

Putting the Image Back in Imagination

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ABSTRACT: Despite their intuitive appeal and a long philosophical history, imagery-based accounts of the imagination have fallen into disfavor in contemporary discussions. The philosophical pressure to reject such accounts seems to derive from two distinct sources. First, the fact that mental images have proved difficult to accommodate within a scientific conception of mind has led to numerous attempts to explain away their existence, and this in turn has led to attempts to explain the phenomenon of imagining without reference to such ontologically dubious entities as mental images. Second, even those philosophers who accept mental images in their ontology have worried about what seem to be fairly obvious examples of imaginings that occur without imagery. In this paper, I aim to relieve both these points of philosophical pressure and, in the process, develop a new imagery-based account of the imagination: *the imagery model*.

Strangely, the image seems to have disappeared from recent philosophical discussions of the imagination. Departing from a tradition that dates back at least to Aristotle, many philosophers in the second half of this century have minimized the importance of the image – or left it out entirely – in their accounts of the imagination. My goal in what follows is to put the image back in imagination.

I. Why Go Imageless?

To start, it will be useful to consider a standard case of imagining. Suppose that upon reading the latest news about the ongoing presidential scandal, I imagine Bill Clinton in a prison cell. When I imagine this, it seems that I do so by producing an image. Of course, the image isn't *what* I imagine; Bill Clinton is. But, so it seems, it is in virtue of the image that I do so.

Given that an imagery-based account of the imagination seems wholly intuitive, we might naturally wonder why it has fallen into disrepute. The trouble began with the advent of behaviorism in the first half of this century. The behaviorists, who were concerned to overturn the Cartesian conception of mind, viewed the acceptance of mental imagery as a perpetuation of Descartes' "myth." In one attempt to debunk this alleged myth, Gilbert Ryle advanced a behavioristic theory of mind which eliminated mental images entirely. Toward this end, he developed an analysis of the imagination which proceeds entirely without reference to mental images.¹

Behaviorism has long since fallen out of fashion, but there nonetheless remains a general antipathy toward mental images in contemporary philosophy of mind. Perhaps the main source of this antipathy is the difficulty in accommodating mental imagery within a scientific conception of the mind. As a result, philosophers have increasingly attempted to explain away mental images, refusing to countenance them in their mental ontology.

This widespread rejection of mental images at least partly explains the imageless trend in recent accounts of the imagination – if mental images do not exist, then imagining cannot be analyzed in terms of them.² But this is not the only reason for the disappearance of the image from accounts of the imagination. Also problematic for an imagery-based account of the imagination are the numerous examples of mental exercises that we call "imaginings" but yet which seem to involve no imagery whatsoever. What sort of image could be involved in my imagining Bill Clinton having a secret desire to be a rock and roll star, or in my imagining him

¹ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

² For examples of ontologically-motivated theories of imageless imagination, see David Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 291-303; J.M. Shorter, "Imagination," *Mind* 61 (1952), pp. 528-542; and Daniel Dennett, *Content and Consciousness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 132-146.

calculating huge sums in his head? In the face of these sorts of problem cases, even those philosophers who accept the existence of mental images, and who think that many instances of the imagination do involve mental images, have tended to retreat to the claim that imagining can occur without imagery.³

As I will argue, we should make no such retreat. To do so, I start from scratch with a descriptive investigation into the imagination. Importantly, such an investigation suggests that we are unlikely to be able to give an adequate account of the phenomenon of imagining without invoking mental images and, as such, serves to undercut the imageless ontological desiderata. Then, in the second half of this paper, I show that an imagery-based account of the imagination need not fall victim to the sorts of counterexamples mentioned above. Toward this end, I separate the claim that imagery plays an essential role in imagining from several other claims about mental images with which it has increasingly been coupled. Since it is only insofar as these latter claims seem an indispensable part of an imagery-based account that the threat of the above counterexamples arises, the account of imagining that I develop – what I call the *imagery model* – is relieved of the problems that have led philosophers away from the image.

II. Framing the Investigation

As we begin our investigation of the imagination, it is important that we are clear on what is to be investigated. In particular, I want to point out that while there are lots of ordinary language uses of the word “imagine” and its cognates, not all of these correspond to the

³ For examples of this sort of retreat, see Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen & Co., 1974), p. 97, p. 104; Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 13; and Alan White, *The Language of Imagination* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 86-100.

phenomenon in which we are interested. Many of these, I expect, are rather easy to spot. To give a trivial example, someone might respond “Imagine that!” to some surprising piece of news, and yet we would by no means understand this to imply an exercise of the speaker’s imagination, nor would it be properly understood as a command for the listener to do so. In this instance, the word “imagine” functions simply as part of an idiomatic exclamation.

Another common use of the word is to signal supposition or, perhaps more commonly, mistaken supposition. We might say of a high school teacher, “The teacher imagined that her students had done their homework,” and mean simply that she made an incorrect assumption.⁴ Of course, this same statement in a different context might be used to refer to a teacher who attempted to escape the reality of her students’ indolence by exercising her imagination. Context, then, helps to make clear whether the word “imagine” refers to an actual exercise of the imagination, and it should not present much trouble to separate out those which refer merely to an exercise of supposition.⁵

Consider also the following passage from Gilbert Ryle:

There are hosts of widely divergent sorts of behaviour in the conduct of which we should ordinarily and correctly be described as imaginative. The mendacious witness in the witness-box, the inventor thinking of a new machine, the constructor of a romance, the child playing bears, and Henry Irving are all exercising their imaginations; but so, too, are the judge listening to the lies of the witness, the colleague giving his opinion on the new invention, the novel reader, the nurse who refrains from admonishing the ‘bears’ for their subhuman noises,

⁴ For further discussion of this sort of example, see Christopher Peacocke, “Imagination, Experience and Possibility: a Berkeleian View Defended,” in *Essays on Berkeley*, eds., John Foster and Howard Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 20. Also, see Zeno Vendler, *The Matter of Minds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). Vendler there claims that the word “imagine” is sometimes used in such a way that it is “semantically quite similar to *suppose*, *think of*, *guess*, etc. What these contexts call for is an exercise of reasoning: to think of certain possibilities, their consequences, implications and the like.” (p. 61)

⁵ That the word “imagine” can be used to refer to an act of supposition is denied by White 1990, pp. 135-148. This denial accompanies what seems to me an overly strict requirement for the adequacy of a theory of the imagination, namely, that it account for *all* common uses of the word “imagine.”

the dramatic critic, and the theatre-goer.⁶

I take Ryle to be making two distinct claims here: first, that we would judge all of these people to be *imaginative* based on these widely divergent activities, and second, that we would describe the people engaged in these various activities as *exercising their imaginations*. Ryle's first claim is uncontroversial. I would, however, take issue with his second claim. Just as there is a use of the word "imagine" which corresponds merely to an exercise of supposition, and not an exercise of the imagination, there is a use of the word "imaginative" (and perhaps this is even the most common use of the word) which corresponds merely to an exercise of creativity, and not an exercise of the imagination. Our use of the word "imaginative," I am claiming, far outruns our actual use of the imagination.

With this understood, let us return to the example with which we began: my imagining Bill Clinton sitting in a prison cell.⁷ I have picked up a fair amount of information about Clinton over the years, from television, newspapers, and the like. It thus seems clear that he is someone whom I can imagine. But what makes it the case that I do so?

There are two very different aspects to this question. First, there is what we might call the *internal* aspect, which concerns the mental exercise itself, in abstraction from the particular content to be imagined:

⁶ Ryle 1949, p. 256.

⁷ A couple of qualifications are in order about my choice of example. First, there is great variation in *how* we imagine. Though "imagining" is sometimes taken to have a visual connotation, I take it that our imaginative exercises can proceed by any of the five senses. Likewise, I use the word "image" in an expanded sense, so that an image can go by way of any sensory mode. In what follows, I focus almost exclusively on visual imaginings (my imagining of Bill Clinton proceeds visually), but everything I say should carry over to the other sensory modalities of imagining. Second, there is great variation in *what* we imagine. Some imaginings are directed at events, as when I imagine my next dentist appointment; others are directed at experiences, as when I imagine the pain of having a tooth pulled. Still others are directed at objects, as when I imagine the offending tooth, pulled at last. The example I focus on is of this last type (with the object in question a person) but again, everything I say should carry over to the other sorts of imaginings as well.

what makes my imagining Bill Clinton an instance of *imagining* – as opposed to, say, an instance of perceiving, believing, or hallucinating?

In contrast, the *external* aspect concerns the particular content itself:

what makes my imagining Bill Clinton an imagining *about Bill Clinton* – as opposed to another person, or to nothing at all?

By separating these two aspects of the question before us, we are reminded that the success of an imagining cannot be determined solely by – to put it metaphorically – looking inside the imaginer’s head. The external aspect forces our focus outward, by asking what it is for my imagining to be about one person or thing in the world rather than another. But, for our purposes, perhaps the most important reason to separate these two aspects of our question is so that we can consciously set the external aspect aside. Whether mental images belong in an account of the imagination is an issue that must be settled on the internal front.

III. The Three Features of Imagining

The question before us, then, is what makes a given mental exercise an exercise of the imagination? Providing an answer to this question is a notoriously difficult task. One of the reasons for this difficulty is the impossibility of forcing the imagination into any of the categories of a standard taxonomy of mental phenomena. Although imagining shares characteristics with mental acts, mental attitudes, and non-attitudinal mental states, it does not fit squarely into any of these categories. As a result, authors dealing with issues related to the imagination often simply throw up their hands, and rely on our intuitive understanding of what it is to imagine.⁸

⁸ This is the strategy taken, for example, by Stephen Yablo in “Is Conceivability a Guide to Possibility?” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993), pp. 1-42. It is also the strategy taken in Walton 1990. Surveying possible strategies for explaining what it is to imagine, Walton notes that:

It is not easy to see what behavioral criteria might throw light on imagining, or what the relevant functions of a functional account might be. Imagining seems less tractable than more frequently discussed attitudes such as believing, intending, and desiring, as well as emotional states such as being happy or sad or feeling guilty or jealous. (p. 21)

This intuitive understanding of the imagination by no means serves as an *analysis*; our intuitions are simply not that sharp. But, in our effort to provide such an analysis, we can usefully look to intuition to help us gather a sense of what imagining is like. Intuitively, there are three characteristic features of imagining which must be accommodated within any satisfactory account of this phenomenon:

(i) *Directedness*: In imagining X, I direct my imagining at something.

(ii) *Activity*: To imagine X is to do something.

(iii) *Phenomenology*: Imagining X has a qualitative character.

In this section, I will discuss each of these characteristic features in turn. As we will see, the conjunction of these three features leads us very naturally to an imagery-based account of imagining.

(i) *Directedness*

Consider first my belief that Bill Clinton beat Bob Dole in the 1996 Presidential election. This belief is directed at something, namely Clinton. Beliefs in general have this quality, which I call *directedness*. Furthermore, directedness obtains even if the world fails to contain an object at which my belief is directed. So, for example, if I believe that Homer Simpson will be the next president of the United States, my belief has directedness even though there is no such person as Homer Simpson.

Many instances of what we might call *direct object* mental acts and attitudes, share this quality, for example thinking about Bill Clinton, seeking him, and admiring him. In contrast, non-attitudinal mental states typically lack directedness; having a headache, for example, is not

Believing, intending and the like, which Walton here calls “attitudes”, are sometimes referred to as mental states. However, following Walton I reserve the term “mental state” to capture only non-attitudinal states. These include sensations, such as being in pain, and the other emotional states Walton mentions (what are colloquially called “feelings”).

directed at any object. In this respect, imagining is like the direct object mental acts and attitudes: imagining too has directedness. When I imagine, my imagining is directed at something; in the case of my imagining Bill Clinton, my imagining is directed at a person, namely, Clinton. And, just as with belief, an instance of imagining has the quality of directedness even if the world does not contain an object at which the imagining is directed.

One thing I want to stress is that all I mean to be claiming here is that a mental exercise cannot be an imagining unless it is directed in some way. I am not making any claim about the particular direction an imagining takes. The fact that imagining has the feature of directedness concerns the analysis of imagining itself. But the issue of what a particular imagining is directed at – is it Bill Clinton, or someone else? – does not; rather, it belongs on the external front.

(ii) Activity

Once again, let us consider my belief that Bill Clinton beat Bob Dole in the last Presidential election. Even when this belief is occurrent, having the belief is not something that I *do*; it is not an act. In this respect, having a belief contrasts with thinking. Of course, in ordinary language we often use the word “thinks” as synonymous with “believes.” Were I to say “Bill thinks that the better man won,” this might simply report a belief of his. But when I claim that having a belief contrasts with thinking, I intend for “thinking” to refer to a mental operation. So suppose I am at present thinking about Clinton’s presidency, and it now occurs to me that it is a shame that he did not live up to the initial hopes of the liberals. Thinking this thought is clearly an active process; it is something that I *do*.

The same point holds for reasoning, or making a decision. In contrast, as we just saw, mental attitudes, such as believing, and non-attitudinal mental states, such as being happy and being in pain, do not involve any sort of mental activity. I have the belief that Clinton beat

Dole, and I am happy that he did so, but neither of these reports about my mental life describes any mental activity on my part; neither describes anything that I do. In this respect, it seems that imagining is more like thinking than it is like believing or being happy.

To claim that imagining has an active nature does not mean, however, that imagining need be something that I do *intentionally*. As Christopher Peacocke has noted, “it is a common experience for visual or auditory imaginings to come to a thinker wholly unbidden – they may even interrupt his thinking.”⁹ Often after seeing a particularly gruesome murder scene in a horror movie, I keep imagining the murder again and again. In such a case, I usually want the imagining to stop, I might even will myself to stop it, but I typically find myself quite powerless to stop the imagining. Analogously, after awakening to a catchy tune on the radio, the tune often runs through my head for quite awhile; I might even be unable to keep from imagining it, in this way, all day long. Yet even in cases like these, where I neither intend nor want the imagining, the imagining is nonetheless something that I do.

The fact that imagining can occur, and then continue, uninvited is closely related to another fact about imagining: an imaginer can discover to her own surprise that she is imagining. Again, however, this should not be taken to suggest that imagining is not an activity. There are many instances where I might find to my surprise that I am humming a tune aloud, or tapping my foot. Both of these are clearly things that I *do*; my surprise at finding myself humming or tapping simply suggests that my doing it was unintended. This point seems completely uncontroversial in the non-mental sphere, and loses none of its plausibility when we turn to the mental sphere. Just as I might realize to my surprise that I am tapping my foot, I might realize to my surprise that I am once again imagining the gruesome murder from last night’s horror

⁹ Peacocke 1985, p. 26. See also Walton 1990, pp. 13-14.

movie.

Importantly, this second feature of imagining helps us to differentiate it from two mental phenomena to which it is closely-related. First, the active nature of imagination distinguishes it from perceiving, which is passive in nature. This claim about the passivity of perception is not wholly uncontroversial, as there is at least some temptation to push perception in a more active direction. I expect that the temptation springs primarily from the fact that in order for us to perceive, there are certain very general things we must do, e.g. we must open our eyes. Other perceptions might require more complicated activity: moving closer to something, turning on another light, and so on. However, it should be clear that these examples suggest only that perceiving is often *associated* with activity, and not that the activity is itself the perceiving. Another, related, source for the temptation to push perception in a more active direction is the fact that we quite naturally categorize certain sorts of “tracking” activities as perceptual activities. When I visually track the fly that is buzzing around my office, I seem to be doing something. Tracking, I would agree, is an activity. But this does not mean that perceiving is an activity. My point here is just to remind us of the familiar distinction between hearing and listening, or seeing and looking. Sounds and sights bombard me all the time, but I do not attend to all of them. Attending to a particular sound (listening) or to a particular sight (looking), is an active process; it is something that I do. But while attending to what I perceive is something that I *do*, the perceiving itself is not.

Second, the active nature of imagination distinguishes it from hallucinating, which (like perceiving) is passive in nature. The fact that we ordinarily say that someone is *experiencing*, *undergoing*, or *suffering from*, a hallucination suggests that it is something that happens to someone, rather than something that a person does. Furthermore, if we accept that perception is a passive phenomenon, additional support derives from the fact that we frequently describe

someone in the midst of hallucination with words of perception: “The heroin addict is agitated because she is *seeing* bugs on her arms,” or “He is *hearing* voices again,” and so on.

Though the claim about the passivity of hallucination is, on its own, fairly non-problematic, a problem may seem to arise from the fact that we sometimes use the word “imagine” in everyday speech to refer to hallucination. The heroin addict, upon recovering from her drug-induced delirium, might report, “While I was high, I imagined that my arms were crawling with bugs.” It is a mistake, however, to assimilate hallucination to imagination. In the grip of her delirium, Jones would surely describe herself as *seeing* the bugs, and describe the wall itself as covered with bugs. If she switches to the word “imagine” upon recovering, this would most likely indicate that she now realizes she had been mistaken; here, “imagine” is being used to mean “falsely perceive.” In such cases, then, the statement by the heroin addict (and others of this sort) should not be understood to indicate acts of the imagination.¹⁰

(iii) Phenomenology

It is typically non-attitudinal mental states that have a phenomenology. So, for example, there is a “what it is like” to the state of being in pain and to the state of being happy, but not to thinking about Bill Clinton, or believing that he beat Dole, or admiring him for doing so.¹¹

Imagining is active in nature, as we have seen, and is thus not itself a state, but there is nonetheless clearly a phenomenology to imagining.

Generally, when we attribute a phenomenological character to a mental attitude, the

¹⁰ Of course, I do not mean to imply that no one under the influence of heroin or other hallucinogenic drugs can engage in acts of the imagination. Rather, I simply want to stress that the fact that we sometimes refer to hallucinations in terms of the imagination (as is often the case with drug-induced hallucinations) does not entitle us to treat hallucination as a species of imagination.

¹¹ The quoted phrase comes from Thomas Nagel, “What is it Like to be a Bat?” *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974), pp. 435-50.

explanation for this stems from the fact that the occurrence of the mental attitude involves a state with phenomenological character, that is, a sensation. So, for example, consider my belief that a friend of mine often wears a dress that is an ugly shade of orange. When this belief is occurrent, there may well be a sensation of orange, and thereby a qualitative feel, associated with the belief. However, because the belief could be occurrent without the presence of the sensation (and thus without a qualitative feel), the belief does not have its phenomenological character essentially.¹²

At this point, the question naturally arises whether there are any beliefs which do essentially have phenomenological character. Some of our demonstrative beliefs about colors might be thought to provide plausible examples: suppose that, while looking at my friend's dress, I were to have the belief "*That* is an ugly shade of orange." It is hard to see how this belief could be occurrent without involving a state with a qualitative feel, that is, a sensation of orange. What is important to notice, however, is that even if there are some beliefs which essentially have phenomenology, having a phenomenological character is not an essential characteristic of believing. When a belief has a phenomenological character, this does not stem from the fact that it is a belief, but rather, from some fact about the content of the particular belief.

Our primary interest here is not with belief, but the foregoing discussion provides a nice contrast with imagining. Suppose that I were to imagine my friend's orange dress. My imagining clearly has a phenomenology. Moreover, the qualitative feel involved in my imagining is essential to it.¹³ Most importantly, however, there is nothing special about this

¹² We might attribute a phenomenological character to an attitude not only because of its *content* (that is, the involvement of a state with a phenomenological character) but also because of the *way* the attitude is held. There may, for example, be a phenomenological difference between beliefs that we hold hesitantly and those that we hold so strongly we are ready to die for them. Here again, however, the attitude would not have its phenomenological character essentially.

¹³ I use the term "involve" here in a deliberate effort to remain neutral on the issue of whether the qualitative

particular imagining that provided it with its phenomenology. No matter what I imagine, my imagining will involve an experiential aspect. Without such an experiential aspect, a mental exercise is not an act of imagining.

The experiential aspect of imagining is very much like that involved in several other mental activities, including hallucinating, dreaming, and perceiving. In fact, perceiving and imagining are so experientially similar that the former is sometimes mistaken for the latter. One frequently-cited example comes from a psychological experiment conducted by C.W. Perky.¹⁴ Perky placed a number of people in a room, facing a screen, and asked them to imagine various ordinary objects on the screen. The subjects were not aware of the fact that, after they had reported that they were engaged in the requested imagining (of a banana, for example), an image of a banana was lightly projected onto the screen. The projected image was slowly increased in intensity until, eventually, it was visible to any newcomer entering the room, but the subjects in the study never realized that they were seeing an image of a banana. The only differences that the subjects noted in their subjective experiences were changes in the size and the orientation of the banana they had been imagining. In this highly controlled setting at least, seeing was mistaken for visual imagining; presumably, there are also everyday situations where this could occur.

As the experiment suggests, imagining feels like perception from the inside. I want to stress, however, that this is not meant to be a strong claim. Granted, Perky's experiment shows that, in some cases at least, perceiving feels *exactly* like imagining. But the similarity I mean to

state is itself a part of, or instead a necessary accompaniment to, an act of imagining. Settling this issue is not important for our purposes here; whichever way the notion of involvement is spelled out, imagining will still have a phenomenology.

¹⁴ C.W. Perky, "An Experimental Study of Imagination," *American Journal of Psychology* 21 (1910), pp. 422-452.

be claiming between the two phenomena is a much weaker one. Earlier, in our discussion of the active nature of imagining, we noted one important difference between imagining and perceiving. This difference might, in some cases, translate into a difference in our experience. However, as Perky's data suggest, it need not. Moreover, I certainly do not think that in typical cases the experience of imagining something and perceiving that thing are exactly alike. Typically, one's imaginings are considerably less vivid than one's perceptions. But the fact that, most of the time, our imaginings seem to us simply to be pale imitations of our perceptions (or, as Hobbes put it, that imagining is "decaying sense"), does not threaten my claim that imagining feels like perception.¹⁵ Actually, the fact that we might regard imagining as an imitation (albeit pale) of perceiving can be seen to support my claim. An imitation resembles the original in some way. In the case of imagining and perceiving, the resemblance stems from the phenomenology of the experiences.

At this point, I hope to have shown that imagining must be characterized in terms of three features: its directedness, its active nature, and its phenomenological character. In the next section, I will show how an imagery-based account of the imagination can accommodate these three distinctive features of the imagination. Perhaps more importantly, however, I will offer reasons to think that any theory of imageless imagination will offend on at least one of these three fronts, and thus that the conjunction of these three features establishes a strong presumption in favor of an image-based account.

¹⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.D. Macpherson (Hammondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 88. Of course, there may be instances where our imaginings are more vivid than our perceptions; I am thinking in particular of what we usually call "fantasizing."

IV. The Imagery Model

Consider the *essentialist claim*: mental images play an essential role in the imagination. This claim will form the basis of the imagery model, my imagery-based account of imagining. Later, when we turn to the counterexamples which seem to threaten an imagery-based account, I will fill out the imagery model in more detail. But the essentialist claim alone is enough to account for each of the three characteristic features of imagining. In short: (1) The representational aspect of mental images explains the directedness of imagining; (2) The active nature of the imagination derives from the operation of image formation; and (3) The experience of having an image, which has qualitative character, accounts for the phenomenology of imagining. Let me address each of these claims in turn.

The claim that mental images are representational is, I expect, wholly uncontroversial. Although there is considerable controversy in discussions of mental images about *how* they represent, no such controversy attaches to the claim that they do represent. And given that my mental image of Clinton represents him, we have a straightforward explanation for the directedness of my imagining Clinton if imagining proceeds by way of mental imagery.

Taken individually, claims (2) and (3) are both quite plausible. Calling up, or creating, an image seems clearly to be an act, even if it is done unwittingly. As such, image formation could account for the active nature of imagination. Granted, someone might be concerned about (3) as a result of the heated debate in contemporary discussions of the philosophy of mind about the qualitative character of our experience. Accounting for this qualitative character has proved difficult for materialist theories of the mind, and this has led to numerous attempts to explain away the existence of qualia.¹⁶ But once someone has accepted the claim that imagining has a

¹⁶ For one such example, see Daniel Dennett, "Quining Qualia," in *Consciousness in Contemporary Science*, ed., A. Marcel and E. Bisiach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 42-77.

phenomenology, there is no reason to balk at the claim that the experience of having an image can account for it.

Unfortunately, however, despite the individual plausibility of both (2) and (3), a tension might seem to arise from their conjunction. We saw above that the phenomenology of imagining resembles that of perception. It thus seems reasonable to expect that the experience of having an image also accounts for the phenomenology of perception. But if the phenomenology of both imagining and perceiving is supposed to be explained in terms of imagery, and the operation of image formation provides imagination with an active nature, then someone might naturally question why image formation does not likewise provide perception with an active nature.

To resolve this tension, it is useful to consider the motion that a patient's leg makes when the doctor taps his knee to check his reflexes. In this circumstance, the raising of the leg is not something that the patient does but rather something that happens to him. In other circumstances, however, the same leg motion might well be something that he does. He might, for example, try to imitate the reflex action of his leg. At one time a shudder might be an involuntary reflex in response to cold weather; at another, it might be a deliberate action on someone's part to signal someone else to turn up the heat. In short, there are many motions of our bodies that are sometimes things we do, and sometimes things that merely happen to us.

I want to say something analogous about the case of image formation. Granted, it would be artificial to talk of the operation of image formation as a motion of one's body. But the point is that, just like knee jerks and shudders, sometimes the operation of image formation is something an agent does, and sometimes it is something that merely happens to an agent. When we perceive, the formation of images is automatic; it is something that happens to the perceiver. But this alone does not give us any reason to believe that the formation of images is also

automatic in the case of imagination. If the formation of images is something that we do in the case of imagining, as I have suggested that it is, then we have an explanation for the active nature of imagining.

At this point I hope to have shown that an account of imagining based on the essentialist claim nicely accommodates the three features of imagining revealed by our investigation. But now a further question arises: could an imageless account also serve to accommodate these features? Reflection on the resources available to the opponent of the essentialist claim suggests that the answer to this question is ‘no.’ An account of imagining that does not invoke imagery will have considerable difficulty dealing with the conjunction of the three features.

One natural way for the opponent of the essentialist claim to proceed would be to attempt to reduce imagining to some other (imageless) mental state. This was Ryle’s strategy in *The Concept of Mind*, where he offered an analysis of imagining as a species of pretending.¹⁷ There is surely something to be said for the association of imagining with pretending. First of all, the two activities often occur simultaneously. Children at play pretending to be bears – to take one of Ryle’s favorite examples – might well imagine that the sofa pillows are a cave, that the shag rug is grass beneath their hands and knees, and so on. And there are many other examples of this sort. Second of all, there is what we might call “an air of unreality” around both the activity of pretending and the activity of imagining.¹⁸ If someone has *only* pretended to commit adultery, then he has not committed adultery. And similarly, if someone has *only* imagined committing adultery, then he has not committed adultery.

However, though it is true that pretending and imagining have several characteristics in

¹⁷ Ryle 1949, pp. 245-272.

¹⁸ In making this observation, I do not mean to imply that we cannot imagine something that is real, or even something that we know to be real. Cf. White 1990, p. 153.

common, such similarities do not provide sufficient justification for the claim that imagining is a species of pretending. The problem stems from the fact that an analysis of imagining in terms of pretending fails to capture all three of the characteristic features of imagining. Though pretending is active in nature, and though at least some instances of pretending can plausibly be said to have directedness, pretending does not have a phenomenological character. The reduction of imagining to pretending thus fails.

A similar failure confronts the opponent of the essentialist claim if she attempts to reduce imagining to thinking. This sort of reduction would be able to account for both imagining's directedness and its active nature, but it is no more able than the reduction of imagining to pretending to account for the phenomenology of imagining. Though some thoughts (like some beliefs) may have qualitative aspects, any such aspects derive solely from the content of the thought and not from the activity of thinking. In general, the activity of thinking does not have an experiential underside. The opponent of the essentialist claim who attempts to reduce imagining to thinking thus owes us an explanation of why an imageless imagining about Bill Clinton necessarily has a qualitative character. The prospects for any such explanation seem dim.¹⁹

Faced with the difficulty of accounting adequately for imagining when reducing it to a non-phenomenological state, the opponent of the essentialist claim might attempt to reduce imagining to sensation. But now a different problem arises. An analysis of imagining in terms of sensation seems unable to account for both the directedness and the active nature of imagining. Sensations, recall, are neither directed nor active.

It appears, then, that no reductive account of imagining will be adequate. In large part,

¹⁹ Walton, in correspondence, has suggested that perhaps the notion of vivacity could be invoked. But, as he admits, this "doesn't help much."

this follows from something that had already been suggested in the discussion of the preceding section: the characteristic features of imagining make it very difficult to locate imagining in any of the standard categories of mental phenomena. Any theory which attempts to reduce imagining to some other mental state is thus unlikely to be able to account for all three of our characteristic features of imagining *in conjunction*.

Of course, the possibility still remains that some non-reductive account of imagining could be found that does not invoke images. In the abstract, however, it is difficult to see what any such account would look like, and I must confess that I have no definitive argument to rule out the possibility that one could be found. Nonetheless, our reflection on the difficulties which plagued reductive imageless accounts strongly suggests that related difficulties will plague non-reductive imageless accounts as well. Invoking non-imagistic representations will allow a theory to account for imagining's directedness, and possibility for its active nature, though unable to account for its phenomenology. But since it seems that a theory of imagining will have to invoke some sort of mental representation in order to account for imagining's directedness, it is difficult to see how a theory of imagining could succeed without invoking mental imagery.

Given that an imagery-based account adequately captures the three characteristic features of imagining, our reflections on the inadequacy of imageless accounts thus establishes a significant presumption in favor of invoking imagery. In doing so, the discussion should also serve to defuse the ontological motivation for imageless imagination that I laid out at the beginning of this paper. Ontological qualms about mental imagery must be weighed against the adequacy of imageless theories of the imagination. In the absence of an imageless account that is adequate to account for the three characteristic features of imagination, we should be inclined to accept that the desire for an imageless ontology cannot be satisfied.

Note that I am not here making any claims about the merits of ontological concerns about

images. My argument does not presuppose that such ontological worries are ill-founded.²⁰ My intent, rather, has been to show that no matter how difficult it is to accommodate mental imagery within a scientific conception of the mind, it is also difficult to see how we can give an adequate account of imagination without invoking mental imagery. Since we can give an adequate account of imagination once we do invoke mental imagery, the burden of proof falls squarely on the proponent of imageless imagining.

V. The Individuative Claim

Having addressed the ontological motivation for imageless imagination through the descriptive enterprise of the previous two sections, I want now to return to the second motivation I sketched at the start. Here, recall, the resistance to images stems from a purported description of our mental life that comes into tension with an imagery-based account of imagining. When we think about the range of imaginings in which we engage, are there not some that simply cannot consist of imagery? Suppose I imagine Bill Clinton doing budget calculations in his head. It seems that this imagining might be accompanied by a picture of Clinton's face, the way a mug shot might accompany a newspaper article. But it certainly does not seem that there

²⁰ I should note, however, that I do suspect that some of the ontological worries are misguided, deriving from confusion about a recent debate in cognitive science between the pictorialists and the descriptionalists. While pictorialists argue that mental images represent the way that pictures do, descriptionalists argue that mental images represent nonpictorially. The dispute between the descriptionalists and the pictorialists thus concerns the representative *nature* of mental images. Unfortunately, however, the imagery debate is commonly mischaracterized as a debate over the *existence* of mental images. Descriptionalists are often taken to be denying the existence of mental images, whereas pictorialists are often taken to be defending their existence. Evidence for descriptionalism would thus appear to be evidence against mental imagery. But this is clearly a mistake. See, for example, Ned Block's over view of the pictorialism/descriptionalism debate in "Introduction: What is the Issue?" in *Imagery* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1981), pp. 1-18; and Zenon Pylyshyn, "Imagery and Artificial Intelligence," in *Perception and Cognition: Issues in the Foundations of Psychology*, C. Wade Savage, ed. (Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), pp. 19-56. As Pylyshyn, who is a descriptionalist, describes his view: "The point is not that there is no such object as an image, only that an adequate theory of the mental representation involved in imaging will depict it as having a distinctly nonpictorial character." (p. 19) Insofar as the ontological worries about imagery are based on a misunderstanding of the evidence from cognitive science for descriptionalism, such worries are less serious than might otherwise appear.

would have to be such an accompaniment. And even if there were, the image would be just that: a mere *accompaniment* to the imagining.

These examples call into question the essentialist claim. However, as I will argue, the real problem is not with this claim itself but with what I will call the *individuating claim*: that images serve to individuate imaginings. The essentialist claim has been increasingly associated with the individuating claim, so much so that it now seems an indispensable part of an account of the imagination in terms of imagery. My first aim is to disengage these two claims, in an effort to show how the imagery model can accommodate the various examples that have been thought to motivate imageless imagination. Doing so will lead to a discussion of the role of the image, and in the course of this discussion a fuller picture of the imagery model will emerge.

It will be useful to begin with the following passage from Descartes' discussion of the imagination in the *Meditations*:

... if I want to think of a chiliagon, although I understand that it is a figure consisting of a thousand sides just as well as I understand the triangle to be a three-sided figure, I do not in the same way imagine the thousand sides or see them as if they were present before me. . . . But suppose I am dealing with a pentagon: I can of course understand the figure of a pentagon, just as I can the figure of a chiliagon, without the help of the imagination; but I can also imagine a pentagon, by applying the mind's eye to its five sides and the area contained within them. And in doing this I notice quite clearly that imagination requires a peculiar effort of mind which is not required for understanding.²¹

Presumably, what he means by this "peculiar effort of mind" is the effort involved in producing an image. In this way, Descartes sharply distinguishes the act of imagining from the related intellectual act of conceiving (in his terms, the act of understanding). In developing an account of the imagination based on the essentialist claim, one might reject Descartes' account of conceiving, but one must accept the imagistic requirement he places on imagining:

²¹ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, ed., John Cottingham et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 50-1.

Descartes' thesis: If a mental exercise is an exercise of the imagination, then imagery is present.

It is also worth noting explicitly that the essentialist claim alone in no way commits one to the converse of Descartes' thesis. The claim that imagery plays an essential role in imagining is independent of the further claim that whenever imagery is present in a mental exercise, such an exercise counts as an imagining. This further claim is not a part of the imagery model, and thus, my account of imagination should be entirely compatible with the claim that mental exercises other than the imagination involve imagery, perhaps even essentially. This is important, since it would certainly be implausible to deny that we have all sorts of imagistic beliefs and memories, for example, without exercising our imagination. The imagery model views the presence of imagery as necessary, but not sufficient, to make a mental exercise an exercise of the imagination.

As yet, however, the imagery model is incomplete. Having claimed that the image plays an essential role in imagining, we need now to explain what that role is. Perhaps the most likely candidate for this essential role is an individuating one, namely, that the image involved in an imagining is what makes it the type of imagining that it is.²² Descartes seems to have held such a view. The reason he thinks that we cannot imagine a chiliagon is that the image that we produce when we attempt to do so would be no different from the image we would produce when trying to imagine a myriagon, or any other many-sided polygon.²³ Thus, his discussion presupposes that we cannot have two imaginings of different types (i.e. imagining a chiliagon and imagining a myriagon) that involve the same image.

In this way, the essentialist claim seems to commit one to the individuating claim: images

²² Another likely candidate is the claim that the image is the object of the imagining. I will discuss this claim in Section VIII below.

²³ Descartes, p. 50.

serve to individuate imaginings. The appearance of this commitment is unfortunate, however, for it has left imagery-based accounts of imagining susceptible to attack. For example, in *The Language of Imagination*, Alan White takes up the question “does any imagery present play an essential role in the imagination?”²⁴ The following three passages play a critical role in his defense of a negative answer to this question:

One is imagining exactly the same thing when one imagines that, for example, a sailor is scrambling ashore on a desert island, however varied one’s imagery may be.

The imagery of a sailor scrambling ashore could be exactly the same as that of his twin brother crawling backwards into the sea, yet to imagine one of these is quite different from imagining the other.

[T]hough one can easily imagine that one is being chased by ninety-nine tigers and one’s friend kills thirty-three of them, it is difficult to believe that any imagery one has would distinguish this case from that in which one imagined that one was chased by ninety-seven tigers of whom thirty-one were shot by one’s friend.²⁵

According to the individuating claim, an imagining is the type of imagining it is if and only if there is a certain image involved. The first passage from White offers a counterexample to the necessary condition of the individuating claim; he suggests that no particular image is needed to make an imagining the type of imagining it is. The second and third passages offer counterexamples to the sufficient condition of the individuating claim; White suggests that no particular image is enough to make an imagining the type of imagining it is. Having argued in this way against the individuating claim, White takes himself to have argued against the essentialist claim as well.

Examples of the sort White proposes constitute rather decisive evidence that images do not individuate imaginings, and they thus justify White’s rejection of the individuating claim.

²⁴ White 1990, p. 91.

²⁵ White 1990. All three passages are from p. 92, though they do not occur in the order I have listed them.

However, they do not thereby justify his rejection of the essentialist claim, since there is no reason to think that the essentialist claim commits us to the individuating claim. For every token-imagining, imagery is assigned an essential role, but this does not entail that the image must play the role of making that particular imagining the type of imagining it is.

In this regard, the following rough analogy might be useful. Consider one type of voyage: the voyage from Los Angeles to Honolulu. This voyage requires some form of transportation. A train, of course, will not get you there, but it does not matter whether you take a boat or a plane. Similarly, consider one type of imagining: the imagining of Bill Clinton in the act of giving a campaign speech. According to the essentialist claim, this imagining requires that I produce some kind of image. Not just any image will do, of course, for it has to be an image *of* him, and moreover an image of him in the act of giving a campaign speech, but it does not matter whether the image I produce has him dressed in a hard-hat or a tuxedo. The way I go about the imagining might at one time be via an image of him dressed in hard-hat, while another time I might go about it via an image of him dressed in a tuxedo; the images differ, and yet both of these are imaginings of Bill Clinton in the act of giving a campaign speech. But an image, whatever image it is, is the means of making the imagining happen, just as the boat or the plane is the means of making the voyage happen.

The point here is that in assigning imagery an essential role in imagining, we can leave it open what image will play that role in a particular type of imaginative exercise. For any given type of voyage, a variety of means of transportation might be suitable. Similarly, for any given type of imagining, a variety of images might fit the bill.

My analogy to voyages has so far distanced the essentialist claim from the necessary condition of the individuating claim. But we can clearly distance the essentialist claim from the sufficient condition laid down by the individuating claim as well. Just as more than one vehicle

can serve as the means for a single voyage, more than one voyage may require use of the same vehicle. The vehicle used is not sufficient for making the voyage the type it is. This relationship between vehicle and voyage can once again serve as an analogy for the relationship between image and imagining: more than one imagining may require the use of the same image. The image is not sufficient for making the imagining the type it is.²⁶ In this way, my account of imagining will not be susceptible to attack by an attack on the individuating claim; we can assign imagery an essential role in imagining without having the particular image involved be essential for determining the imagining's type. The imagery model, which is committed to the essentialist claim, is not thereby committed to the individuating claim (and is thus not susceptible to attack by an attack on the individuating claim).

This said, I want to note explicitly that my above analogy to voyages and vehicles serves only to establish this negative claim: assigning images an essential role in imagining does not commit the imagery model to the claim that the role is an individuating one. I do not intend this analogy to give rise to a positive claim about what that essential role is. Rather, I will return to this issue in the final section of this paper.

VI. The Alleged Counterexamples

There are two morals to draw from the previous section: first, that two different images might be essentially involved in imaginings of the same type, and second, that two imaginings of different types might essentially involve the same image. It is this second moral that serves to protect the imagery model from the alleged counterexamples that often motivate theories of

²⁶ Bernard Williams' discussion of the relation between what is imagined and what is visualized is suggestive of this sort of treatment of the relation between what is imagined and what is imaged; see "Imagination and the Self," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 26-45.

imageless imagination.

The most plausible counterexamples are cases of predicative object-directed imaginings in which what I predicate of the imagined object seems to be something that cannot be imaged. Recall the examples we saw above: my imagining Bill Clinton having a secret desire to be a rock and roll star, or my imagining Bill Clinton calculating next year's budget in his head.²⁷ Impressed by such cases, which seem to force us to jettison the essentialist claim, philosophers have often adopted alternative analyses of the imagination which minimize the role and importance of the image. These analyses, which I will call *mixed models* of the imagination, vary in degree. Kendall Walton, for example, accepts that some exercises of the imagination "consist partly in having mental images," but claims also that "imagining can occur without imagery."²⁸ Hidé Ishiguru de-emphasizes the image even further. On Ishiguru's view, imagery never plays an essential role in imagining:

mental images are, at most, necessary tools for a *limited number* of people in *certain kinds* of exercise of the imagination and are, for many people, merely psychological accompaniments which occur when they are engaged in imaginative work and not the essence of it.²⁹

On any mixed model of imagining, however, the class of imaginings divides in two: some imaginings involve imagery (and perhaps some even involve imagery essentially), while others involve no imagery at all. So, for example, consider the following two imaginings:

- (1) I imagine Bill Clinton doing budget calculations on paper
- (2) I imagine Bill Clinton doing budget calculations in his head.

²⁷ Walton has suggested examples such as these in correspondence. For other examples of this sort, see White 1990, p. 88.

²⁸ Walton 1990, p. 13.

²⁹ Hidé Ishiguru, "Imagination," in *British Analytical Philosophy*, ed., Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 171.

Though a proponent of the mixed model will accept that mental imagery is involved in the first imagining, she will deny that the second involves any imagery.

Rather than adopt a mixed model of imagining, one might try to defend the imagery model against alleged counterexamples like (2) by relying on a point I made earlier, namely, that not every use of the word “imagine” in ordinary English corresponds to an exercise of the imagination. So, we might accept that there is no imagery involved in the sort of mental exercise described in (2), but then try to deny that this sort of mental exercise should be characterized as an exercise of the imagination. Instead, this mental exercise should be classified under the heading of supposition (what I am really doing is *supposing* that Clinton is doing budget calculations in his head) or the entertainment of a proposition (what I am really doing is *entertaining the proposition* that Clinton is doing budget calculations in his head).

This strategy, however, is unlikely to satisfy the opponent of the imagery model. This opponent might even accept that not every use of the word “imagine” corresponds to an exercise of the imagination. But the examples at issue seem to be legitimate exercises of the imagination. After all, if they were not, then we would be left with a very unnatural schism. Why can we imagine Clinton engaged in budget calculations on paper, when we are unable to imagine him engaged in such calculations in his head?

The suggested line of defense of the imagery model thus seems unpromising. However, this does not mean that the alleged counterexamples force us to adopt the mixed model. Rather, to defend the imagery model, I am inclined to deny the assumption that imagery cannot play an essential role in cases like (2). With respect to (1), the proponent of the mixed model can agree with the proponent of the imagery model that imagery plays a role. Such an imagining involves an image of Clinton, bent over a table, say, his face screwed up in concentration, scribbling numbers on a sheet of paper. This suggests a very natural explanation of how (2) involves

imagery: the image in (2) could be just like my image in (1), only without the scribbling on paper.

One reason that there might be thought to be a problem with (2) is that the proponent of the mixed model has failed to learn one of the morals that we drew from our previous discussion of the individuating claim, namely, that the same image might well be involved in imaginings of different types. When I attempt to imagine Clinton doing budget calculations in his head, since the calculations are internal to Clinton they will not be literally included as part of whatever image I produce. We might put this point by saying that there is no way, in principle, to “read off” from any image of Clinton that he was doing mental budget calculations. Thus, I might use the same image in imagining Clinton mentally calculating something else, say campaign donations, or even in imagining Clinton performing some other draining mental activity, perhaps pondering the political expediency of some proposal. The claim that imaginings are individuated by their imagery supports the view that (2) presents a problem for the imagery model; however, as we have seen in the previous section, this claim is false.

In fact, once we appreciate the force of our rejection of the individuating claim, it seems to me that the threat from alleged counterexamples like (2) all but dissipates. Just as we can imagine Clinton doing mental budget calculations by producing an image of him sitting at a table, face screwed up in concentration, we can just as easily do so by producing an image of him at the curtainless windows of the Oval Office, staring pensively out at the White House lawn. We might even produce an image of him in the shower, shampooing his hair; that is, after all, when some people do their best thinking. In none of these images can we read the mental calculations off the image, and we might thus use these same images in other imaginings as well, but this consequence would be a problem only if the individuating claim were true.

Perhaps, however, an opponent of the imagery model could utilize a slightly different

line of attack in an attempt to show that the imagery model fails to account for imaginings like (2). Such an opponent might just try straightforwardly to deny that I can produce an image of Clinton doing budget calculations in his head. Presumably, such an opponent would cite considerations similar to those we have just reviewed. Because the mental calculation cannot be read off the image, this opponent would deny that the image could count as an image of Clinton doing budget calculations in his head.

More generally, the problem raised here is that of how it is to be determined what an image represents. And in response, what is important to notice is that the same sort of problem arises with respect to (1). The image I form in imagining Clinton's calculations might not include the numbers on the page as part of the image. I might form an image of him bent over a piece of paper, but in which the writing on that piece of paper is obscured. Why shouldn't this be an image of Clinton adding up rising legal costs? Or writing out a list of pros and cons concerning a controversial proposal? We seem to have a problem with (1) which is precisely analogous to the alleged problem with (2). Why should my image count as an image of Clinton doing budget calculations? There is no denying that there is a very real issue here concerning the question of what counts as an image of what. It is not, however, a problem that arises solely in connection with the sorts of cases that the mixed model points to as problematic for the imagery model. Insofar as this is a problem for our version of the imagery model, it is a problem for the mixed model as well.

VII. The Role of the Image

As I have argued in the previous two sections, we can defuse the threat of the alleged counterexamples by detaching the essentialist claim from the individuating claim.

Unfortunately, however, the individuating claim is not the only problematic claim with which

the essentialist claim has been associated. I would like now to discuss what I will call the *object claim*: the image involved in an imagining is the *object* of the imagining. An association with the object claim would leave the imagery model susceptible to attack, but fortunately, we can separate the essentialist claim from the object claim (just as we could separate the essentialist claim from the individuating claim). Our reflection on how to achieve this separation will have two desired effects. First, it will reveal a more promising solution to the problem that both the individuating claim and the object claim tried unsuccessfully to solve, namely, the problem of assigning a role of the image. And second, it will thereby reveal a more complete picture of the imagery model itself.

As G.E. Moore has noted, once one endorses the claim that images are involved in imagining, it is very natural to claim that “these images which we have before our minds, when we imagine things, are *what* we imagine.”³⁰ Zeno Vendler, in his discussion of the imagination, not only attributes the object claim to the proponent of an imagery-based account of imagining, but also suggests that the need to find a object for the imagining is the prime motivation such an account. The argument Vendler sets up goes as follows. In order for me to see an elephant, the actual elephant has to be before me. But in order for me to imagine an elephant, there need be no elephant in the near vicinity. It is thus tempting to treat the imagination on the model of my seeing a *picture* of an elephant, since in this case there also need be no elephant in the near vicinity. When I see a picture of an elephant, I am able to perceive the elephant represented in the picture, but only because I am perceiving the piece of paper on which it is represented. On

³⁰ G.E. Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1953), p. 235. Moore’s way of casting the object claim introduces an ambiguity, since “What”-questions typically may have a variety of possible answers. If I ask someone what she is drawing, her reply might be “a caricature,” or it might also be “Bill Clinton.” The image is supposed to be *what* is imagined in the sense that Bill Clinton is *what* she is drawing, that is, it is the object of her imagining. Moore goes on to argue forcefully against assigning this role to the image; see especially pp. 236-7.

analogy with this, the reason that I am able to see the elephant in imagination is that I am seeing a mental image in which it is represented.³¹

It is in this sort of way that the object claim becomes entrenched in an imagery-based account of the imagination. Unfortunately, however, the object claim embodies a fundamental mistake. If, when one engages in an imaginative exercise, the object of the imagining is an image, then our ordinary imaginative exercises turn out to be quite different from what they seem. When it seems to me that I am imagining Bill Clinton, for example, the object of my imagining is really an image of Clinton. I am unable to imagine Clinton, for he is a man, not an image.

Notice that the problem is not just that Clinton is somehow too “real” a thing to be the object of my imagining. If the object of my imagining is an image, then I am unable to imagine Sherlock Holmes as well. Though the problem of the ontological status of fictional objects is a notoriously difficult one, I take it that however this problem is to be resolved, Sherlock Holmes had better not turn out to be an image (an image, for example, cannot solve mysteries or have a fondness for opium). And so, if an image is the object of my imagining, then Sherlock Holmes is no more capable of being a object of my imagining than is Bill Clinton.

In this way, the object claim is clearly problematic. But the proponent of an imagery-based account of imagining clearly can endorse the claim that imagining essentially involves imagery without thereby acquiring a commitment to the claim that the image is the object of the imagining. Just because the image involved in an imagining is not the object of that imagining does not mean that there is no essential role for that image to play in the imaginative exercise. Reflection on a variety of examples helps to make this point. First, consider the activity of

³¹ Vendler 1984, p. 58.

writing. Words play an essential role in this activity; you cannot write without words. But, when someone writes a biography of Clinton, even though words play an essential role in the activity, they are not the *object* of her activity; they are not what the writing is *about*. I take it that these claims about writing are entirely uncontroversial. Next, consider the activity of painting. Paint plays an essential role in this activity. But, when someone is engaged in the activity of painting Clinton, even though paint plays an essential role in the activity, it is not the *object* of the activity. The painter is not painting paint, she is painting Clinton. Moreover, just as with the activity of writing, these claims about painting are wholly uncontroversial. Thus, claiming that imagery plays an essential role in imagining does not commit us to the claim that the imagery is the object of the imagining.

Because the essentialist claim is logically independent of the object claim, attacks on the former which proceed by attacking the latter are misguided.³² But given this obvious logical independence, one might wonder why the proponents of imagery-based accounts have been saddled with the latter claim. The reason, I expect, is that no other plausible explanation for the role of the image has been forthcoming. The essentialist claim tells us only that images are involved essentially in imagining. But the question remains: What does the image *do* in imagining? For any imagery-based account to be a satisfactory account of imagining, its proponent must answer this question. The object claim, despite all its problems, provided an answer to this question. Thus, while the essentialist claim by no means entails the object claim, the need to assign a role to the image puts a practical pressure on the proponent of the former claim to adopt the latter. The reflections of this section, however, have laid the groundwork for

³² For two examples of such attacks, see Ryle 1954, p. 247 and Vendler 1984, p. 58. Vendler there argues that “An imagined elephant is not a picture-elephant seen with real vision; it is a real elephant perceived in imagination.”

showing how we can remove the pressure. In particular, I want to lift from our discussion of the activity of painting an enticing metaphor: imagery can be thought of as the *paint* of the imagination.³³

This metaphor is, of course, by no means perfect. Even speaking metaphorically, we would not want to characterize the imagination as a canvas to which some mind's hand applies brushstrokes. But this metaphor, imperfect though it may be, helps us to see what the image is doing in an imagining. Suppose I were trying to paint a portrait of Bill Clinton. As we have seen, in such a case, the paint I use would not itself be the object of my activity. Rather, the role the paint plays would be to capture the object of my painting, in this case, Bill Clinton. Similarly, if I were trying to imagine Bill Clinton, the image I use would not itself be the object of my activity. But the role that the image plays is to capture the object of my imagining, in this case, Bill Clinton.

We should also note that categorizing the role of the image in the activity of imagining on analogy of the role of paint in the activity of painting fits nicely with the observations made in Section VI, in our discussion of the individuating claim. Many different sorts of paintings could be painted from the same palette, and the same sort of painting might have been painted with paint from a different palette. Thus, just as a particular image is neither necessary nor sufficient to make an imagining the imagining it is, particular paint is neither necessary nor sufficient to make a painting the painting it is.

As a result of this discussion we now have before us a fuller picture of the imagery model. Like any imagery-based account of imagining, the imagery model centers on the

³³ With this analogy, I do *not* mean to invoke the notion of “mental paint” sometimes used in discussions of qualia, e.g. Ned Block, “Mental Paint and Mental Latex,” in *Philosophical Issues: Perception* (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, 1995).

essentialist claim that the image plays an essential role in imagining. But the imagery model departs from previous incarnations of imagery-based accounts of imagining in its explanation of the role of the image. The fact that the image is assigned neither the role of individuator of the imagining nor the role of object of the imagining, but rather, the role of capturing the object of the imagination, allows the imagery model to escape criticism that is often aimed at imagery-based accounts of imagining.

Since similar criticisms are often aimed at imagery-based accounts of perception (i.e. sense-data theories), the above discussion also has important implications for theories of perception. As I noted in Section III, the phenomenological character of imagination is very much like the phenomenological character of perception. Thus, once we accept the imagery model as our theory of imagination, it seems natural to explore an analogous theory for perception. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to develop such a theory here, the points I have made about the role of imagery in imagination could surely be extended to claims about the role of imagery in perception. An image can be involved in perception, even essentially so, without having to serve as the object of the perception. Rather, the perceptual image, just like the image involved in imagining, could serve to capture the object of the perception. This insight has the potential to allow an imagery-based theory of perception to escape many of the standard objections to sense-data theories.

VIII. Conclusion

Let us return, once more, to the example with which I began: my imagining Bill Clinton in a prison cell. The imagery model aims to explain what makes this mental exercise an act of the imagination. Of course, hard questions still remain. Notably, for example, our picture of the imagery model does not explain why this mental exercise is an imagining as opposed to some

other possible mental exercise that involves imagery essentially. However, insofar as the imagery model is able to explain how mental imagery could be essentially involved in this mental exercise, the goal of this paper has been achieved: we have put the image back in imagination.³⁴

³⁴ Thanks are due to Joseph Almog, Tyler Burge, Andrew Hsu, David Kaplan, Frank Menetrez, Alex Racjzi, and Seana Shiffrin for helpful discussion about the issues raised in this paper.