

# THE IMAGE IN MIND

*Theism, Naturalism, and the Imagination*

CHARLES TALIAFERRO  
AND JIL EVANS



# Contents

Acknowledgments.....	vi
List of Images.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 The Turning Image.....	11
Chapter 2 The Aesthetics of Inquiry.....	37
Chapter 3 The Cosmic Question and Emergence: The Trick.....	65
Chapter 4 Seeing into Other Minds.....	107
Chapter 5 The Problem of Theism: Evil.....	149
Chapter 6 The Fitting Imagination.....	179
Bibliography.....	198
Index.....	209

## CHAPTER 1

# The Turning Image

As infinite kinds of almost identical images arise continually from the innumerable atoms and flow out to us from the gods, so we should take the keenest pleasure in turning and bending our mind and reason to grasp these images, in order to understand the nature of these blessed and eternal beings.

Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*

Chariots, caves, cantilevers, branching trees, peacock tails, circuit boards, a single eye, and a massive explosion are not just things and events in the world, but images with distinct aesthetic content. Each of these images constitutes a nexus of meaning, enduring or perishing in scientific, philosophical, and religious practices. Images are not static or absolute, and this is why they are often generative by nature. Images, like metaphors, can enlarge or diminish our potential to create or access greater meaning, just as they can enable a communion of minds. Their openness to interpretation reflects our subjectivity and the values implicit in how we picture the world and ourselves, our goals and desires. In Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*, the soul is pictured as a charioteer driving a chariot with two horses. On the path of enlightenment, our passionate nature, both good and bad, is directed by reason to guide us to the truth. Today we rarely speak of souls, and our passions are no longer tethered to a chariot hastening in celestial flight; our passions are now frequently relegated to "figments" of our imagination while our minds are pictured as a circuit board.

In this chapter we develop a provisional understanding of imagination and images in philosophical inquiry. What is the imagination? What are mental images? After defending an account of imagination and images we argue that both may be used in four ways: forming an image of a state of affairs can be *prima facie* evidence that what it is we are imagining is possible; the imagination and images makes explicit what we know or can come to know on the basis of other beliefs; imagination is indispensable in ethical reflection and philosophical inquiry; and images and imagination enables us to see connections between evidence and challenges to evidence. Imagination itself has undergone a history of changing definitions. Before identifying what we think is the most promising view of imagination, let us consider some background.

## THE MENTAL IMAGE

A commonplace and, until recently, a fairly uncontroversial definition of imagination can be put succinctly: *Imagination is the power to create or form images in the mind*. Or, with a slight modification: *It is the power to create or form mental images*. On this view, “imagination” does not refer to a thing or object or event, but a power possessed by subjects that can either be cultivated or suppressed for good or ill. In the latter part of the twentieth century, this view of imagination was attacked, and in particular, “mental images” were seen as problematic. As Alastair Hannay begins his book *Mental Images: A Defense*, “It would be an exaggeration to say there was a conspiracy against mental images. But ‘campaign’ would not be too strong a word” (Hannay 1971, 19). But before the attack on images began, the controversy was mostly over the scope and power of the imagination.

## SCOUTS AND SPIES RANGING IN A VAGUE FIELD

The early modern philosopher, René Descartes, lamented the ways in which imagination can lead us astray, as did his contemporary Michel de Montaigne who wrote in the essay “Of Idleness” that unfocussed and undisciplined thought can lead us to the “vague field of imagination” (*champ vague des imaginations*). But Descartes also considered imagination indispensable in knowing the world. For Descartes, imagination pertains mostly to the sensible, material world and our reflection on it, as opposed to that which is intelligible but cannot be imaged, e.g. we may have an idea of God but this is not the same as God being imaged, the forming of an image God. He treated “conception” as broader than imagination, taking note of how we may conceive of some things (a figure with a thousand sides) that we are not able to imagine because we lack the power to form the appropriate image. Descartes anticipated the positive role of imagination as an important component in education and personal formation, and he expressed regret over those who neglect the imagination and thereby do not raise their minds “beyond things of the senses” (1996, 6:37).

While Thomas Hobbes and Descartes were opposed on most matters, they overlapped somewhat on imagination. Hobbes, famously, held that “Imagination therefore is nothing but *decaying sense*” picturing imagination as a place where what is sensed goes to decompose (Hobbes 2009, ch. 2). While this may seem grim and altogether disparaging, Hobbes actually held that imagination was pivotal in education, personal formation, and action. It was through imagination that one comes to line up desires and objects of desire: “For the thoughts are to the desires as scouts and spies to range abroad and find the way to the things desired” (Hobbes 2009, ch. 8). It is imagination that enables us to think of what is not present and give direction

to our desires. Hobbes' materialism and mechanical view of nature led him to what he saw as a scientific account of values and politics, an account that relied on individuals using their imagination in accord with rational self-interest.

### EXPLORING THE GOOD, TRUE AND BEAUTIFUL WITH A CANDLE SHINING

The Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century also saw imagination as shaping and re-forming new images and ideas, combining and reconfiguring what we observe through the senses. Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, Benjamin Whichcote, and the other Cambridge Platonists thought that imagination is not entirely under our control and can lead to excess in religion (what was pejoratively called "enthusiasm"), but they believed that our fundamental being was created by an all good God who enables us to have reliable cognitive powers to search out and discover what is essential for human flourishing. Unlike Hobbes, the Cambridge Platonists held that God has created us with an innate idea of the good, an intrinsic or "built in" natural sense and longing for communion with one another and God. The Cambridge Platonists upheld what Thomas Nagel in a provocative essay, "Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament," calls the redemptive role of philosophy. According to Nagel, one of the historical roles of philosophy (going back to Plato) was providing wisdom in relating the self to the greater cosmos. If the Cambridge Platonists were right in their philosophy of human nature, such a cosmic point of view can be redemptive (healing or consoling). A recurring image of Cambridge-Christian Platonists was one used to describe human reason as "the candle of the Lord." In their view, imagination can provide a natural means to make explicit and give shape to ideals that are not immediately observed. In this way, the domain or works of imagination can provide an arena in which to explore the good, the true, and the beautiful, assuming the powers of imagination are exercised in the context of a life of virtue. The Cambridge school of thought inherited Plato's teaching that a virtuous form of life was essential for the love of wisdom (see, for example, Plato's seventh letter). A vicious or mean-spirited or spiteful context can, however, lead the imagination to create (perhaps quite literally) hell. The drama of *Paradise Lost* would have resonated with the Cambridge Platonists. Satan carries hell within him (Milton 2008, book 4.20–21) and then by unleashing his malice (and giving it image or body) he gives rise to or creates hell, thus providing some grounds for agreeing with Satan when he boasts that he "can make a Hell of Heaven." Actually, there is some reason to think the Cambridge Platonists recognized this power of imagination to create hell (or heaven) before Milton. In *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, Ernst Cassirer observes:

That grand and audacious speech which Milton puts in the mouth of Satan: “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” was first enunciated by the modest thinkers of the Cambridge Circle [Platonists]. “Heaven is first a Temper, and then a Place,” said Whichcote. (Cassirer 1970, 32–33)

Descartes, the Cambridge Platonists, and also Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) used imagination philosophically in setting up different pictures of the world to compare and assess. In *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau*, John D. Lyons aptly describes Pascal’s meditations on human finitude as exercises in “cosmic imagination” (Lyons 2005). This seventeenth-century description by Pascal that follows is a prime example of an image of nature:

Let man then contemplate the whole of nature in its high and full majesty, and let him turn his gaze away from the base objects that surround him. Let him look at that brilliant light placed like an eternal lamp to illuminate the universe, and let earth seem to him only as a dot compared to the vast circuit that this star traces, and let him be astounded at the fact that this vast circuit itself is only a fine dot when compared to the circumference embraced by the stars that spin in the firmament. But while our gaze stops there and *imagination* continues beyond, it will wear itself out conceiving forms before nature ceases to supply them. (Pascal in Lyons 2005, 110)

Pascal uses this image to challenge human pretensions to greatness, to increase our sense of vulnerability in a cosmos that stretches beyond both our control and imagination, and to prepare us for a different image: the image of a God of power and judgment that is more awesome and vast than the cosmos God creates and sustains.

For John Locke, the imagination is less reliable than the Cambridge Platonists supposed, partly because Locke did not hold that God had implanted within us innate ideas of virtue and the like. Locke, famously, held that human beings begin life as a blank slate (a *tabula rasa*) rather than with an inchoate schema of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Still, Locke retained the notion that a good Creator bestows our faculties or cognitive powers upon us. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke writes:

Men have Reason to be well satisfied with what God hath thought fit for them, since he has given them . . . Whatsoever is necessary for the Conveniences of Life, and Information of Virtue; and has put within the reach of their Discovery the comfortable Provision for this Life and the Way that leads to a better [life] . . . The Candle that is set up in us shines bright enough for all our Purposes. (Locke 1690, ch. I, §5)

For Locke as for the Cambridge Platonists our faculties do not yield infallible, incorrigible knowledge in all matters of importance, but our faculties

(imagination, when governed by reason and senses) are adequate. In what follows, one may see Locke as a close ally to the Cambridge Platonists, notwithstanding his rejection of innate ideas:

The Discoveries we can make with this, ought to satisfy us. And we shall then use our Understandings right, when we entertain all Objects in that Way and Proportion, that they are suited to our Faculties; and upon those Grounds, they are capable of being propos'd to us; and not peremptorily, or intemperately require Demonstration, and demand Certainty, where Probability only is to be had, and which is sufficient to govern all our Concernments. If we will disbelieve every thing, because we cannot certainly know all things; we shall do much what as wisely as he, who would not use his Legs, but sit still and perish, because he had no Wings to fly. (Locke 1690, ch. I, §5)

While Locke locates the drive to action in terms of the uneasiness of the will, he seems to acknowledge that without being able to exercise imagination in conceiving of different courses of action, there would be no freedom (Locke 1690, ch. XXI, §8).

Locke and Bishop George Berkeley, who followed him, differed on the kinds of images or ideas that we form and entertain. While there are scholarly disagreements in the vicinity, Locke is typically interpreted as holding a theory of meaning that gives a central role to images and he thought there could be abstract images or ideas (e.g. the meaning of “dog” may, in part, be the image of dog), whereas Berkeley attacked the possibility of there being abstract images or ideas. Each image or idea is specific. Still, both agreed that imagination is a power to create and fashion images, at will: “I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. It is no more than willing, and straightaway this or that idea arises in my fancy; and by the same power it is obliterated and makes way for another” (Berkeley 1965, 72).

### **SENSATION AND UNDERSTANDING LEAD TO THE “WHOLE” EXCEPT WHEN THERE IS A DANGEROUS FLIGHT OF IMAGINATION**

In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume envisaged imagination as foundational to human understanding itself. Hume wrote that the human capacity of understanding is itself “the general and more established properties of the imagination” (book I, part IV, sec. VII). On this view, our understanding of the world involves our capacity to form images of what is or is not present. The use of memory may thus involve imagination insofar as one pictures or forms images of what is no longer present. In a wonderful passage, in which the imagination is pictured as a ship, Hume held that the imagination extends and completes our experience of the objects around us.

[T]he imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse . . . Objects have a certain coherence even as they appear to our senses; but this coherence is much greater and more uniform, if we suppose the objects to have a continu'd existence; and as the mind is once in the train of observing an uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as complete as possible. (Hume 1739, book I, part IV, sec. II)

Immanuel Kant sought to extend this high view of the power of the imagination in an elaborate epistemology involving what he called *reproductive imagination* and *productive imagination*. The first is akin to Hume's usage. Arguably, you cannot (strictly speaking) see at any one time a full, dense three-dimensional object; one only sees the object's surface or curvature. Imagination is what enables us perceptually to think of ourselves as perceiving baseballs rather than only being able to claim to perceive the surface of a baseball and infer that there is more to the object than its surface. The productive imagination then works to synthesize our experiences, allowing us to apprehend the world as a unified subject, seeing objects whole or as unities. Kant described this power as "transcendental" insofar as it was an operation that is prior to or it is a foundation for our understanding of the world and ourselves. In her important 1978 book, *Imagination*, Mary Warnock summarizes Kant's position:

Neither understanding alone nor sensation alone can do the work of the imagination, nor can they be conceived to come together without imagination. For neither can construct creatively, nor reproduce images to be brought out and applied to present experience. Only imagination in this sense is creative; only it makes pictures of things. It forms these pictures by taking sense impressions and working on them. Kant calls this activity "apprehension." (Warnock 1978, 31)

Kant and Hume did not think of imagination in opposition to sensing or perceiving, as though if you sense something, a book, for example, you thereby do not imagine the book. Imagination, rather, is essential in our seeing and perceiving whole objects. Moreover, imagination has a vital role in conceiving of one's whole, including one's future, life. In exercising free agency we imagine our lives constituting very different roles we must choose between. Imagination is thereby a condition for agency.

For Hume and Kant, imagination is good insofar as the ability to apprehend, perceive, and understand are valuable powers in their own right or they are put to good use, but although Hume thought the imagination was essential for ethics ("it is on the imagination that pity entirely depends") he did not view the imagination as an intrinsic good (Hume 1739, book II, part II, sec. VII). Hume claimed that "Nothing is more dangerous to reason



than flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers” (Hume 1739, book I, part IV, sec. VII). This negative judgment was countered in the romantic era, however, especially in response to what the romantics saw as an impersonal form of reason that promoted a mechanized, dehumanizing culture and science. So, Samuel Taylor Coleridge defended a high view of imagination, contending that it was an inner power that allows us to feel and it is linked in particular with joy. Coleridge can be seen as recovering or reviving the view of imagination that we find in the Cambridge Platonists and their conviction that we have a God-created constitution that orients us to the good.

### JOY CONNECTS US TO THE WORLD

In continuity with Kant, Coleridge thought there were two types of imagination: *primary imagination* has a role in perception itself, while *secondary imagination* is instrumental in the making of art. In this role, imagination “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create . . . it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead” (Coleridge 1817, 183). Coleridge was not ignorant of the ways in which we can be misled by our imagination, and he referred to the lowest form of the imagination as “fancy” — sometimes not even calling it imagination but a separate faculty. At its best, the imagination involves joy and connects the subject with the world. In “Dejection: An Ode,” Coleridge exults, “We in ourselves rejoice!” (Coleridge 1912, 366) In an earlier work, he expounds:

In looking at the objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering through the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking for, a symbolic language for something within me that already and for ever exists, than observing something new. Even when the latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomena were the dim awakening of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner nature. (Coleridge 1895, 136)

Coleridge is very much in the Cambridge Platonist tradition as he sees imagination enabling us to restore a fitting relationship between the natural world and ourselves. On his view, we are created in order to find, experience, and act in light of a concord between the inner good (our being), and nature and nature’s God (see Douglas Hedley’s *Coleridge, Philosophy, and Religion*).

In early American philosophy, Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of the more vigorous defenders of the imagination and the Cambridge Platonist-Coleridge stance that the imaginative perception of the world can be redemptive. In “The Nature of Beauty,” Emerson writes of the importance of linking our inner and outer senses:

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. (Emerson 1929, 8–9)

While Emerson was closer to pantheism than theism, he both resisted the growing impersonal, mechanistic philosophy of his day and affirmed the goodness of the natural world, as revealed to imaginative, caring perception:

The ancient Greeks called the world *kosmos*, *beauty*. Such is the constitution of all things, or such the plastic power of the human eye, that the primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, give us a delight *in and for themselves*; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion and grouping. This seems partly owing to the eye itself. The eye is the best of artists. By the mutual action of its structure and of the laws of light, perspective is produced, which integrates every mass of objects, of what character soever, into a well colored and shaded globe, so that where the particular objects are mean and unaffecting, the landscape which they compose is round and symmetrical. And as the eye is the best composer, so light is the first of painters. There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful. (Emerson 2009, 20–21)

In Emerson, imaginative perception is the key to realizing the value of nature and the valuable link between nature and the soul.

The conviction that the imagination may be employed in imaging and interpreting the world has its defenders today. Warnock concludes her book, *Imagination*, with this claim: “Imagination is our means of interpreting the world, and it also is our means of forming images in the mind. The images themselves are not separate from our interpretations of the world; they are our way of thinking of the objects in the world. We see the forms in our mind’s eye and we see these very forms in the world. We could not do one of these things if we could not do the other” (Warnock 1978, 194; for a complementary position, see Eva Brann 1991).

As it happens, Charles Darwin embraced such a view of the imagination in *The Descent of Man*:

The imagination is one of the highest prerogatives of man. By this faculty he unites, independently of the will, former images and ideas, and thus creates brilliant and novel results . . . The value of the products of our imagination depends of course on the number, accuracy, and clearness of our impressions; on our judgment and taste in selecting or rejecting the involuntary combinations, and to a certain extent on our power of voluntarily combining them. (Darwin 1874, 44)

Darwin, like Descartes, thought that dreaming employed images, and so he thought that the apparent fact that some nonhuman animals dream is

evidence that some of these animals have the power of imagination.

As suggested at the outset of this survey of views on imagination, a more recent philosophical obstacle to a robust philosophy of imagination has focused on the problem of mental images. The attack on images is so strong, beginning mid-twentieth century, that the prestigious 1967 *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry “Imagination” includes this confident assertion: “Clearly it is inadequate to equate ‘imagination’ with the power to produce images” (Manser 1967, 137).

The movement away from images in accounts of imagination was prompted by at least two related philosophical challenges. Both involve a deep skepticism about our common-sense understanding of our subjective experience as unique and irreducible. One challenge was derived from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s private language argument, and the other was advanced by Gilbert Ryle’s case against dualism. Both philosophers objected to the idea of images as private, mental objects. They both worried that positing mental images set up an artificial veil or barrier between the person and the world. Such a duality or bifurcation sequesters the subject from the world in a kind of subjective prison and invites a malignant form of skepticism. If you only know the “external world” indirectly or as mediated by mental images, how do you know the world is at it appears? Let us briefly consider these two sources of discontent with images.

### PROBLEMS WITH IMAGES

Wittgenstein’s private language has been variously interpreted. On one conventional reading, Wittgenstein held that the use of language requires following rules (of grammar in terms of syntax and semantics). In order to follow these rules, one must be able to tell when the rules are being followed or not. If meaning is acquired by matching words with some inner image that only a speaker has access to, then it will not be possible for the speaker to know that she means the same thing by, say, “green” as another speaker, because it may be that speakers have different inner, private images. Wittgenstein offers this parody of using language in terms of matching words and images:

[T]hink of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked “five red apples”. He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked “apples”; then he looks up the word “red” in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers — I assume that he knows them by heart — up to the word “five” and for each number he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer. — It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words — “But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word ‘red’ and what he is to do with the word ‘five’?” — Well, I assume that he *acts* as I have described. Explanations

come to an end somewhere. — But what is the meaning of the word “five”? — No such thing was in question here, only how the word “five” is used. (Wittgenstein 1953, 2)

Clearly we sometimes define terms ostensively. We may not know what an elephant looks like until we look it up in a book with pictures, but Wittgenstein thought this couldn't be the whole story. He likened the person who embraces private images to a situation in which all persons have their own private box with a beetle inside that only the individual person can see. “No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle” (Wittgenstein 1953, 85). In such conditions, persons would not be able to successfully compare beetles or meanings, and the practice of language would be undermined. In the story of shopping for apples, Wittgenstein signals that meaning needs to be articulated and identified in practices rather than in terms of referring to mental images that are private to each speaker. Private images cannot be subject to second-person inspection. If meaning is bound by such privacy, perhaps that shopkeeper's “red” (what her mental image red is like) is different from the shopper's and neither the shopkeeper nor the shopper really knows what he is talking about.

Wittgenstein's notion of equating meaning with practice is a common-sense explanation for why communication can be successful in a community. But it does not account for the possibility of experiencing new meaning (or values) within a community, or creating and finding meaning in poetry. The hypothesis that someone may mean something different by their color terms because his or her spectrum is different (this imagined thought experiment is sometimes called the *inverted spectrum*) and that this condition may be uncorrectable or undetectable seems altogether coherent. We propose that skepticism about the meaning and structure of language (the possibility that one is systematically mistaken linguistically) is a bona fide possibility. Using the idiom of contemporary film, you might read and be convinced of Wittgenstein's private language argument and yet be in the Matrix. (In the popular 1999 film, *The Matrix*, human beings are in the Matrix, a simulated world that seems real, while in reality their bodies are used as energy sources.) Still, even if we accept that linguistic meaning must be anchored in correctable practices, *it does not follow that persons do not have mental images*. One could always adopt a behaviorist account of linguistic meaning but allow that such an account does not cover *all* mental life. On this view, you might claim that meaning is necessarily defined by behavior (a highly implausible reduction) and thus shared meaning can be established by observation, while all along acknowledging there is more to meaning than behavior. This may have been Wittgenstein's position (see, for example, *Philosophical Investigations* 304). But apart from the details and challenges to the private language argument, Wittgenstein's own work supports our general approach to the imagination, which involves images. Many of Wittgenstein's arguments may largely be seen in terms of images. Consider again the aesthetic properties

of the image of a beetle in a box. Wittgenstein uses the claustrophobic image of a trapped boxed insect to generate an antipathy to the private world of images.

Coleridge developed a different image or metaphor for private images. Coleridge was insightful when he described the power to form images that can link the inner and outer worlds as a “living Power” (in his *Biographia Literaria*, ch. 13). The capacity to create and hold mental images (and by all accounts, most people at least claim to have mental images) is not claustrophobic, but a capacious capacity of our minds to envision and entertain beyond what the senses inform. But whether you side with Wittgenstein or Coleridge on how you describe our imaginative powers, Wittgenstein’s own philosophical methods make ample use of images and their aesthetic dimension. Wittgenstein’s many images are arresting: letting a fly out of a bottle, a lion asking the time, the duck-rabbit, laborers calling out for slabs of material, the human face, a plane overhead, the very idea of a family resemblances, different games, and so on. If this way of proceeding is acceptable (and we find it quite imaginative and creative), then Wittgenstein presents no obstacles to the project of our book, which is the consideration, and comparison of two different images of nature.

In *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle attacks mental images and the traditional portrait of the imagination as involving images. This is necessary for his critique of dualism, the idea that persons are embodied souls or mind. What follows is Ryle’s portrait of the dualism he rejects:

Material objects are situated in a common field, known as “space”, and what happens to one body in one part of space is mechanically connected with what happens to other bodies in other parts of space. But mental happenings occur in insulated fields, known as “minds”, and there is, apart maybe from telepathy no direct causal connection between what happens in one mind and what happens in another. Only through the medium of the public physical world can the mind of one person make a difference to the mind of another. The mind is its own place and in his inner life each of us lives the life of a ghostly Robinson Crusoe. People can see, hear and jolt one another’s bodies, but they are irremediably blind and deaf to the workings of one another’s mind and inoperative upon them.

As thus represented, minds are not merely ghosts harnessed to machines, they are themselves just spectral machines. Though the human body is an engine, it is not quite an ordinary engine, since some of its workings are governed by another engine inside it — this interior governor-engine being one of a very special sort. It is invisible, inaudible and it has no size or weight. It cannot be taken to bits and the laws it obeys are not those known to ordinary engineers. Nothing is known of how it governs the bodily engine. (Ryle 1949, 20)

Ryle considers a host of cases when persons report that they are forming images “in their mind’s eye” or picturing some place or thing.

If a person says that he is picturing his nursery, we are tempted to construe his remark to mean that he is somehow contemplating, not his nursery, but another visible object, namely a picture of his nursery, only not a photograph or an oil-painting, but some counterpart to a photograph, one made of a different kind of stuff. (Ryle 1949, 247)

Ryle's case against this position is to drive home the thesis that when someone claims to picture his or her nursery, there is no picture or thing that is being pictured. Rather, they are in a position that is similar to actually seeing the nursery. "A person picturing his nursery is, in a certain way, like that person seeing his nursery, but the similarity does not consist in his really looking at a real likeness of his nursery, but in his really seeming to see his nursery itself, when he is not really seeing it" (Ryle 1949, 248).

A similar point can be made about Ryle that was made in response to Wittgenstein. Ryle makes ample uses of images in his own arguments. We cited his extraordinary caricature earlier about dualists, who are imaged as utterly bifurcated or splintered; dualists are like a confused, blind and deaf Robinson Crusoe who posits an interior, ghostly field and can only be reached telepathically. Ryle deftly uses such images to draw us into a kind of aesthetic (as well as conceptual) revulsion of dualism. So, the project of this book is actually supported by Ryle's own practice, his use of images to portray worldviews and engage us aesthetically. Ryle offers no reason to dispatch with mental images, construed along dualist lines.

A dualist can fully affirm that in normal, healthy cases of embodiment you are not bifurcated or some odd ghost operating a body in the world that can only be reached directly through psi-phenomena like telepathy. But under traumatic, damaged conditions in which you lost all feelings, emotions, and powers of agency by which to express yourself, you might indeed be like Ryle's ghost. You might actually still have an interior life and no way to express it; if you lost the powers of agency, you would indeed be inaudible and your actual desires might be invisible insofar as you are unable to display them through action or speech. Normally you are spatially embodied and available for touching, seeing, hearing, jolting, and speaking (see Taliaferro 1994 and 2001). Dualists simply maintain that in addition to the physical behavior involved, there is also the embodiment of intentions, desires, thinking, feeling, emoting, and so on.

As for mental images, Ryle seems to concede that (in some sense) a person may picture something not present (the nursery), but by denying the existence of mental images he has removed experientially that in virtue of which we can say that when a person pictures the nursery they seem to be in a position of seeing the nursery. Ryle seems to utterly discount the fact that the person picturing his nursery is having an actual (rather than merely simulated) experience. Moreover, his analysis seems to fly in the face of what — to common sense — seems apparent: exercising the imagination (or thinking imaginatively) is an activity, as is "seeing in one's mind's eye" a nursery or whatever.

Ryle claims: “Seeing and hearing are neither witnessed nor unwitnessed doings, for they are not doings” (Ryle 1949, 267). Seeing and hearing are not activities like painting or lifting weights, but surely they are activities that one may do well or badly. Ryle claims that seeming to hear things in one’s mind does not consist of actual auditions that are loud or quiet. Yet controlling the loudness or quietness of a “seeming” movement in Mozart’s *Serenade in G Major* is exactly what one can do in one’s mind that one cannot do listening in a concert hall. As the philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch observed: “Imagining is *doing*, it is a sort of personal exploring” (Murdoch 1966, 48).

The debate over mental images is considerable (see *Imagery*, edited by Ned Block, and *The Imagery Debate*, edited by Michael Tye). Because this book is in neutral about highly specific views of sensory images (though we are committed to there being images and that these are employed in the imagination to think about the world), we will leave off further work on representational mechanisms and non-imagistic accounts of cognition. Aristotle boldly claimed, “it is impossible even to think without a mental picture” (Aristotle 2007, 450e). Aristotle seems to go too far, but it is important to take seriously the mental pictures we employ when we think, and this will be a major aim in the next chapter. We will, however, clarify one more element in the philosophy of images employed here, and this concerns the way images can function to inform us of reality, and then offer some further points about the use of imagination in reflecting on the value of aesthetic experience.

### MOVING IMAGES

Wittgenstein, Jean Paul Sartre, and Colin McGinn each propose that a study of mental images themselves does not generate new information about the world or disclose its features. If our images are entertained in a fashion in which they are intentionally distinguished from the world itself, there is a sense in which they are right. Wittgenstein writes: “Images tell us nothing, either right or wrong about the external world . . . It is just because forming images is a voluntary activity that it does not instruct us about the external world” (Wittgenstein 1981, 106, sec. 621, 627). In *The Psychology of Imagination*, Jean Paul Sartre writes: “The image teaches nothing: it is organized exactly like the objects which do not produce knowledge, but it is complete at the very moment of its appearance. If I amuse myself by turning over in my mind the image of a cube, if I pretend that I see its different sides, I shall be not further ahead at the close of the process than I was at the beginning. I have learned nothing” (Sartre 1966, 10). Colin McGinn proposes that the reason why images themselves cannot illuminate or broaden our knowledge of reality is because they are subject to our voluntary control. Imagine we “frame an Idea of the Legs, Arms, and Body of a Man, and join to this a Horse’s Head and Neck” (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, book II,

ch. XXXII, 393). This act and image will not help us in determining whether such a creature exists. And the image will be quite responsive to our wills. Imagine you decide that the Lockean creature you have pictured (the Horse-Man) is a vegetarian. When you then further imagine the creature refuses to eat a steak, you did not learn something new about it. After all, you invented it. In this way, seeing objects in the world is a more passive matter (you are not the cause of your sensations) whereas in matters of imagination, you are more in control. “The will has no causal control over what you see and hear” (McGinn 2004, 15).

We have already cited arguments that hold the imagination as indispensable in perception, making perception an active, not passive activity. But we also think that images and the use of images in imagination are important instruments in thinking about the world, and play a vital role in sorting through evidence. Developing such rich images can be cognitively significant in at least four ways: forming an image of a state of affairs can be *prima facie* evidence that what it is we are imagining is possible; the imagination and images make explicit what we know or can come to know on the basis of other beliefs; imagination is indispensable in ethical reflection and philosophical inquiry; and images and imagination enable us to see connections between evidence and challenges to evidence. We now defend and clarify these four claims.

### THE MODAL PRINCIPLE OR WHAT IS POSSIBLE

*Imagination and Possibilia*: David Hume defended a strong claim: “[N]othing we imagine is absolutely impossible” (Hume 1739, book I, part II, sec. II). There may be some truth in this, but Hume’s precept must be qualified. We may imagine (or believe we imagine) some things such as time travel that appear possible but turn out to be impossible (e.g. time is necessarily one-dimensional and irreversible). We suggest, then, a more qualified thesis:

If one can imagine (picture or describe) some states of affairs obtaining, and its obtaining is not ruled out by anything independently known (e.g. the obtaining is not incompatible with the law of noncontradiction, necessary truths about space and time, and so on), then one has *prima facie* reason for believing the state of affairs is possible. (See Taliaferro 1994, 1997, and 2002)

“*Prima facie*” here signals that one may be mistaken. A *prima facie* reason to believe something is a good reason to believe it, even though further inquiry may overwhelm or undermine such reason. The linking of imagination and possibility is sometimes called the modal principle, often used in philosophy. The modal principle has come under attack recently, and so it is important to pause and consider at least one objection.



Peter van Inwagen maintains we should be skeptics about whether the imagination can serve as a reliable guide to learning about what is possible. He says that we may know that some states of affairs are possible, even if they are never actual, through mathematical reasoning and reflection on the meaning of terms. But he argues that we cannot use the imagination in determining whether it is possible God exists or that a person might exist disembodied (e.g. a person survives the death of their body) or that there could be (to use his example) transparent iron or naturally caused purple cows.

Consider those propositions whose truth-values cannot be determined by logic and reflection on the meanings of words or by the applications of mathematical reasoning. Among those, consider those whose truth-values are unknown to us or which are known to be false. If the only way to determine whether a proposition in this category is possible is by attempting to imagine a world we take to verify this proposition, then we should be modal skeptics; while we shall certainly know some propositions of this type to be possible, we shall not be able to know whether the premises of our illustrative possibility arguments are true; and neither shall we be able to know whether it is possible for there to be transparent iron or naturally purple cows. (van Inwagen 1998, 84)

Van Inwagen bases his skepticism on the grounds that in our imagination we lack a clear account of how we might tell what is genuinely possible; we lack the ability to form the precise details of imagining the relevant states of affairs; and it appears that for any of the interesting state of affairs (it is possible persons cannot be disembodied), he thinks we can imagine the opposite. If we can imagine the opposite state of affairs, we have negated any power of the imagination to guide us in what might be possible.

Consider these briefly. As for the first objection, van Inwagen claims to know that there are many possible but not actual possibilities.

I know that it is possible that . . . the table that was in a certain position at noon have then been two feet to the left of where it in fact was. I know that it is possible (in this sense) for John F. Kennedy to have died of natural causes, that it is impossible for there to be liquid wine bottles, and that it is necessary that there be a valley between any two mountains that touch at their bases. And, no doubt, reason — operating on a combination of “basic” modal knowledge like that displayed in the previous sentence and facts about the way the world is put together — can expand the range of our modal knowledge considerably. (van Inwagen 1998, 70)

But van Inwagen does not tell us how we know such basic states of affairs are possible.

Fortunately, we do not have to have an adequate account of how we know statements of a certain type in order to know some statements of that type or to know that we know

some statements of that type or to know that we know a given statement of that type. (van Inwagen 1998, 76)

If, as he states above, van Inwagen does not have a fully developed account of basic modal knowledge, why should this be a mark against using the imagination for bolder modal claims? We propose that the reason why van Inwagen knows about possible rearrangements of furniture and knows that JFK might not have been assassinated is due to the modal principle. Imagining is exactly the power he employs to locate reasons.

Van Inwagen's two other objections can be handled together. Van Inwagen writes:

Can we imagine a world in which there is transparent iron? Not unless our imaginings take place at a level of structural detail comparable to the imaginings of condensed-matter physicists who are trying to explain, say, the phenomenon of superconductivity. If we simply imagine a Nobel Prize acceptance speech in which the new Nobel laureate thanks those who supported him in his long and discouraging quest for transparent iron and displays to a cheering crowd something that looks (in our imagination) like a chunk of glass, we shall indeed have imagined a world, but it will not be a world in which there is transparent iron. (van Inwagen 1998, 79)

In making this point, van Inwagen concedes that if you can imagine details that are sufficient to the state of affairs at issue, then imagination can be a guide to determining what is possible. Moreover, once one engages in such detailed analysis it is not at all clear that the imagination supports opposite, incompatible states of affairs in an abundance of philosophically interesting states of affairs. Take two examples. David Robb has used van Inwagen's strategy against David Chalmers, who uses the imagination to argue that there could be zombies, a creature exactly like conscious beings but without consciousness. Chalmers imagines such a state of affairs in detail, but Robb offers this counter-move:

But his [Chalmers'] opponent might shift the burden back in a similar way by advancing the 'anti-zombie,' a being who knows that zombies are logically impossible . . . I find such a being conceivable; after lengthy reflection, I can (as Chalmers says of zombies) detect no internal incoherence in the idea of an anti-zombie. There is, then, a strong presumption for the logical possibility of anti-zombies. (Robb 1998, 530)

Is imagining someone who "knows zombies are logically impossible" the same as Chalmers' imaging, picturing or describing a state of affairs that justify us in believing zombies are possible? Doesn't the burden of argument fall to Robb to flesh out the details of his thought experiment? By virtue of what essential relations, necessary truths or evident impossibilia, is Robb's thought experiment an equal match to Chalmers'? As another example of when the

claim to imagine a state of affairs is supposedly cancelled out by a contrary claim, consider David Kaplan's claim that he can imagine the refutation of Gödel's incompleteness theorem. Does this show that Gödel's theorem is possibly false and thus not necessary? Certainly not the way Kaplan develops his claim about what he imagined, for Kaplan imagined the *Los Angeles Times* carrying huge headlines "UCLA PROF REFUTES GODEL; ALL REPUTABLE EXPERTS AGREE" (cited by Plantinga 2007, 115.) This proposed use of imagination to identify what is possible is not more plausible than to claim that by imagining a newspaper headline "TALIAFERRO AND EVANS CREATE A SQUARE CIRCLE IN TWO-DIMENSIONAL SPACE," we have given anyone reason for thinking it is possible for there to be a closed two-dimensional figure that has four right angles and does not have four right angles at the same time.

As for van Inwagen's specific examples of transparent iron and purple cows, we believe that one plausible exercise of the modal principle is to provide evidence that the current laws of nature are contingent; there are many different ways that the natural world might be constituted.

We suggest that David Lewis was right when he claimed:

[T]hings might have been different, in ever so many ways . . . I might not have existed at all — neither I myself, nor any counterpart of me. Or there might never have been any people. Or the physical constants might have had somewhat different values, incompatible with the emergence of life. Or there might have been altogether different laws of nature; and instead of electrons and quarks, there might have been alien particles, without charge or mass or spin but with alien physical properties that nothing in this world shares. There are ever so many ways that a world might be; and one of these many ways is the way that this world is. (Lewis, 1986, 1–2)

Given Lewis's outlook, in *this* world, with our current laws of nature, perhaps iron and cows cannot be transparent and purple (respectively), but by using the modal principle we have reason to believe it is possible for those laws to be different. Perhaps there can be people who have super-vision for whom iron would be transparent (presumably an object is transparent if persons can see through it with clarity) and perhaps cows might be in worlds where people's retinal equipment are such that in ordinary conditions (sunlight as opposed to artificial light) cows are purple (presumably an object is purple if persons see it as purple in recognizably ordinary conditions).

Before moving to the second objection to images and imagination, note some ways in which the modal principle is used in philosophy. An argument for mind–body dualism going back to Descartes has to do with the plausibility of the mind existing without the body (see Taliaferro 1994). The very use of the example and counter-example method in philosophy rests on some modal principle. So, when arguing about utilitarianism, for example, one commonplace argument is that if utilitarianism were true, then some

state of affairs which we imagine and see to be morally repugnant, would be morally obligatory. So, for example, someone might be drawn to a form of utilitarianism in which morally right actions are determined solely in terms of which act maximizes pleasure. Arguably, however, one can imagine states of affairs in which what seems like a morally reprehensible act (the torture of an innocent person) would be justified if utilitarianism were true. An exercise of imagination provides reasons for either rejecting or modifying utilitarianism and other moral theories.

### IMAGINATION AND MAKING KNOWLEDGE EXPLICIT

The use of imagination in determining possibilities may work, in part, because it makes explicit something that we know implicitly or we are committed to believing, given the other things we know. Raymond Tallis, in *The Explicit Animal*, calls our power of what he calls explicitness underivable: “. . . explicitness is the essence of human consciousness . . . Once the nature of man as the explicit animal is grasped and explicitness is understood as the essence of consciousness, it becomes much more difficult to overlook the all-encompassing nature of consciousness, to eliminate, marginalize or underplay its role in behavior . . .” (Tallis 1991, 208). The reason why some thought experiments are successful is because, for example, we have some awareness of the mind as distinct from the body or we have some idea of goodness that is independent of utilitarianism. Thought experiments involving choices under magical conditions (what would you do if you had a ring that would make you invisible?) or ordinary conditions (would you cheat during a test to achieve personal wealth if you were confident about not being detected?) can bring to light one’s actual values.

By exercising his imagination, John Stuart Mill discovered that his current life goals were insufficient. In the chapter “A Crisis in My Mental History, One Stage Onward” in his autobiography, Mill records this thought experiment:

It occurred to me to put the question directly to myself, “Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?” And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, “No!” At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for. (Mill 1969, 81)

Mill used his imagination as a tool to discern his own values and their fragile foundation for enduring happiness.

## IMAGINATION IN ETHICS AND PHILOSOPHY

Imagination plays a vital role (as Hume realized) in being able to picture the world from the point of view of other persons. The Golden Rule and the basic complaint “How would you like it if someone did that to you?” requires imagination. Philosophers like Martha Nussbaum, who have underscored the ways in which literature can expand one’s moral imagination, appreciate this point. The philosopher R. G. Collingwood in *The Idea of History* argued that a pivotal component of historical inquiry involves imaginatively representing the world from the point of view of different historical agents. In philosophy, this skill is clearly needed when it comes to evaluating worldviews. In a fair debate, a theistic philosopher should be able to understand and assess arguments from the standpoint of a naturalist philosopher and vice versa.

An interesting case of a possible failure of imagination emerges in Bernard Williams’ critique of the concept of two persons switching bodies.

Suppose a magician is hired to perform the old trick of making the emperor and the peasant become each other. He gets the emperor and the peasant in one room, with the emperor on his throne and the peasant in the corner, and then casts the spell. What will count as success? Clearly not that after the smoke has cleared the old emperor should be in the corner and the old peasant on the throne. That would be a rather boring trick. The requirement is presumably that the emperor’s body, with the peasant’s personality, should be on the throne, and the peasant’s body with the emperor’s personality, in the corner. What does this mean? In particular, what has happened to the voices? The voice presumably ought to count as a bodily function; yet how would the peasant’s gruff blasphemies be uttered in the emperor’s cultivated tones, or the emperor’s witticisms in the peasant’s growl? A similar point holds for the features; the emperor’s body might include the sort of face that just could not express the peasant’s morose suspiciousness, the peasant’s a face no expression of which could be taken for one of fastidious arrogance. These “could”s are not just empirical — such expressions on these features might be unthinkable. (Williams 1973, 11–12)

Williams may be correct that it is metaphysically impossible for persons to switch bodies, but is it really necessarily the case that those who are peasants are morosely suspicious and blasphemous and that emperors are essentially cultivated and given to fastidious arrogance? Presumably the foundation of many political rebellions has been the realization that hereditary monarchs and other rulers might have been peasants and vice versa. The imagination can help in royals considering what life would be like for non-royals and vice versa.

Lest we give the impression that images and imagination are always emancipatory, imaginative portraits can also suffocate and distort. Some art can, as Margaret Iversen observes, be deeply problematic. “Art is no longer regarded as part of the solution but as part of the problem, laden as it is with

all the ideological baggage of history, be it bourgeois, racist or patriarchal” (Iversen 1986, 84). Iversen commends a critique of art: “The new critical procedure . . . involves a . . . critique of visual imagery, from painting to pop videos . . . [in order to] lay bare the contradictions and prejudices beneath the smooth surface of the beautiful” (Iversen 1986, 84). We would only add that this critique itself inevitably involves images and imagination, the power to re-imagine social class, ethnicity, gender inequality, and so on.

## IMAGINATION, COGNITION AND EVIDENCE

Imagination functions as a vital cognitive power, enabling us to fill our worldviews, or understandings of nature, that can be assessed evidentially. Stephen Pepper was on the right track when he proposed that a great deal of our philosophical reflections on the nature of reality may be seen in terms of competing images, though his preferred term was *root metaphors*. In *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence*, Pepper entertained four massive images by which to think about reality: Formism, Mechanism, Contextualism, and Organicism. Pepper has shown some of the ways in which each may or may not be seen to have evidential justification. Some philosophers have resisted the role of controlling images or metaphors. Jerry Fodor claims, “when you actually start to do science, the metaphors drop out and the statistics take over” (Fodor 1996, 20). But as Michael Ruse points out in his excellent book, *Science and Spirituality*, such statistics are best viewed as taking place in light of some overall root metaphor or image, typically today the image of nature as a machine (Ruse 2010).

Jane Goodall explicitly invokes the important role of the imagination in assessing Darwin’s work. She takes the following important passage from *The Descent of Man*:

We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system — with all these exalted powers — Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin. (Quoted in Goodall 2009, 185)

Goodall comments: “Such a bipolar view of the species is radically destabilizing in ways that cannot be fully addressed through discursive exposition. *Imaging* is called for, but an order of *imaging* that widens the bounds of illustration or impersonation to provide the scope for metaphysical themes” (our emphasis, Goodall 2009, 185). Goodall aptly points out the important role that pictures played in the response (positive or negative) to Darwin’s work:

If nature abhors a vacuum, the human imagination is similarly intolerant of absences and missing elements . . . People quite simply wanted to see [the missing link in Darwinian evolution], to fix in the mind's eye a picture of the long-vanished being that somehow held the secret of their own nature. (Goodall 2009, 172)

As one further example of how imagination can bring to light evidence, consider how J. S. Mill managed to come out of the despair of his youth (referenced earlier). He recovered, in part, through the poetry of William Wordsworth who brought to light through his contemplative imagination new values. Mill writes:

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence. (Mill 1969, 89)

Through imagination, Mill discovered values or new sources of happiness.

### SNEAKY SNAKES AND INNOCENT LAMBS

In ending this chapter, it will be helpful to consider that the proposed use of imagination in testing theism and naturalism is one of enlargement of perspective (as Goodall recommends) rather than substitution. In early-modern European philosophy, two images of nature were prominent. On one account, the cosmos is the work of an intentional, purposive, all-good being, much like a book. On the other account, the cosmos is the outcome of factors that are mindless, non-intentional, and non-purposive, factors that had no pre-vision of the end to be brought about. In *An Antidote against Atheism*, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More offered the following juxtaposition of these two images. In the passage that follows he casts the case for theism as worthy of assent but not incorrigible and coercive.

For I conceive that we may give full assent to that which notwithstanding may possibly be otherwise: which I shall illustrate by several examples. Suppose two men got to the top of Mount Athos, and there viewing a stone in the form of an altar with ashes on it, and the footsteps of men on these ashes, or some words, if you will, as *Optimo Maximo* . . . or the like, written or scrawled out on the ashes; and one of them should cry out, Assuredly there

have been some men here that have done this: but the other more nice than wise should reply, Nay, it may possibly be otherwise; for this stone may have naturally grown into this very shape and the seeming ashes may be no ashes, that is no remainders of any fuel burnt there, but some inexplicable and imperceptive motions of the air, or some other particles of the matter into the form and nature of ashes, and have fridg'd and played about so, that they have also figured those intelligible characters in the same. But would not any body deem it a piece of weakness no less than dotage for the other man one wit to recede from his former apprehension, but as fully as ever to agree with what he pronounced first, notwithstanding this bare possibility of being otherwise? (More 1653, 10–11)

More invites us to envisage the same thing (ashes on a stone) which one person reads as a deliberately written phrase and the other discounts as a mindless, unintended pattern. The imagination of each of these men on the mountain fills out or extends what each one believes to be the significance and cause of what they observe. This is not a case of free association or substitution.

In contrast, Emily Brady offers a view of imagination that seems to involve substitution or free association. In “Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature,” Brady writes:

Whilst perception does much of the work in simply grasping the object and cordoning it off in our perceptual field, it is imagination that reaches beyond this in a free contemplation of the object. In this way exploratory imagination helps the percipient to make an initial discovery of aesthetic qualities. For example, in contemplating the bark of a locust tree, visually, I see the deep clefts between the thick ridges of the bark. Images of mountains and valleys come to mind, and I think of the age of the tree given the thickness of the ridges and how they are spaced apart. I walk around the tree, feeling the wide circumference of the bark. The image of a seasoned old man comes to mind, with deep wrinkles from age. The imaginings lead to an aesthetic judgment of the tree as stalwart, and I respect it as I might a wise old sage. (Brady 2003, 143)

This exercise of moving from the bark of a tree to a “seasoned old man” can be an element in a great folktale, myth, or fantasy (think of J. R. R. Tolkien’s Ents, the giant but lonely tree people in *The Lord of the Rings*). But this is not the use of imagination to enhance our grasp of whether the cosmos (or a tree or all forests) are purposive or non-purposive realities. Trees are not stalwart; though their typically vertical disposition in the world might be used to symbolize a human value. But this is not an aesthetic quality of the bark. The aesthetic qualities of the bark inform us of “deep clefts,” “thick ridges,” and these become sensible features that, if attended to, are part of our ongoing education in scale and tactility. It might be that this attending to aesthetic features or qualities is necessary to recognize our capacity for others and developing the capacity for empathy, such sensitivity being a quality of a moral being.



Brady also commends using imaginative personal identifications in and with the natural world, which also seems wide of the mark in relation to imagination as a tool of inquiry *à la* Henry More or Jane Goodall. Brady writes:

Sometimes we take the further imaginative leap of projecting ourselves *into* natural objects. For example, to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of an alpine flower, I might somatically imagine what it is like to live and grow under such harsh conditions. Without imagining such conditions I may be unable to appreciate the remarkable strength hidden so beautifully in the delicate quality of the flower. [This example shows] how imagination provides a more intimate aesthetic experience, and thus allows us to explore aesthetic qualities more deeply than through perception alone. (Brady 2003, 143)

Again, this seems more in accord with what Coleridge calls fancy than imagination. This is not to say that Brady hasn't identified a meaningful, useful practice. Dante pictured those who commit suicide as trees in the *Inferno* (Canto 13), and there is the well-known haunting myth of Philemon and Baucis turning into a pair of intertwining trees (and many other Greek myths of persons transformed into trees, vines, and so on). But this is not the imagination employed by More *et al.* The distance between More and Brady is highlighted in the following passage in what Brady claims is a revelatory use of imagination:

I want to distinguish an aesthetic truth from a non-aesthetic truth according to the manner in which it becomes known. We do not seek out aesthetic truths in the way we seek out the answers to philosophical or scientific problems. Rather, aesthetic truths are revealed through a heightened aesthetic experience, where perceptual and imaginative engagement with nature facilitate the kind of close attention that leads to revelation. A quick glance at a lamb reveals little except an acknowledgement of its sweetness. But the fuller participation of perception and imagination can lead to a truth about innocence. Contemplating the fresh whiteness of a lamb and its small, fragile stature evokes images of purity and naiveté. It is through dwelling aesthetically and imaginatively on such natural things that we achieve new insight. (Brady 2003, 144)

How is this different than assigning evil to a snake? Brady's glance at the lamb reveals a great deal of projection, not aesthetic contemplation. It seems she is reversing an order, starting with a culturally specific symbol of lamb as white and innocent to get to purity and naiveté.

Brady usefully notes how aesthetic contemplation of an object can lead one to contemplating greater contexts. She cites Andrew Wyeth contemplating a shell:

A white mussel shell on a gravel bank in Maine is thrilling to me because it's all the sea – the gull that brought it there, the rain, the sun that bleached it there by a stand of spruce woods. (Wyeth cited by Brady 2003, 144)

Brady rightly thinks that this is an imaginative enrichment of perception, but then in her analysis of similar aesthetic experiences we believe she misdescribes the boundaries of naturalistic experience.

The close connection between perception and imagination in aesthetic response provides some help in distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate imaginings. Wyeth's response to the seashell involves an imaginative aspect which is guided by attention to perceptual qualities and the recognition that the object comes from the sea. But problems arise if we depend solely on the connection between imagination and perception, because some imaginings can be so tentatively tied to perceptual qualities as to become inappropriate because they are irrelevant. For example, when coming upon Beachy Head, a high cliff on the south coast of England, one is awestruck by the dramatic, sheer drop to the sea, and this feeling is heightened by the knowledge that this is a favorite suicide spot. Imagining the feeling of jumping off the cliff and the fear of someone standing at the top of it accentuates the sublimity of the place. But this train of images would become irrelevant to aesthetic appreciation of the cliff if one then imagined several possibilities, such as financial difficulties, which might serve as a motive for suicide. (Brady 2003, 145)

Contemplation of the danger of natural events may well enhance a sense of the sublime, though we are not inclined to believe that imagining people committing suicide by jumping off a cliff enhances sublimity. Knowing such acts have occurred means you are informed about what is possible given the topography of Beachy Head. But once you step off of the cliff, you are no longer in the realm of the sublime, but in the realm of tragedy.

We end this chapter with a passage in which imagination informs the experiences and valuation of the world. Mark Wynn, in *Faith and Place*, offers an aesthetic reading of a place whose significance was cast in equal parts to sharing repeated visits with a friend, and the specific aesthetic features of the place. Wynn's account is a record of phenomenal experience, but one that has enduring meaning, and he argues that such enduring meaning is built in part through aesthetic encounters with place. Wynn describes his frequent trips with his friend Edmund to Port Meadow, a large commons on the outskirts of the city, while a student at Oxford University in the 1980s:

[W]e'd push off, always at Edmund's bidding, and swoop down towards the meadow. We'd feel the air rushing past our faces and hear the clang of the sprung gate closing behind us — all the senses partook in this sense of being released from the world we were leaving behind — a world which was even for a student in Oxford in the 1980s, one of responsibilities, of appointments to be kept, and particular paths to be followed, to navigate the traffic of ordinary living — whereas the meadow was all open expansiveness, flat and at

## THE TURNING IMAGE

times flooded, + even frozen over, so that its surface would collect + throw back the light of the sky. In its way it was a place of transfiguration — where even the motes suspended in the evening air, stirred up by the passage of our bikes across the dusty tracks of the meadow, would be caught + irradiated so revealing their true nature, and giving them the appearance of their own kind of life + their own kind of glory. And we would look back at the city + see its spires irradiated in the same light — and, often without articulation, we would set the business and congestion of our lives there against the open airiness of the meadow, and feel our ordinary concerns transfigured — a kind of disengagement in the name of a deeper, more compassionate re-engagement with the objects of those concerns. (Wynn 2009, 20)