in a particular and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else" (1918/1967: 25-6).

2. Why would I imagine being Napoleon?

To see why a different account with more emphasis on the imagining subject's self is needed, it is useful to ask: why would one engage in the activity of imagining oneself being someone else? Of course, this can 'happen' to us, as in a dream when it can be dramatically vivid to me that I am a certain other person. But when willingly engaging in daydreams, or even better: when trying to understand why people around us, people we read about in the paper, fictional characters, behave like they do in situations they find themselves in, there is a much more deliberate element to

imagining oneself being someone else. I believe this part of our mental life cannot be understated – it is so much more widespread an activity than simply sitting down and telling oneself "Now, I shall pretend that I am prince Myshkin". One sets out on what Williams appropriately calls an "imaginative project", with a goal or purpose. That purpose can be more or less articulated, and of a more or less serious variety, of course, but it can perhaps be broadly characterised as attempting to reach further understanding.

First of all: For an individual to imagine herself being someone else – if that phenomenon is to be understood in a meaningful way – she must recognise at least a distinction between herself and the target individual she imagines herself to be. This is a rather minimal claim about the concept, that was touched upon in association with Williams' and Walton's accounts. It also explains, in a better way than the elimination of the imaginee suggested by Williams and Recanati does, why the imagining is not of an identity relation. In other words, it makes an informative and intelligible answer to (2) possible. The distinction is not only an important constituent of the concept but in a way also its nucleus. If the subject did not recognise a difference between herself and the target individual, why would she imagine herself being someone else at all?

So the subject must recognise that there is a difference. What difference? Well, since the operation is one of imagination it is not enough to say that she recognises that she and Napoleon, or she and her friend, are *in fact* numerically distinct particulars, because she could just as coherently imagine being a purely fictional individual. Neither can it be that there is an identity relation that we know is *merely imagined* – that would amount to what Leibniz is supposed to have said on the subject, namely that he replied to someone who expressed the wish that he was the King of China, that all this person wanted then was that he should cease to exist and that there should be a King in China.

The imaginer must, it seems, recognise that there is a difference in *what it is like* to be her and what it is like to be the target individual. The particularity that matters lies in the unique point of view of every particular individual, and what is needed is that she recognises that *she and the target individual have different perspectives* in virtue of being different particular individuals. This also seems to be the most plausible motivation for even undertaking such an imaginative project. To imagine oneself being someone else, or to imagine having someone else's perspective, to imagine oneself experiencing what someone else experiences *from their point of view* rather than from one's own, must be motivated by a desire at some level to enrich one's own perspective with that of another individual.

Now we can also see why the imaginer's self is indispensable in the analysis of imagining oneself being someone else. In order to actually attempt to acquire understanding of another's

perspective, she must relate another's perspective to her own in terms of e.g. resemblance and difference. It should now be even clearer how aspects (1) The role of the imaginee/self; and (2) The imagined relation between imaginee/self and target, are important to accounts of imagining oneself being another that needs satisfactory answers, and why (1) should be answered rather than dismissed.

3. The role of the self and its importance

One of the most useful modern theories of understanding available is the Simulation Theory, which, very simply put, holds that the proper way of understanding another agent is to in some sense put oneself in her shoes by feeding our own mental system with imagined beliefs and desires that we ascribe to the target individual, and see what it is like or what "comes out" of it. Folk-psychology may also play an active role for the output here. For an early version of simulation theory see Robert Gordon (1986). Karsten Stueber characterises this simulation process as what he calls an empathic reenactment (e.g. 2008, 2011), where the reenactment is of the target individual's beliefs, together with certain folk-psychological generalisations. In one of his papers Stueber provides a rough schema of the three phases of empathic reenactment:

> (i) The "matching phase" in which the simulator tries to match the perspective of the other person by feeding his own mind with pretend-beliefs and pretend-desires. Equally important, the simulator needs to quarantine those of his own beliefs, desires and normative commitments from the simulation process that he knows he does not share with the other person.
> (ii) The "simulation phase" in which the simulator uses his own cognitive process off-line or in the imaginative mode by thinking about the world from the perspective of the other person as adopted in phase (i).
> (iii) The "attribution phase" in which, after having stopped imaginatively entertaining the other person's perspective, the simulator uses the knowledge gained in phase (ii) to interpret the other person's actions in folk psychological terms. (2011: 169-170)

> It is clear that the simulator's, or the imaginer's, perspective must be centrally involved in such a process. Even if her own beliefs are "quarantined" they are very much present since the imaginer simultaneously must be aware that these are *not* shared with the person she imagines to be[4]. Of course, we aim in some way to reconstruct the position of the other and put ourselves in it. But we do not, indeed

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[4] Of course, in various cases some, and even many, of the beliefs, desires, normative commitments etc. can be shared. This depends on how alike we are the person we empathise with, and typically we find it easier to empathise with those people who are like ourselves in many respects, see for instance references cited in notes 23-25 in Coplan (2011:55).

cannot, completely disregard ourselves. By productively putting our own beliefs into play, we can see how the other's beliefs with which we are currently feeding our own mental system differ from or resemble them. Thus, again we can see that a simple role playing account is not sufficient and (1) cannot be dismissed: While the own perspective is in the background, it is still very much there "in dialogue" with the target individual's perspective.

Indeed, it seems odd that we as imaginers should not be involved in the imagining, if an understanding is what we want to reach when we engage in imagining ourselves being someone else. It is hard to see any other motivation for undertaking the imaginative project. If the imaginer's own perspective was not involved in the imagining, then every aspect of imagining to be Napoleon, say, being crowned, would seem the same to every imaginer. Presumably they do not, even if they all had the same information about the crowning of Napoleon, from, say, the same history textbook. This is because what I, lacking a better expression, call dialogues of perspectives – perhaps borrowing Hans-Georg Gadamer's term "fusion of horizons" could also give the right feel for what is at the heart of this – are case-specific, and highly dependent on both subject and target individual. What the imaginer brings of herself into the imagining will matter for the result.

4. The role of the self and its qualities

A related approach to emphasising why the self matters when imagining oneself being someone else, is to point out that what the imaginer ascribes to the target individual of her imagining is dependent on her own beliefs about the target individual and what properties she ascribes to her. By acknowledging this, it will also again be clear why the self that Walton wants in his answer to (1) is too austere to do any work.

> To imagine being Napoleon it is not even necessary that one imagines having experiences of kinds one believes Napoleon to have had. I might imagine being Napoleon and landing on the moon, without thinking that Napoleon did land on the moon, and without being crowned or doing or experiencing anything else I think Napoleon actually did or experienced. There is, to be sure, the question of what makes it Napoleon whom I imagine being. But the answer does not lie in the descriptive content of the imagining, in what I imagine doing or experiencing (Walton 1990: 33-4).

So, at first glance it seems I need not involve any of my own properties – apart from what Walton calls my "attenuated" or "bare Cartesian" I – nor any properties I believe Napoleon to have had, in my imagining. I can effortlessly and unmysteriously go on producing imaginings

about myself and about Napoleon or anybody else I wish to, and there will be no doubt about whom my imaginings are about. Now, this is not entirely true. It is probably true that I can coherently imagine being Napoleon and landing on the moon rather than being crowned or doing anything else that I think Napoleon actually did. But as Kripke has famously pointed out, the problem (or simplicity, in many cases) of referring to an individual is not the same question as that of which qualitative properties an individual has.

> [T]his table is wooden, brown, in the room, etc. It has all these properties and is not a thing without properties, behind them; but it should not therefore be identified with the set, or 'bundle' of its properties, nor with the subset of its essential properties. Don't ask: how can I identify this table in another possible world, except by its properties? I have the table in my hands, I can point to it, and when I ask whether *it* might have been in another room, I am talking, by definition, about *it* (Kripke 1972: 52-3).

This illustrates well how *thisness* is a crucial feature of our conception of individual persons and objects – it is in most ways fantastically unproblematic to decide to talk about a certain entity, regardless of its properties. There is no problem of identifying either myself or Napoleon in my imagining myself being Napoleon.

However, the point I want to make is that *to reach an understanding of another person I need to have some qualitative properties ascribed to her*. I need at least something – beliefs, desires, circumstances or normative commitments – to feed the process with, to entertain even the faintest thought of what it is like to be that person. These need obviously not be her *actual* properties, as I may ascribe the "wrong" properties to her (and presumably fail to reach an understanding of her) without failing to imagine *her*. What is important is that for my imaginative project, however small or short-lived it might be, to get off the ground at all, I need to associate some perspective or point of view with the target, so that I can imagine to take it on. And, I argue, while my referring to an individual is in itself non-qualitative, my concept of this individual and her particularity in virtue of her perspective, is shaped by what qualitative properties I ascribe to her.

This is a very natural way to think about and understand attitudes and reasoning in ourselves and others. Intuitively, I think most of us would concede that had one's childhood contained some trauma that it in fact did not, one's perspective on various aspects of the world would be very different. Similarly, it is a natural part of our conception of rationality that different attitudes and different information give rise to different beliefs and different behaviour. We conceive of our own perspective as dependent on our own qualitative properties in one way or another – had we had other experiences and properties, we probably would have had a very

11

different qualitative outlook on the world, although we can still talk about this as us, as *our* perspective. In other words: while particularity and properties can be intelligibly distinguished between, we do not understand them as independent of each other.[5]

And this is why Walton's "attenuated I" does not work: it assumes no connection at all between qualitative properties and particularity in the concept of an individual.

5. *A* and *B* revisited

What with all the attention directed at the imaginer's own point of view, it might be a worry that the initial distinction between *A* (imagining oneself in another's situation) and *B* (imagining oneself being someone else) is in danger, and that my own account answers (3) negatively. This is not so, which I will now argue. First of all, putting oneself in another's situation as in *A* is not in any sense a meeting of the imaginer's perspective and the alien one, it is just to imagine oneself having experiences one does not have. Probably I will learn something about myself. But in the case of *B* I am not primarily gaining further understanding of myself, rather (if successful) I gain an understanding of another person and her perspective. Consider the following: taking the pilot's seat in an aircraft simulator can teach you some facts about piloting an aircraft and let you gain further understanding of how you yourself feel in certain situations, probably also some enhanced capacity for understanding how others feel when piloting an aircraft or engaging in similar activities. However this is not the same as imagining oneself being a specific pilot of some aircraft. Only through ascribing the person and the situation certain properties, and imagining that they are yours, can *you* learn what it is like for *that person*.

Secondly, if there was no difference between *A* and *B,* the idea of thus gaining understanding of another would become a victim of the difficulty of analogically inferring anything about another mind from my knowledge of my own mind. But in the case of *B* I do not use myself qua myself to learn what it is like to be in a certain situation, I have to involve my knowledge of the person I imagine being, and make room for the differences between us. Indeed, as noted above, they seem to be part of the very motivation for undertaking the endeavour of imagining being another.

Stueber, whose version of the simulation theory appeared above, does not (as far as I know) make an articulated distinction between *A* and *B*. But Stueber is certainly aware of the threat from the critique against analogical inferences. Indirectly he acknowledges the importance of upholding a balanced awareness of the difference between self and other in noting two

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[5] Again, I stress that I am not making any substantial metaphysical claims. My business presently only concerns conceptions, as that seems to be what matters in analysing imagination. What is important here is the particularity and non-reducibility of our self or point of view to the set of our properties, in an explanatory and conceptual sense.

separate dangers with simulation: projectionism and nonprojectionism, i.e. to assume the other is too much like oneself, and to assume the other is more *unlike* oneself than is actually the case when for instance interpreting agents from a culture alien to the subject (2006: 204-11). I suggest that a closer look at, for instance, the first of the three phases of reenactive empathy, would benefit in clarity from assuming a distinction between *A* and *B* imagining and a less obscure notion of what the actual imaginative effort involved consists in.

A simulation theorist might suggest that the difference between *A* and *B* is one not in kind but in degree, with *A* and *B* as the two end points on a continuum. But I think it would ultimately be a misunderstanding to construe it thus, if the extreme on the one side of the continuum is supposed to be a "full fledged" B imagining where one really "becomes" the target individual, and the other extreme is imagining where one just puts oneself in another's situation. It is important to see that there is always some (more or less complex and enduring) situation with respect to which one imagines being another, and it is doubtful if one can ever "become" another in *every* way. How much is demanded of the imaginer in terms of pretend-beliefs and property ascription may vary depending on a number of factors, such as the complexity of the situation or the differences between imaginer and target. In that sense one could perhaps talk of some continuum. But the important difference between *A* and *B* imagining lies not *essentially* in how much is demanded of the imaginer to succeed, but in the deliberate effort to engage with another perspective. *B* imagining may *in fact* normally be more demanding, but it is the conscious self-other distinction that really cuts the deal. This connects to the importance of answering (1) and (2) properly. In addition, it has been argued by researchers in cognitive neuroscience that while there are similarities on a neural level between *A* and *B* imagining, there are also important differences. Certain areas in the brain, particularly the right inferior parietal cortex, is activated in *B* cases but not in *A* cases, for instance (Ruby & Decety 2001, 2003; Decety & Grezes 2006).

Distinguishing properly between self-oriented and other-oriented perspective taking is, I believe, vital in defending a simulation theory against the complaint about analogical inferences. Gordon touches on something similar when he, in response to the analogy complaint argues that when we simulate another's mental states, we are *not* first imagining being in a certain situation ourselves, and then transferring the mental states that result from this pretending from ourselves to the other. Instead, the simulator "transforms" himself into the target for the purpose of the simulation – he "re-centers his egocentrical map"– and the mental states that result are *already* the target's supposed mental states (Gordon 1995: 55-6)[6].

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[6] However, Gordon does not, in my opinion, sufficiently recognise the role of the self as he claims there is indeed no comparison between self and other involved and the subject's self is "out of the picture altogether" in the context of simulation (1995:56)

Peter Goldie also makes a distinction between two types of imagination similar to mine, which further supports the importance of doing so. However, he has a different agenda, as he subsequently argues that imagining of type *B,* or perspective-shifting as he calls it, is conceptually incoherent: "Essentially, empathetic perspective-shifting is conceptually unable to operate with the appropriately *full-blooded notion of first-personal agency* that is involved in deliberation" (2011: 303). Goldie makes a few different complaints that all stem from the same idea, namely that there is a first-person perspective to each specific agency that another person by definition never can succeed in adopting, because each attitude or mental state of an agent is formed against the background of the whole experience of being *that* agent. And even if it was not conceptually impossible, there are insurmountable practical difficulties: a simulator will always end up with a fundamentally distorted perspective that is in a sense too self-conscious, since the simulation would proceed from certain assumptions about the target's character – assumptions one does not make about one's own character, as one is merely governed by it.

Goldie is probably right that it is not conceptually coherent to assume that one can *fully* "become" another agent. We are likely to always be somewhat stuck within ourselves. But full identification is not necessary, nor is it what we are after, in imagining being someone else. This is evident if we again consider what the point is of adopting another's perspective, as well as taking into account the points made by Decety & Grèzes (2006: 12) and Decety (2011: 73) about over-identification typically leading to confusion and personal distress. Goldie seems very focused on *prediction* as the purpose of imagining oneself being someone else – can I accurately predict what someone else will do in a given situation by imagining being that person in that situation? Goldie's answer is no: that method is at best completely unreliable and at worst conceptually impossible.

Of course, one can imagine being someone else when one wishes to predict attitudes or behaviour of another person. Indeed it is important that we do so, for instance if we wish to avoid speaking or acting in ways that are hurtful or confusing to another. However, it is more fruitful to talk of perspective taking in terms of understanding. We imagine ourselves being someone else in seeking to *understand* behaviour and attitudes of others. Motivations for it can vary, we can of course wish to predict, but we can also do it out of simple curiosity with the intent to widen our own perspective, or from a wish to adjust our conduct or judgement towards a certain person. To make a dead-certain prediction, I might need to "become" the target in a way that is not possible, as Goldie argues, but to *understand* the horizon from which a decision is made is not impossible, although it can certainly be demanding.

Furthermore, I do not think that the ascription of properties distorts the perspective in the

way Goldie argues it does. It is wrongheaded to suppose that when I am trying to understand what it is like to be a kind person in a certain situation, I cannot do that if I am an unkind person myself. A kind person does things not because they ascribe kindness to themselves and infer that they hence should act in a certain way, but as a result of being disposed to act kindly, Goldie correctly points out. But when I imagine being a kind person, I am not just, as he suggests, ascribing kindness to the perspective I am adopting and trying to act accordingly, but imagining what it is like to *want to* do kind things, *to be governed* to some extent by such a disposition. We all know from a first-person perspective what it is like to be governed by certain urges or disposed to act in certain ways. For similar reasons, neither do I think that the general obstacles to adopting the perspective of another are as insurmountable as Goldie implies. We all know what it is like to be irrational, akratic, indecisive or confused about our own feelings, or to be faced with a personal decision that we will have to live with for the rest of our lives. It is not impossible to imagine being any of those things for different reasons, as a result of different drives or in different situations.

Related to the question of how difficult it is to succeed in adopting another perspective, another difference between *A* and B can be brought out. To imagine *A* seems to demand less of the imaginer – in some sense (hopefully!) one knows oneself and can speculate on how one would act in a certain counterfactual situation. To speculate along the lines of *B* is different – it requires more information about the person one is to imagine being in order to get the imaginative project off the ground, and a mental co-running of perspectives alongside each other. It lies in our nature to often assume other people to be more like ourselves and hold more of the same information as we do than is actually the case[7]. This presumably often shines through in our *attempts* to understand each other, and when we evaluate what is the proper way to act and react in other people's situations. For instance, using a quite trivial example: You say to a friend that 'If I were you, I would go to the bank tomorrow instead', when she tells you that she intends to go this afternoon. You say this because *you* know that the bank is closed today. You put *yourself* (who holds the information that the bank is closed today but open tomorrow) in the situation of your friend (who needs to go to the bank as soon as possible). This is a case of *A* imagining. Imagining along the lines of *B* would be a more promising way of trying to understand her and really see things from *her* point of view. From her point of view, you believe that the bank is open today and that you need to go there as soon as possible, hence you *would* go there today *if you were her*.[8]

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[7] For sample references see Coplan (2011: 55)

[8] Of course, expressions like "if I were you I would…" are normally used to implicate that we are giving the other person advice on how to act, based on the information that we hold which we presume the other person to presently

6. Empathy proper and the Imagining oneself being someone else

Finally, I will look at the concept of empathy, which nicely brings out the main points of my suggested elucidation of imagining oneself being someone else. There is more than one conceptualisation of empathy around, but I adhere to an approach similar to the ones suggested by Nancy Snow (2000) and Amy Coplan (2011). On these accounts, something like *B* is at the nucleus of the empathy concept. Coplan argues that empathy is to be "conceptualised as a complex, imaginative process through which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation" (2011: 40).

Again, a clear self-other distinction is central: For my sadness to be genuinely empathic, my sadness must be a sadness about what makes X sad, and I must be sad because X is sad – that is, something about X must be what elicits sadness in me (cf. Snow 2000: 67). This presupposes the ability to distinguish at least at some level[9] between oneself and the target individual, and this is also brought out by the phenomenological difference: in the case of sympathy or low-level processes like emotional contagion, the sadness is phenomenologically *mine* in the first place, whereas in the case of empathy I feel bad from another person's point of view (cf. Batson et al.: 1997). This does not mean that my own perspective is lost or inactive, quite to the contrary it is again present as a backdrop and as the perspective that attempts to, and if successful, ultimately gains an understanding of the other agent. The expression "feeling bad *with*" hints at this co-running of perspectives.

Although the terminology is not always used in the philosophical literature on empathy, it is common to distinguish between affective empathy and cognitive empathy. Under the first term fall cases of unconscious, low-level processes that are outside-in directional, such as emotional contagion, mirroring effects etc. Hoffman (e.g. 2000: 30) also includes cases where the emotional

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lack. I am merely using the literal meaning of the familiar expression here to illuminate the difference between *A* and *B* and how common it is to assume other people to know much of what we know in assessing their behaviour and rationality.

[9] There are different opinions on what level of self-reflection is required for genuine empathy. Snow (2000) suggests that it is sufficient that a subject understands that another is feeling an emotion, and that she feels something similar because of the other's feeling of that emotion. The subject does not then need to have the second-order understanding that she is feeling what she is feeling because of the other's feeling of that emotion. Having that further understanding is, according to Snow, not necessary for genuine empathy but the mark of a "cognitively sophisticated empathiser". I am not entirely convinced that Snow is right in this, but I agree and appreciate that it is difficult to empirically determine whether a subject possesses an understanding of another person's having an emotion, and perhaps even more difficult to decide whether a subject possesses an understanding that the trigger of one's owns emotions is the fact that someone else is feeling something similar towards the same fact. Whether Snow is right or wrong in her definition here, this need not affect my suggestion that the activity of imagining oneself being someone else is central to empathy. Although I do prefer a more cognitively demanding definition of empathy, I do not need to make any explicit claims about the second-order understanding of imagining oneself being someone else – it can be compatible with Snow's definition above: The imagining myself being you (this need not be a deliberate and fully self-conscious activity, but can be triggered by just considering or witnessing your situation) can be seen as figuring out why you are sad, e.g. you as a person and your specific relation to the fact that a certain person is dead.

states of the subject match the situation the other is in more than they match the subject's own situation, but do not necessarily have to match the actual emotional state of the other. Cognitive empathy is instead inside-out directional, beginning with beliefs rather than with an emotional reaction, and relying on imagination. Coplan wants to exclude the low-level processes from the empathy concept[10], but also characterises two different types of cognitive empathy: pseudo-empathy and empathy proper. Coplan's pseudo-empathy, or "self-oriented perspective taking" (2011: 53-7), is in fact more or less co-extensional with what I group together under *A*.

> What is pseudo-empathy? I use this term to refer to an attempt to adopt a target individual's perspective by imagining how we ourselves would think, feel, and desire if we were in the target individual's position. It is, essentially, a type of self-oriented perspective taking. We use our own selves and our responses to various simulated or imagined scenarios as a way to gain access to or understand another person's situated psychological states (2011: 54).

In support of this distinction, Coplan points out that pseudo-empathy, as opposed to empathy proper, typically leads to phenomena like errors in prediction, false consensus effects, and personal distress, which are ultimately failures to properly understand and empathise with the target individual (2011:57). Empathy proper, on the other hand, involves *B* imagining, and this is one way in which my distinction can be useful in the empathy debate.

The importance of ascribing qualitative properties to the target individual one is to imagine oneself being, mentioned in section 4, can also shed light on the empathy debate and provide support for a conceptualisation of empathy as primarily cognitive rather than affective. Snow notes that "emotions are composites of belief and affect … some types of emotion … are, by and large, qualitatively indistinguishable from each other, unless reference is made to the belief that partially constitute each type of emotion" (2000: 69). Coplan (2011: 58) similarly remarks that for genuine empathy to be possible, at least some knowledge of the target is required. The mark of genuine empathy and understanding of another's perspective is appropriate beliefs about the other and her situation, and the process starts with *imagining oneself being someone else* in the sense of *B*. A serious case of imagining oneself being someone else makes for a successful attempt to empathise.

7. Conclusions

I have examined three extant accounts in the philosophical literature dealing with what it is to

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[10] Without belittling the importance of the other forms of responses to other agents' behaviour, of course. The distinction is argued for conceptually as well as from multiple sources citing empirical evidence from social neurological research showing how different parts of the brain are active in the different types of response. See Coplan 2011 for sources. See also Goldman (2011) who discusses similar issues but keeps the term empathy for the lot while distinguishing between high-level/low-level empathy. See also Miller (2011) and his three "different kinds of empathy".

imagine oneself being someone else, and concluded that they are found wanting due to their lack of attention devoted to the presence of the imaginer's own perspective in the imagining. In effect, they fail to uphold a clear distinction between A and B types of imagining. Keeping the self as a central part of imagining oneself being someone else is important because *the distinction* between the subject's and the target individual's perspective and the recognition of this distinction, is essential both to the motivation behind and the result of such an imaginative project. I have argued that our conception of the perspective or point of view of a person is dependent on the properties we ascribe to that person.

While emphasising the role of the imaginer's perspective, I have also noted that it is vital to distinguish between *imagining oneself being someone else* and *imagining oneself in another's situation*. The importance of distinguishing between the two types of imagining is further supported by showing how such a distinction can illuminate the debate over how we are to understand and define genuine empathy and successful simulation of another's thoughts, as well as by various findings in social psychology and cognitive neuroscience[11].

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