

A New Dynamism for Philosophy.

Chapter 6.

Imagination.

Key Questions: *What is the imagination? What is a mental image and how is it distinguishable from the perception? Is imagination necessary for perception to take place? Do we imagine the action of a play or the features of a portrait? What is thinking and its relationship with the imagination?*

In one respect at least the central discussion of perception and reality, begun in Chapter One, is wanting, because almost anything that can be perceived in reality can equally well be imagined to be there. This present short chapter will concentrate on the creative and ingenious as an exclusively human dimension to experience, and begin with our fondness for make-believe.

The imagination is often equated with creativity, but philosophical interest tends to focus upon the mental image: trying to define it and distinguish it from the perception. Mental images have an object, such as the face of a friend but, unlike the perception, the friend is not present to flesh out or lend substance to the experience. Considered simply as experiences in the traditional empiricist manner, the two appear difficult to distinguish. We are perhaps used to thinking of the imaginary as less distinct than the perception, but the two experiences can overlap, and the imagination is often more vivid and clear than its perceptual counterpart. Hume suggested that mental images are faint copies or reproductions of perceptions. This seems to suggest that the two might easily become confused, but the fact that they seldom are indicates that a distinction of degree, similar to that between wakefulness and sleep, is not well founded.

A distinction is made more difficult to effect because the imagination seems to interweave with the perception, and lends it depth and richness. The unseen leg of the chair or the hidden sides of the dice are not directly perceived, so the imagination is perhaps called upon to make good the deficit. Perhaps too there is

a distinction between sense experience and perception. The Empiricists certainly thought so. Whether a perception embraces this hidden aspect or whether it is lent by the imagination is a question that separates major schools of philosophy.

The imagination is also an important component of explanations involving the property of representation. Philosophers have long puzzled on how pigments applied to canvas can become a portrait, or the gestures of an impressionist transformed into the impersonation of another person. Philosophers such as Sartre believed that the representational is a central and defining quality of the imagination, and criticised theories that conceive the mental image as a mental object representative of some other object, person or whatever. For Sartre these are theories that leave the relationship of representation unexplained, and any similarities or resemblance they locate presume rather than explain this representative relationship.

Sartre observed that our perceptions reveal new facts or discoveries in an object, whereas mental images seldom furnish new information about anything beyond what we place there. This he turned into a defining attribute of the image, although this is a distinction that can hardly extend to representations such as portraits, photographs and dramatic performances. These can all prove to be useful sources of information. With respect to the mental image, however, the distinction is reinforced with a further observation that our recognition of the object of a mental image does not depend upon a prior comparison with a perceived object. The link between a mental image and its object is direct. The moment I have a mental image of Peter I know the experience to be an image, and an image of Peter to boot, without having to scrutinise the experience or compare its object with the real Peter. These are important attributes of an image, though perhaps they are sufficiently intriguing to require explanations in their own right, rather than furnishing starting points for an explanatory theory of imagination.

The voluntary nature of the imagination also plays an important part in defining the experience. We all have a greater freedom or control over our imagination than we do over our perceptions and sensations. We enjoy sovereignty over the world of fantasy and imagination, but perception brings us into contact with the real

world where our influence is curtailed by circumstance, inhibition or other impediment. We cannot rely on this aspect of the imagination to make a firm distinction however, since many pleasurable perceptions and sensations are freely enjoyed for their own sakes, and some haunting images are difficult to control or suppress.

It is hardly surprising therefore that the complexity of the imagination and its relationship with the perception should prove to be a source of special difficulty for philosophers. At its heart is a paradox that is more easily sidestepped when considering perception. In imagination we have an experience that is real and present, and yet an object that is unreal or absent. In perception the object similarly lies beyond or independent of the experience, but its proximity can readily be appealed to as a focus or cause. We have seen that this presence can disguise the weakness of some philosophies of perception, but no such protection is available for theories of the imagination.

A dynamic theory can offer a new understanding of the imagination and some of the problems it presents. As expected, it moves away from idealist or materialist efforts to explain the imagination in terms of the presence or absence of different types of experience or object. But unlike concept-based theories it has taken the sensible precaution of providing an understanding of a concrete reality in which perception can be anchored, and in opposition to which the imagination can be defined. The imagination, like the perception is principally a type of experience, but one that enables us to depart from reality and the encounters it generates. In perception we direct our faculties towards and into reality, and in imagination we use our creative powers to move away from it, usually with a different purpose in mind.

Inventiveness and creativity are certainly central features of the imagination, but they need not employ mental imagery. The imagination may inspire a sculptor, and if original and well executed, the resulting work will be imaginative. But a sculptor does not need to leave the world of perception whilst working. What is creative, skilled or original in the sculpture is certainly a part of the imaginative process, but not sufficient to define the imagination. A satisfactory theory must embrace the imaginative experience as well.

For a dynamic theory, the defining feature of the imagination is that it moves freely and deliberately in a direction away from reality, and so requires some knowledge of reality as its starting point. Once we begin to lose control of the imagination or are unable to differentiate between the real and the unreal, we start slipping into delusion. The imagination is therefore subordinate to perception, leaving a creature capable only of mental imagery as inconceivable. It can function only as a secondary activity that pulls against and away from a reality acknowledged through perception. Philosophical theories based in experience usually place the perception and the image alongside one another and accord them parity. Dynamism rejects all such theories and sidesteps the problems that have resulted.

In order to explain how the imagination can move away from reality, it will help just to summarise the main features of a dynamic theory of perception. These are that our bodies and the reality beyond comprise an interactive network of energy pulses, and that we use our bodies to impose and pursue our interests there. Experiences represent one form of engagement that results from the attentive interest characteristic of consciousness. In perception the interest is measured and inquisitive, and is directed towards intervening in and influencing the spatial relationships generated within reality. In sensation the engagement is with the body, producing a different type of experience that is incapable of determining spatial influence. Although we need and use our bodies in order both to perceive and have sensations, the engagement we achieve in perception is of a different order from that of the sensation. The perceptual engagement reaches beyond the body by virtue of its agenda and the way in which it is implemented there. Sensation remains constrained within bodily confines.

To reach a dynamic understanding of the imagination, it is necessary to place it in a context supplied by both sensation and perception. A mental image requires a sensation that any of the senses can provide, whether singly or in combination. We tend to give these sensations a location appropriate to the senses with which they are associated, placing imagined music in the ears, for instance, or visual impressions behind the eyes. There is no necessity to do this however, and where images combine contributions from all the senses, that sense of location becomes dissipated. A passage from a novel that is rich in multi-sensory description stimulates imagery that we might locate in the head,

but we are probably equally happy giving it no position at all. If it has a place, it is where we are when having the image. Sophisticated imagery has many of the qualities of the perception, and shares the same range of objects, but it requires a deliberate movement away from perceived reality. Immediately this opens up a gulf that lends its objects no particular place in reality, and puts us at no particular distance from them.

Most of use can produce the sensations necessary for imagery at will. For them to become mental images we need also to nominate their objects, and perhaps locate the time and place of their appearance. The nomination can precede sensation formation, as is usual when we follow a story, for instance, although it is also common for both to take place together. Generating mental images is usually quite a relaxed and casual affair. Often images can lapse imperceptibly into a daydream where they develop their own narrative structure with no conscious effort on our part. All that is necessary to preserve the imaginary experience is that we remain awake and be aware that the content represents a departure from our perceived surroundings. The mental image is thus not an experience placed on an equal footing with the perception. It can only occur within a framework determined by perception, and involves a tacit acknowledgement that its prevailing conditions are suspended and its content no longer applicable.

We can even pretend that a sensation is a perception and conduct a thorough investigation of an imaginary object, scrutinising it from a variety of imagined viewpoints. Yet the experience remains firmly in the domain of the imagination, so long as we recognise that the conditions necessary for the perception to proceed are not being met. Fantasy follows this familiar route and holds little prospect that its objects will be realised in perception.

The mental image cannot be a source of knowledge therefore. Once we engage the imagination we are deliberately working against facts that we know to be true and wandering where the fancy takes us. By its nature the imagination subverts reality. It wilfully proceeds away from it. Nor is it difficult to explain how image and reality are so readily distinguished. Since an image is formed in opposition to perceived reality, it is necessary to have a reasonably clear idea of the state of that reality in order for the imagination to proceed. It involves making a decision to proceed. We can of course stray too far from the well-trodden path of perceptual enquiry. Daydreaming is an instance where we begin

to lose track of our surroundings and become engrossed in the imaginary experience. But as the name suggests, we are well on the way here to the suspension of mental imagery too, and heading towards sleep. The puzzle of how to distinguish perception and image dissolves once we realise that it is we who are responsible for forging that distinction. The beauty of a dynamic theory is that we have more than just the experiences of perception and mental image to examine and compare. We have the world that perception gives us access to as well. We can make mistakes about what we perceive, and in more extreme cases begin to lose our grasp of what is real. But errors in perception do not blur the distinction with the imagination. Persistent error erodes the framework needed for the imagination to proceed, and so gives way to delusion.

Although any meaningful perception will be enriched by an imaginative input, the place of the imagination in basic perceptions is limited. The unseen leg of the chair and the hidden sides of the dice form a part of the perception, but their place there is not indebted to mental imagery. The perception is not a static perspective or snapshot of its object, but a continuous enquiry that will include all the legs and faces if allowed to proceed comprehensively towards a conclusion. For much of the time an exhaustive investigation is not possible or necessary, and we have to make assumptions about what we see and draw conclusions from what we know. The imagination may play a subordinate role here, in stimulating speculation about objects we find puzzling, for instance.

If our explorations are successful we will gain the confidence to include more of the unseen in our perception. The three visible legs, and the three sides of the dice that face us, are indispensable parts of our perceptions of the chair and of the die. But they are nonetheless only parts. They are the visible parts, or are themselves perceived, from limited and fixed perspectives on the main objects. Perception instinctively and confidently ventures beyond these visible or "sensible" parts to include a fuller exploration of its object. Of course it relies heavily upon the memory to maintain its success. Even our perception of a single leg or side of a die extends beyond what is visible in the same fashion, to include the unseen side of the leg for instance. Perceived objects can be built up out of perceived parts, but not out of sensations. If we suspend our inquisitiveness and suppress our inclination to explore, we may be able to make the experience

degenerate towards the merely visible, and into a visual sensation. Screwing up the eyes, and trying to visualise a cube exclusively as an arrangement of two-dimensional shapes, would be one way we could try reducing what is seen to what is sensed. The perception must have some sense experience in order to operate, but is not based upon or built up from arrangements of raw sensations such as these. Perceptions are sensations “with attitude”. A life in which there are no sensations, in which they give way completely to perceptions, is unknown, but is theoretically conceivable.

Perception and image are therefore quite different. Very young children don't have a firm grasp of what is real, and so are unable to engage their imaginations effectively. They can appear in consequence to move effortlessly between the perceived and imagined worlds. This is far less common in adults, though fantasy and self-delusion make interesting exceptions. Being so different we now need to ask how perception and image can share a common object when comparisons and resemblance no longer ensure their convergence there.

The suggestion has been that we are free to nominate the objects of our mental imagery. If I am unable to visualise the front of St. Pancras station, this is due to a creative shortcoming on my part, rather than something objective and attributable to the conditions under which I would perceive the building. The image is a creative departure from the world of perception into a world of my own choosing. I seem to enjoy an unchallenged sovereignty over its objects and their presentation. The constraints normally governing or guiding the perception seem to have no jurisdiction here. They have only as much bearing upon the creation of a mental image as we extend to them.

Although the freedom accorded to the imagination is wide ranging, there are some constraints it must recognise. In one respect the imagination can operate like the some formless and improvisatory painting. If I produce a daubing that is sufficiently expressive and arbitrary, I can pretty well say that it represents anything I want it to. I could call it “Reminiscences of Peter.” No one could contradict me with any authority. But if I become more specific about individual features of the painting and their representation, that freedom is circumscribed. Suppose that I paint or imagine Peter as having red hair, then if it is a fact that he has never had red hair, it may be that I am confusing Peter with his red-haired brother, and so haven't really produced a picture or an image of

Peter at all. The moment we depart from a world of pure fantasy or make believe, and attempt to give some definition to our imagery, access to our imaginary world is extended by degrees to others. So if two people try to produce images of Peter, what they produce may not be two separate images of Peter with separate existences in their respective imaginations. Because we are looking at the experiences dynamically, we can assume that each is having the same image of one and the same Peter unless and until differences are discovered between them. This much is also claimed for the dynamic perception. When there are differences between two images of Peter and the person himself, it also becomes pertinent to contrast him with the image he inspires. So long as the differences are tolerable in terms of the identity of Peter, the images do not diverge from the real person. So we can have different images of Peter, and our images can differ from the real Peter, to a certain extent. Nonetheless we can assume that the image is one of Peter without having to go through a process of comparison and confirmation that the experience-based theories require. The nomination of an experience as an image of Peter normally proceeds unchallenged until it encounters problems.

The relationship between an image and its object is accordingly one that can vary. It is when the image becomes more detailed that a separation between image and object can begin to occur. Just as with the perception, we are inclined to speak of the image as an experience only when our image differs from the reality in significant details or respects. Because of the creative nature of the imagination, this separation is bound to be more frequent with the image rather than the perception. Even so the mention of the imagination on these occasions is often made simply to specify the conditions under which an object or whatever is being experienced. Telling a friend that I am trying to imagine Peter with his beard shaved off conveys the information that I have not yet had the opportunity to perceive him in a shaven state. It says more about the person Peter and my relationship with him than it does about the results of a strict comparison between Peter with the mental imagery I have produced of him. The imagination is also frequently enlisted to cover for speculations, presumptions and expectations.

When images come unannounced or involuntarily, as in a nightmare, the relationship between image and object becomes closer to that of the perception. It is a feature of nightmares that we believe them whilst we are dreaming, and are unable to

conceive them as creative departures from a known reality. Upon awakening we need to reassess their authenticity. This may require moments to reassure ourselves and verify that events supposedly witnessed have no connection with anything happening in reality. Dreams and delusions do not blur the distinction between image and perception, but rather highlight its complexity. A dynamic theory does not equate both to a single form or substance and attempt a distinction of degree. Reality itself is an arena in which creativity, receptivity and susceptibility are some of the variables that help to define experiences as varied as fantasies, hallucinations, nightmares, illusions and daydreams.

It is also mistaken to try to effect too exclusive a separation between image and perception, when so many experiences make abundant use of the imagination, and yet remain firmly rooted in reality. Listening to a story, reading a book, watching a play or looking at a photograph are examples of these, and they make an interesting group. One feature noticeable in them all is a tendency for those experiencing them to remain in large part attentive to some perceived phenomenon. We listen to a storyteller, look at the actors and so on. Theories that polarise perception and image are bound to encounter difficulties with experiences that offer such an absorbing all round experience for the imaginative and observant. Another feature these experiences share is that they can be successful by degrees. Storylines are more or less convincing, and a top actor's performance weighs in more powerfully than a lesser rival's.

These are experiences that can also teach us a great deal. Photographs and works of non-fiction are an important source of knowledge, and theories that equate the experience of studying them to the exercise of the imagination do themselves few favours.

A dynamic approach is able to draw on both perception and imagination to highlight the richness of these experiences. In the first instance the attention is drawn to a perceived object that stimulates the imagination to work in specific directions. The telling of a story is a perceived event that is listened to, and a typical narration will describe a sequence of settings, actions and events. It resembles a description of real events, but it is a deliberate and creative departure from a factual narrative. Clichés such as "Once upon a time" often assist the recognition of a fictional narrative. They give notice to suspend credulity and invite us to deploy creatively the imagination upon the story. The truth of

what we hear is not an issue, as it would be if the teller were bringing news of a recently witnessed event. In listening to a story we acknowledge a boundary to the setting and plot within which verification is not a requirement, and where we the listeners are ruled out as possible participants. We confine our recognition and acknowledgement of the characters and events to the attributes the author gives them, and the significance they hold for each other. So, although we need imagination in order to invent or listen to a good yarn, the experience remains dominated by the perception, and there is no need for mental imagery to provide the imaginary element. This is supplied by the creative direction of a storyline that leaves the listeners behind at the point where the narrative leaves reality. The imagination plays a subordinate role, and may fill out some of the detail of plot or description that the author leaves unspecified.

Stories generate interest on a number of counts. They may illustrate and reflect upon social or psychological issues, challenge pre-conceived ideas, evoke nostalgic feelings, or impress with the acuteness of their observations. We are always interested in other people, in how they perceive the world and each other, in where their aspirations lie, and in how they strive to realise them. Fictional characters may have no actual connections with those of our acquaintance, but the comparison of our own lives with those of perceptively drawn characters from literature is a constant source of fascination. A lack of connections does not rule out the possibility that the lives of real and created characters follow parallel paths. When sufficiently well drawn they may prompt a reappraisal of the directions we have taken. It is not necessary to acknowledge the reality of a novel in order to be persuaded of the truth of a moral position it may promote. In reading it we discover similarities between a fictional world and a real life by examining them separately and comparing them. A thoughtful exposition of a life comparable to our own is enough to provoke a thoughtful response. Our response to a real narrative need make no such separation, but an interest in comparing actual lives is a very common preoccupation, and the fictional narrative serves to extend its range.

Reading is an experience involving the imagination because it can take place at more than one level. Nearly all of us are taught to read by others and begin by reading out loud. Most children rapidly reach a second stage where the process is internalised and we become able to read quietly to ourselves. The way we learn to

think follows a similar pattern. Reading a story is like listening to one, because we are following a perceived representation, this time with our eyes, and usually accompanied by an acoustic mental image of the text being read out loud. Like most others I imagine a voice, usually my own, reading the words out loud. There is also a parallel with thinking here, where thinking quietly to yourself is to imagine that you are thinking out loud. Sometimes more able readers can dispense with the imaginative component of reading, finding themselves able to understand and respond to the words directly as they read. The response is similar to that of a spoken narrative, and may be unmediated by images or sensations. Where this occurs, reading returns to being a form of perception.

Reading is consequently an exercise in perception. I perceive the words directly, printed or written on the page. This dynamic presentation may sound like an innocuous exposition of common sense, but it resists the view that we initially perceive a meaningless arrangement of ink marks on a page, and that a process of reflection or imagination transforms them into significant text. It is therefore at odds with all concept-based philosophy. Locating what is significant is central to the perceptual experience, and understanding language in its written or spoken forms is a sophisticated exercise of this fundamental faculty. The dynamic perspective not only locates significance wherever we seek knowledge, but also roots it firmly in the surroundings where we meet it. So it avoids a fundamental dualism between material objects and the judgements we make about them. We are apt to be misled by examples such as learning to read, where we appear to strive to discover meaning in what confronts us as meaningless, but the challenge of reading is simply that of a new level of significance that spoken language has usually prepared us for. Nor are we alternating between real and imaginary worlds when we try to decipher a piece of poor handwriting. For the most part we are using our powers of perception to approach the text in different ways and from different directions.

Some philosophies have taken perception and imagination to be different types of experience applied to the same range of objects, and others have construed them as similar types of experience applied to different types of object. Both are mistaken insofar as they lend both sets of experience a parity at odds with the unequal roles they play in our daily lives. Mental imagery makes an important contribution to our enjoyment of reading but reading

operates principally at the level of perception, leaving us free to imagine and think about the activity in discussions such as this.

Watching a drama is another experience blending both perception and imagination, and is made more interesting by the fact that it is a shared experience. Many paradoxes also seem to lurk here too. An early scene in "Hamlet" has Hamlet and Horatio standing on a platform before the walls of Elsinor Castle. And yet the characters aren't really there at any performance of the play. If Hamlet or Horatio ever existed, they are certainly long since dead, and are unlikely to have expressed themselves in Elizabethan English. Nor are the walls there either. I would not expect to be able to climb on stage in a performance and find myself in Elsinor. Yet an audience will testify that it is in Elsinor and nowhere else where the action is taking place, and that this scene is indeed set before the walls of Elsinor. To say otherwise is to deny a matter of fact. Later in the scene the ghost of Hamlet's murdered father appears. I have never seen a ghost and don't believe in them, so what should I say about the performance of the ghost? Is it appropriate to remark that I saw no ghost, and that there are no such things as ghosts?

Dynamism allows us to abandon the dualism of perception and image and helps us reach a philosophical understanding of the theatre-going experience. Once again, watching a play is principally a perceptual experience. What we are being asked or expected to do is to respond in a creative and positive way to the instructions, suggestions and encouragements offered by the script, stage directions, performers and scenery. In order for the play to work we have to allow the imagination to work beyond what is presented to perception and in the directions indicated. In watching an effective performance of an actor playing Hamlet, our consciousness doesn't alternate between perceptions of the actor and mental images of the character he creates. We see the actions of one person in the guise of another. Dynamically conceived our perception of a person is a continual process of scrutiny and enquiry, normally limited by position and circumstance. The performance requires us to suspend these inquisitive impulses, and the expectations they arouse, in favour of the created scenario that the actions and setting of the play suggest.

Normally an audience is excluded from the action of a play, and it is unusual for characters to indicate any awareness that they are participating in a drama. Sometimes there is a conspiratorial aside, or tacit acknowledgement is conveyed by an ironic remark.

Prologues address their audience but they too find themselves separated somehow from the performance whilst they do so. Active audience participation doesn't play an important role outside of the pantomime season. Too many asides undermine the separation necessary for effective theatre, and so long as some imaginary distance is preserved, audience members cannot enter the action of the play by walking on stage. As the audience forms no part of the scenario it is witnessing, it remains at no specific distance from it.

Toy with the conventions however and the relationship changes. Set up a scene in which a mountebank addresses and cajoles a theatrical audience with the offer of quack remedies, and the front row is enlisted into the action at a specifiable distance from it. Have the actors perform a play within a play and the some of the company become distanced from the performance in the manner of an audience. The blending of theatrical performance with first person narrative can also appear to create an exception to the conventional actor-audience relationship. An actor who offers a continuous first person running commentary to an audience on the action in which he participates still requires a creative and imaginative response. The drama is still removed from them and would be destroyed were they to form a part of it.

So a dramatic performance needs to generate an imaginary scenario and maintain its separation from perceived reality. We need to make extensive use of our imaginations in order to understand a play, and need to attend closely in perception to the actors' performances. Do we perceive Hamlet on stage? We certainly perceive the actor that plays him, but we are only imagining him playing Hamlet. Given the free and sometimes whimsical direction of the imagination, how do we know that it is Hamlet we are witnessing and a mistake to give him any other name? How is we can see Hamlet on stage when he isn't really there, and no more real than his father's ghost?

A dynamic solution is not threatened here by a polarisation of perception and imagination corresponding to objective and subjective. Concept-based or dualist theories are put in jeopardy by the apprehension that the imagination is subjective, unconstrained and arbitrary, making their version of the collective imaginary experience of play watching seem unconvincing. Their accounts are closer to descriptions of mass hypnosis than the television watching, joke telling or impersonations that we routinely

share. Dynamism recognises no such polarity. There is no incompatibility between statements being true and objective on the one hand, and about imaginary people and events on the other. It is a creative departure from what is real that marks out the imagination, but it is a departure from others that contributes to our subjectivity. A playwright instigated and specified the creative departure that is “Hamlet”, performers realise it, and an audience is witness to the enactment. There is textual evidence for the identity of Hamlet and it is a matter of fact that his mother was Gertrude even though, to all intents and purposes, both are fictional characters. Where the text is unclear, such as on the subject of Hamlet’s sanity, there is scope for legitimate interval discussion.

Plays are consequently a source of learning and scholarship. Hamlet does exist, but only within the confines of a play which an authoritative text lays out for us. The nature of Hamlet’s life and upbringing prior to the action of the play is only briefly alluded to, and this is the limit to what we can say about it. All that is true or false of a fictional character is confined to what can be determined to be true or false of him. A real historical character must have been either left or right handed, but Hamlet is neither. If I am reminded again of concept-based theories here it is because they interpret too literally the Shakespearean remark that all the World’s a stage and all the men and women merely players. Theatre depends upon a real world context to supply the scripts, performers and audience for its output. Concept-based theories seem happy to describe a plot, scenery and performance from the viewpoints of characters in a drama, and suppose this to be a metaphor for Life itself. I am surprised that they haven’t noticed more often just how shaky the scenery sometimes appears!

Since Hamlet does not exist, but is the creation of a playwright and only substantiated through performance it is interesting to ask where his identity lies. When “Hamlet” is performed in two different venues simultaneously, are there in fact two “Hamlets” or is each a portrayal of one definitive “Hamlet”? If an authoritative text does play an indispensable role in defining a character then, so long as similar texts are used, then each performance will be a representation of one and the same “Hamlet.” Only a radical departure from the text, or an innovative reinterpretation of the role would justify the critical verdict that a performance had produced an entirely new “Hamlet.” Similarly, only a historical argument about the authenticity of the original or revised versions of the text could make the issue of the “real” identity of Hamlet worthy of

discussion. The character Hamlet cannot be identified either with that presented by a single strutting performer, nor with an idealised vision that transcends any performance. It consists of the common result reached from any performance or reading of an authentic text of the play.

A final group of examples that seems to blend the real and the imaginary is supplied by photographs, portraits and films. Here again it is the perception that initiates the experience, supplying indications or signs that guide the imagination on to the represented object. The perception on a photographic print is a two dimensional arrangement of forms on a piece of card. Recorded there is a scaled-down and glimpsed perspective of a scene from a fixed standpoint. For the imagination to work it is necessary to concentrate our creative powers on what the camera has provided us, and to produce an enriched experience of a three-dimensional subject. When successful it will contain much of the interest, anticipation and engagement associated with the perception and the variations in perspective it is able to produce. The printed impression is sufficiently clear to be able to guide the imagination to recognise a fixed perspective and imagine a roving one. Yet, no matter how lifelike the image, it scarcely ever creates the illusion of being in the presence of the subject. The image remains static and confined to the card on which it is printed. With an elementary understanding of photography in place it becomes easier to understand how photographs can be a reliable source of information. A camera picks up the light waves emanating from its subject in much the same way as does the eye. To this extent it is unlike portraiture and lacks a creative impetus away from reality that is characteristic of the imaginative enterprise. Creative talents do of course find considerable outlet in photography. Choice of subject, lighting, focus, equipment, and so on all influence an image, and manipulation software now offers a scope for a far greater range of creative options than the chemical development process ever made available. Nonetheless, unless there is reason or evidence to suppose that some sort of tampering has occurred, we are entitled to assume that a photograph is a faithful representation of its subject matter.

Is my mother really in the photograph I am holding? It is of her, and yet there is only a piece of card in my hand. The photograph is the culmination of a sequence of processes that began with a stream of light waves reflecting off her in the direction of the camera. The photographic image is a two dimensional

arrangement of forms that resembles a perception of my mother from a fixed viewpoint. It stimulates the imagination to identify and locate the forms as her features and surroundings. Recognising the image is not a subjective act, as the photograph is of my mother and nobody else. Partly this is because the identification can be made by an objective examination of the card, and partly because of the processes that uniquely link it to her being in her garden when the photo was taken. This understanding is made possible from a dynamic perspective because an image no longer starts out as an internalised experience constricted by its own subjectivity. With photographs the image results from a willingness or susceptibility to generate a mock perception from a number of tokens or clues that are made accessible to perception.

My mother does not exist in the photograph therefore, because it requires an act of imagination to put her there. The photograph has real features that I can feel and touch, such as its glazed surface, but these include neither the subject nor its setting. Because I am only holding an image of my mother, her position and location within it depend upon the imagination. So an onlooker always remains at an indeterminate distance from my mother and the garden shown in the photo. The photograph is an unusual image to consider because it cannot work without stimulating the imagination, and yet can be a reliable source of information. Films operate in a similar way but are able to create not only an impression of movement, but also the illusion of changing viewpoints. The ability to shift a point of view is a hallmark of the perception, but this does not mean that watching a film comes close to perceiving the events depicted there. They remain projected upon a two dimensional screen and shifting one's viewpoint in relation to a screen does not produce the variation necessary to make a sustainable comparison with perception.

If these observations on plays films and so on appear rather obvious, then I am all the happier for that. My hope is that a dynamic interpretation of these cultural experiences does no more than reinforce our common sense views. If there is an excuse for exploring them here it is because it is the philosophers have experienced the difficulties in trying to accommodate them consistently with their pronouncements on experience and reality. The image and the thought have given much trouble to philosophers in the modern era since Descartes. One area of difficulty arises from the fact that they can be removed from public gaze into the secret realm of the mind. Great man though he was,

much philosophy since Descartes has striven urgently to carve out an alternative to his reasonable sounding distinction between mind and body. It is almost as if each succeeding philosophy has set out to define itself in terms of the way in which it opposes or differs from his Dualism. A chronic difficulty for the Cartesian has been a polarisation of mind and body that leaves mental states and events locked into an impenetrable world removed from reality and other minds. In attempting to avoid this Cartesian privacy and all its implications, many of his successors have looked for outward signs or criteria for locating our mental lives in order to secure for them a public dimension. But there is a danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water. Both image and thought can be deeply private experiences and a successful alternative philosophy needs to accommodate them without attracting the objections that have made Cartesianism so vulnerable.

Dynamism is able to accommodate the privacy of experience in much the same way as materialism has done. There is nothing irredeemably private about experiences such as thoughts and mental images. We have to secure their privacy by concealing, suppressing or removing their manifestations from the public arena. No mental event takes place without a large number of events occurring in the brain or elsewhere in the body. The vast majority of these are safe from public gaze for now and some time to come, but many symptoms, like the slightly tremulous voice, the barely perceptible flush, or the distracted gaze betray their origins or causes in thoughts and feelings, and need to be controlled if their privacy is to be protected. Dynamism differs from Materialism in this area because it does not countenance a third person view of our own experiences. Perceptions, sensations and so on arise from a purposeful engagement with events in the body and beyond, with the capacity to modify and adapt its orientation in the quest for success. Such is the hallmark of a consciousness that can supply us with a sense of self.

I have said little in this chapter on thinking beyond linking it to the imagination when we think quietly to ourselves. There are clearly more links between the two as we often use both concepts interchangeably, as when we speculate for instance. But there is also a recognised sense of higher level thinking that goes beyond mere supposition or image contemplation, and into the realms of deduction and judgement. This has been of particular interest in philosophy, and emphatically so for Rationalists, for whom deduction from self-evident premises represented the principal

route to wisdom. Most other philosophy is content to allow much more by way of description into its survey of the Cosmos, but arguments, rebuttals, proofs and inferences remain indispensable tools for a discipline whose subject matter is often defined as thinking itself.

I have found it more appropriate to consider thinking and inference as an adjunct to the chapter on meaning and truth. Sustainable reasoning is perfectly possible from false premises, so the issue is less about truth than validity, the way in which thinking takes us from one position to another. This I have examined briefly in the previous chapter. Thinking isn't always an activity that we must conduct silently in our heads. Contributing to a debate or trying out moves on the board in chess are examples of thinking carried out in the public arena. Nonetheless the question of what does go on inside our heads when we are thinking quietly to ourselves is really the one that fascinates not only philosophers. The thought processes may be the same when we plan how to address the floor, or think through a gambit whilst playing an opponent, but the thoughts occur in private. What is going on then?

A dynamic solution to the problem is to derive private thinking from its more public displays. It is the same thinking activity, but transferred to the imagination. In thinking out a debating ploy, we imagine ourselves speaking. In working out a chess move, we imagine the pieces moving to new positions. The thinking processes are real, but the activities are not. Typically visual imagery or imagined voices accompany and facilitate the thinking process. There are occasions when we are able to dispense with these, as when we practise mental arithmetic, for instance. But if we know the answer to a sum immediately, it is probably because the answer doesn't need thinking about.

It is central to a dynamic position that we perceive significance in the world about us and can learn to respond instinctively and intelligently to complex situations we encounter. The able tennis player is thinking or calculating hard about speed, distance, angle, position and so on as a rally is played, but intelligent play represents a different thinking skill from the thought processes that preoccupy philosophers. The tennis player has no time for reflection.

Similarly when you are reading quietly to yourself, it is likely that you are creating a voice that is reading a text for you in your

imagination. You probably have a little imaginary voice performing for you right now. With practice some readers are able to dispense with this imagined voice and progress to a reading without mental imagery. They perceive the words directly on the printed page. The reading activity belongs in the world of perception but is no less thoughtful for that.

Mental imagery may hamper our effectiveness in thinking. Often it slows us down and distracts us from our surroundings. Nevertheless it is an invaluable resource that enables our thinking to be vastly more ambitious and creative. It doesn't matter, for instance, how thoughtful are the efforts to outwit my dog when I try to corner her in the yard. Her speed and judgement combine in an intelligence that always gives her the edge, and ensures she retains possession of the stick. We share with other animals a similar instinctive intelligence like this, but mental imagery is indispensable to feed the creative vision that designs pyramids writes symphonies or sends astronauts to the Moon.

So thinking and the imagination are not necessarily private mental activities. When they are private the imagination makes creative use of visual, acoustic or other sensations to assist in their performance. Much of our thinking and imagining operates at this level, and indeed a large chunk of our lives consists of activity of this kind. One answer to the question: "What is it like to be a conscious human being?" is to suggest that it ordinarily consists of a sequence of low-key sensations and thoughts. They presently include feelings caused by the chair I am sitting on, some mild emotional activity, and thoughts that focus upon usually mundane matters, illustrated or aided by the imagination. A large part of our waking lives consists of thinking, in which we use the imagination to appraise, plan, and revise our perception of the world, our responses to it and our relationships with others. Stop and observe the internal workings of your own mind for just one moment..... If yours is anything like typical, then the activity is constant and often needs to be suppressed to prevent it becoming a distraction. Consciousness is more often a torrent than a stream. How best we should use the rich resources of imagination and thought to influence the conduct of our lives is the next important question, and this forms the focus for the final chapter.

Summary of Conclusions: The imagination is subordinate to perception. It moves freely and creatively away from what is known to what is non-existent, elsewhere or otherwise inaccessible to perception. Its starting point is the voluntary production of a visual, tactile or other sensation

that is creatively invested with attributes. This disqualifies the mental image as a source of knowledge. The imagination can only work in opposition to what is known in reality. This ensures that perception and imagination are distinct and confusion unlikely. Accordingly imagination only plays a subordinate rather than a constructive role in perception.

Nominating an object usually suffices to identify and locate the object of a mental image, within limits determined by the identity of the person or object imagined.

Involuntary imagery introduces other types of experiences such as dreams or delusions.

Many experiences stimulate the imagination whilst focussing upon perceived objects, for example a spoken narrative. Dynamism conceives reading, play watching, examining a photo and other “representational” experiences principally as sophisticated exercises of perception. These can therefore be a source of knowledge. Although enriched by imagery, mental images are not necessary for these experiences. The dynamic approach can also resolve many of the paradoxes associated with an imagination-led approach to these experiences.

Thoughts are neither public nor private. Thinking can take place in the public as much as the private domain. In private thinking the activity takes place in the imagination.

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