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# Introduction

The principal aim of this monograph is to present and compare the main theories of imagining in a systematic and opinionated way.

The presentation is systematic in so far as it is structured by the concern with the unity and common nature of the many forms of imagining, such as visualising, supposing or daydreaming. Accordingly, the book involves both a close study of the distinct kinds of imagining and of their main features, similarities and differences; and a critical discussion of the principal accounts of imagining put forward in the literature. The book therefore serves as an introduction to the main ideas and positions that have been adopted with respect to imaginative phenomena. But it does so in a strictly problem-oriented manner, namely from the perspective of the possibility of providing an account of imagining that unifies its different incarnations. As a consequence, the discussion is organised around the possible sources of the unity of imagining and centres less on particular philosophers and their specific views.<sup>1</sup>

The comparison of the corresponding principal theories of imagining is

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<sup>1</sup> Another reason for this is that – with some notable exceptions, such as the works by Husserl (2006), Sartre (1940), Casey (1976), White (1990), O’Shaughnessy (2000) and McGinn (2004) – many philosophers have not presented fully developed and focused theories of imagining, but instead embedded their claims in discussions of other, often more general issues (see, e.g., Collingwood (1938), Ryle (1949/1963), Scruton (1974), Peacocke (1985), Walton (1990, Hopkins (1998) or Martin (2002a)). Even of the noted exceptions, who devote whole books or lecture series to the topic, some have not aimed at formulating a cohesive account of all forms of imagining, but rather focused on discussing particular kinds of imagining, or on developing a list of more or less loosely connected ideas and observations.

opinionated, on the other hand, in so far as a more specific goal of the book is to defend the *Agency Account* of imagining as the best unified account of imagining available. The main claim of this theory is that imaginings are, essentially and fundamentally, mental actions of a certain kind. Accordingly, imagining is something that we actively and voluntarily do.

A *unified account* of imagining is characterised by the fact that it captures the common nature of the central cases of imagining (e.g., visualising, supposing, or daydreaming) in fundamental terms and is able to distinguish them from the central cases of non-imaginative mental phenomena, notably cognitive representations (e.g., perceptions, judgements, or memories). The minimal goal of any theory intended as a unified account of imagining should therefore be to achieve extensional as well as explanatory adequacy: it should be valid for the paradigm cases of imaginative and non-imaginative phenomena; and it should correctly describe and explain the distinctive and fundamental nature of the former. A main theme of the discussion is therefore the elucidation of primary examples of imagining, and of what distinguishes them from other, non-imaginative mental phenomena. Another and closely related guiding issue is whether it is possible to account for the specific character of these imaginings by identifying a set of features distinctive of them and responsible for their imaginative status (i.e., their property of being instances of imagining). That is, the book addresses the issue of whether it is possible to specify and elucidate this status in terms of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for something to be an imagining, at least with respect to the paradigm cases.

The issue of formulating a unified account of imagining has often been neglected in the philosophical tradition. Many of the discussions of imagining in the past and the present have focused, not on the nature of imaginings, but on their role in our mental lives and our interactions with other people and the world. It has been widely acknowledged that imagining is very prominent in and significant for various parts of our lives, ranging from our emotional engagement with other people (e.g., Goldie (2000): 194ff.) and our moral evaluation of actions (e.g., Johnson (1993)) to the aesthetic appreciation of artworks (e.g., Walton (1990) and its many fol-

lowers) and even the acquisition of knowledge about the external world.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, even when philosophers address the question of what it means for a mental phenomenon to be imaginative (i.e., possess the property of being an imagining), they usually concentrate exclusively on specific forms of imagining, notably on sensory or visual imaginings.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the neglect of the issue of what all imaginings have in common *as* imaginings may be closely linked to the neglect of non-sensory or complex kinds of imagining. Finally, philosophers writing about the imagination have not always succeeded, or been particularly interested, in developing their ideas into a proper theory of what is distinctive of imaginings.

As a result, most discussions of imaginings have been concerned either

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<sup>2</sup> Although imaginings are typically held not to constitute knowledge about the external world or provide relevant epistemic justification by themselves (though see Chapter 4 for an opposing view), it seems beyond doubt that they are often involved in other ways in the acquisition of knowledge. See, for instance, the discussions on thought experiments (e.g., Sorensen (1992) and Gendler (2000a)), the link between conceivability and possibility (e.g., Gendler & Hawthorne (2002)), the role of mental imagery in geometry (e.g., Giaquinto (1992)) and in counterfactual reasoning (e.g., Williamson (2008)), or the involvement of visualisation in memory-based cognitive projects, such as the project of determining whether frogs have lips, or how many windows are in one's own house (e.g., Kosslyn (1980): 1, or Pylyshyn (2002): especially 164).

<sup>3</sup> See Collingwood (1938): chs. 9f., Sartre (1940), Peacocke (1985), Hopkins (1998): ch. 7, and, it seems, Wittgenstein (1984c): vol. II, sec. 63-147, to name just a few of those who focus more or less exclusively on sensory or visual imaginings. Kind (2001) does the same: while she argues that all instances of 'imagining' involve sensory imagery, she distinguishes the resulting sensory 'imagining' from intellectual 'supposition'. Scruton (1974), White (1990), Casey (2000), O'Shaughnessy (2002), Currie & Ravenscroft (2002) and McGinn (2004) address both sensory and intellectual imaginings, but no emotional imaginings (in contrast to emotional responses to imagining), and imaginative projects only in passing and not in relation to their commonality with imaginative episodes. Besides, although McGinn discusses various forms of imagining, he does not aim to provide a unified account of them. Instead, he argues merely that they form an 'imagination spectrum' which extends from the most simple and temporally and conceptually prior imaginative phenomena (e.g., those involved in sensory representation) to the most complex and developed ones (e.g., those involved in creativity; see McGinn (2004): 13). See also the discussion of the five main forms of imagining in Section 1.2 for further references to accounts which focus on particular kinds of imagining.

with aspects of imaginings other than (though perhaps dependent on or otherwise related to) their imaginativeness, or with the imaginativeness of only certain kinds of imagining. Just a few philosophers have attempted to provide a satisfactory account of imagining in its (more or less) full variety.<sup>4</sup> The less comprehensive philosophical discussions have certainly shed light on important aspects of many different kinds of imagining, such as sensory imaginings (e.g., visualising a face), intellectual imaginings (e.g., supposing or imagining that it rains), affective imaginings (e.g., imagining an itch), experiential imagining (e.g., imagining having the experiences of someone else) or imaginative projects (e.g., daydreaming about being rich).

But the imaginative nature common to all forms of imagining has remained largely uninvestigated. A good example for this and the underlying way of thinking is Walton's account of imagining (1990: ch. 1). He spends considerable time on specifying 'a number of dimensions along which imaginings can vary', but also insists that we cannot 'spell out what they have in common' and have instead to be content with an 'intuitive understanding of what it is to imagine' (*ibid.*, 19). Indeed, it is rather common in discussions about imaginings and their role in our mental lives to take for granted

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<sup>4</sup> See Scruton (1974): chs. 7f., Casey (1976), O'Shaughnessy (2000): chs. 11f., and McGinn (2004) for clear examples. But none of them discusses imaginative projects (fantasies, daydreams, etc.) in any detail. Whether other proposals are intended or able to constitute a unified account of imagining is less clear. Hume's account of all imaginings as forming a certain sub-class of 'ideas' suffers from its treatment of the differences between sensory and intellectual representations and between imaginative and cognitive representations as quantitative (i.e., a matter of 'vivacity') rather than qualitative (see Chapter 9 for discussion and references). Although Ryle discusses mainly sensory cases, his account of imagining as a form of 'internal' pretending or pretending 'in one's head' might be applied to intellectual imagining as well (see Section 12.3, and Ryle (1949/1963): chs. 7f., especially sec. 8.6). White analyses both visualising and intellectual imagining in terms of thinking of the possible, but does not explicitly connect the two analyses (see Section 5.4, and White (1990): 122f; 184). Despite the fact that Currie and Ravenscroft treat both sensory and intellectual imaginings as simulations of their respective cognitive counterparts (see Section 12.2, and Currie & Ravenscroft (2002): 11 and 49), their main concern is with the involvement of the imagination in adopting a perspective on the world different from one's current one, rather than with the general nature of imagining (*ibid.*: 8f. and 11).

that it is sufficiently clear what it means to imagine something – as it is likewise often assumed that we have a good grasp of, say, what it means to perceive or believe something, or to desire it.

One particular difficulty with this approach is, however, that imagining – perhaps in contrast to perception, belief or desire – does not obviously constitute a natural kind (more on this point in Section 1.1). In fact, the suspicion that imagining – understood as the class of visualising, supposing, empathizing, daydreaming, and so on – is not among the most basic or primitive mental phenomena may explain why it has by no means been the subject of philosophical investigation to the same extent, and with the same exclusivity, as perception, belief and desire. Similarly, it is not evident that there is a unity in imagining; nor, if so, what it consists in or comprises. This may lead to a situation in which a certain kind of imagining is postulated or appealed to in the context of explaining a given phenomenon; while the lack of any further elucidation of the nature of this type of imagining raises in others considerable skepticism about the proposed role or even existence of the kind of imagining in question.<sup>5</sup>

Such complications – as well as, more generally, the significance and prominent position of imagining in our lives and interactions with each other and the world – provide sufficient motivation for the investigation of the possibility of a unified account of imagining. In particular, it will be helpful and illuminating to learn more about what it means for a representation to be imaginative, and how this relates to or influences the various forms of engagement or project involving imagining.

### *(i) The Need for a Unified Account*

The nature and unity of imagining is of theoretical interest both in itself and in relation to many important aspects of our lives. But the general interest inherent in the question of whether we can provide a unified theory of imagining and the significant role of imaginings in our mental lives are

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, the skepticism – expressed in Budd (1992), Hopkins (1998): ch. 1, Wollheim (2003) and Dorsch (2012c) – about the existence of the specific form of imagining seeing the depicted, which Walton refers to in his account of pictorial experience (see Walton (1990): ch. 8, and (2002)).

not the only motivations for the search of a unified account. The expectation that the central cases of imaginings share a common nature arises also from the need to explain two facts about our actual treatment of such representations.

The first is simply that, even after discounting the less obvious cases, we do group together a large variety of mental occurrences in the class of imaginings, while excluding many others. Thus we accept visualising, supposing, daydreaming, being engaged with fictions, empathizing, and so on, as paradigm instances of imagining, or at least as essentially involving such instances; but not seeing, judging, deliberating, or feeling an emotion or desire. If such imaginings had nothing in common with each other, but shared features with the non-imaginative phenomena, this tendency in how we categorise mental phenomena would be rather mysterious: there has to be something about the imaginative mental phenomena which causes us to treat them – but not other mental phenomena – as members of one and the same class (see Scruton (1974): 91f.).

The second relevant observation is that our corresponding classifications are stable, and that we usually have a good grasp of whether – though not necessarily of why – a given mental state is imaginative or not. Three observations are particularly relevant here. First of all, we repeat the same categorisations and do not locate certain representations today on one side of a divide and tomorrow on the other. There is no change in opinion about whether, say, visualising is an instance of imagining. Then, it normally does not take us much effort or thought to come to a classification of a given mental phenomenon as imaginative or non-imaginative. Identifying an instance of daydreaming as an example of imagining, say, is typically very straightforward. Finally, we are seldom unsure about how to treat a certain mental phenomenon. This may happen with borderline cases (e.g., spontaneously occurring images and thoughts), or when we are confronted with an unusual or rare kind of representation (e.g., Macbeth's awareness of Banquo, or of the dagger). But, in most cases, we are not in doubt about whether some mental episode is an instance of imagining. These three aspects of the stability of our relevant classification, too, strongly suggest the existence of a certain kind of unity among imaginings, to which we furthermore have easy epistemic access, but which is still in want of further elucidation.

Otherwise, it would be very difficult to explain the firmness and ease with which we take the sometimes very different instances of imagining to be of the same kind, and why it is that they, but no other phenomena, count for us as imaginative. Any satisfactory analysis of imagining needs to provide an elucidation of this unity of the paradigm instances of imaginings.

The idea pursued in this book is that the unity under consideration is due to some features shared by and distinctive of imaginings. This is the simplest and most straightforward explanation of their homogeneity; and it is adopted by all theories of imagining that have the ambition to provide a unified account. But it is not the only possible account of the two noted facts and the resulting apparent unity of imagining. One could, for instance, maintain that our grouping together of the variety of phenomena described as instances of one and the same type of phenomenon is merely accidental or conventional, without any substantial grounding in shared features of the mental phenomena concerned. But such a claim would be difficult to support in view of the facility and assurance with which we categorise mental states as either imaginative or non-imaginative. Until it has been confirmed that such a strong form of skepticism is inevitable, the realistic hope for a more positive theory of the common nature of imaginings should outweigh any doubts about the possibility of a unified characterisation of imagining. It is thus reasonable to demand from a theory of imagining that it account for the fact that we classify a large variety of phenomena as imaginative; and the fact that this classification is not a pure coincidence or convention. A unified theory of imagining promises to provide such an explanation by treating these facts as a consequence of the presence of certain features shared exclusively by all imaginings.

### *(ii) Three Main Theories of Imagining*

This raises the question of which proposals for a unified account of imagining are on offer and should be considered. When looking at the theories of imagining put forward in the philosophical tradition, three major recurring themes can be identified: the relationship (or lack thereof) of imaginative representations to reality, their relationship to cognitive representations, and their relationship to the will. These motives identify the

three principal ways in which the common and distinctive nature of the core instances of imagining may be elucidated: in terms of their irrelevance for our epistemic interaction with the world, in terms of their dependency on perceptions and (occurrent) beliefs, or in terms of their origin in a specific kind of mental agency.<sup>6</sup> The resulting theories of imagining may be labelled the Epistemological, the Dependency and the Agency Account. The prominence in the literature of these approaches and their central ideas about the nature of imagining is indicative of the fact that they are the main contenders for a unified theory of imagining. Accordingly, I concentrate my discussion primarily on these three proposals and devote to each a whole part of the book.

The *Epistemological Account* specifies the difference between imaginings and cognitions by reference to the idea that only the latter are concerned with the representation of reality – at least in a particular sense still to be specified. Our minds interact with the world by means of cognition and action. Both forms of interaction are primarily the domain of cognitive representations, such as perceptions, memories or beliefs. In accordance with this observation, the versions of the Epistemological Account to be found in the literature identify a lack of cognitive concern with reality and, especially, the failure to play a substantial role in cognition as the distinctive feature of imaginings. Different versions of this approach may vary in how they characterise the assumed lack of cognitive concern.<sup>7</sup>

It is conceivable that a unified account of imagining may also be formulated in terms of their specific insignificance for our active engagement

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<sup>6</sup> Although it might be possible to endorse a view that characterises imaginings in terms of their relationship both to reality and to agency (without also tracing back one relationship to the other), such an approach to imagining would seem to be over-complex. As will become clear in the subsequent chapters, reference to the presence and nature of one kind of relationship suffices to account for the distinctive nature of imagining and, if necessary, for the presence and nature of the other kind of relationship. The general idea is that imaginings will turn out either to lack a cognitive concern with reality precisely because they are voluntarily formed by us; or instead to (be able to) be mental actions precisely because they are not cognitively constrained by how reality is like.

<sup>7</sup> The main proponent of this view is O'Shaughnessy (2000). But very similar ideas can be found in the writings of Hume (1739), Sartre (1940), Wittgenstein (1984c) and McGinn (2004), among others (see also the introduction to Part II).

with the world. The idea is that imaginings – in contrast to, say, desires, intentions, beliefs or perceptions – cannot motivate us to act or guide us in our actions (e.g., by providing us with information about our relevant environment, or about adequate means to achieve our goals). However, the claim that imaginings lack a guiding role in agency can be traced back to the idea that they lack a cognitive concern with the world: they cannot guide us in action because they do not provide us with knowledge about the relevant aspects of reality (i.e., the environment and the means). The idea that imaginings cannot move us to act, on the other hand, is not only controversial (see Note 16 in Chapter 1); it also does not distinguish them from many non-imaginative phenomena. Hence, it is not very promising to formulate a unified account of imagining specifically in terms of their seeming unimportance for our actions; and not very surprising that the focus in the literature on imagining has rather been on the apparent lack of cognitive concern.

The *Dependency Account*, by contrast, puts emphasis on the asymmetric dependency of imaginings and cognitions. It argues that imaginative phenomena are constitutively dependent on and, hence, have to be elucidated by reference to their cognitive counterparts. While cognitions exist and can be made sense of independently of imaginings, the opposite is false. Proponents of the Dependency Account disagree about the nature of the kind of dependency concerned.<sup>8</sup> Philosophers in the Humean tradition, for example, focus on the idea that imaginings depend on cognitions in so far as they represent them (possibly due to a suitable causal link). Another prominent approach is to assume that, in some sense, imaginings imitate or mimic cognitions – for instance, in the shape of off-line simulation or inner pretense. Besides, it is widely accepted that there is also some form of semantic dependency: that we acquire much of our ability to represent something in an imaginative way by means of engaging in cognition (i.e., in per-

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<sup>8</sup> Hume (1739): 1.1.1.6ff. and 1.3.7.7), and O’Shaughnessy (2000): 363, endorse the representational version of the Dependency Account for all forms of episodic imagining; while Peacocke (1985): 22, Martin (2001): 273 and (2002): 404, and Dorsch (2010c) accept this view for sensory imaginings; and Dorsch (2011b) – which is more or less identical with Chapter 11 – for emotional imaginings. Currie & Ravenscroft (2002): 49, and Ryle (1949/1963): 250ff., may be read as defending a version of the Dependency Account formulated in terms of simulation or imitation.

ceiving, sensing, judging, and so on) and developing the relevant recognitional and conceptual capacities.

Finally, the already introduced *Agency Account* proposes mental activity as the characteristic element of imagining. It maintains that imaginings are, in a particular way, essentially active; while cognitions are either passive, or active in a different way. The general idea is thus that imaginings are mental actions of a special kind: they are imaginative determinations or expressions of the will. They differ in this respect from mental passions, among them: judgemental thoughts or occurrent beliefs that are formed in response to epistemic reasons; episodic memories that are determined by past experiences; perceptions and sensations that are determined by their external objects; and deviantly caused instances of the each of the preceding cognitive kinds of episode. Again, distinct versions of the Agency Account vary in how exactly they individuate the active character distinctive of imaginings.<sup>9</sup>

The particular version, that I intend to put forward in this book, maintains that imaginings are mental actions, that aim at the active and direct formation of mental representations with specific contents. The requirement of representational specificity demands that the underlying motivational states (e.g., tryings, desires or intentions) determine which particular features are to be represented as being instantiated by which particular objects; while the directness requirement is meant to ensure that the motivational states end up determining the content of the formed representations without making use of epistemic or merely causal mechanisms of content determination – and, notably, those mechanisms involved in the actively triggered manifestation of mnemonic or other mental dispositions, or those relied on during the voluntary formation of beliefs on the basis of evidence – as means. My defence of this version of the Agency Account of imagining is paired with a rejection of the Epistemological and the Dependency Account.

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<sup>9</sup> The Agency Account (or something very much like it) has been endorsed by, among others, Wollheim (1973): 69, Scruton (1974): 95 (see in general 94-100), Levinson (1998): p. 232, n. 3, Kind (2001): 90ff., and McGinn (2004): 12ff.; 131f. Most of these endorsements have been inspired by Wittgenstein's comments on sensory imaginings (see, for instance, his (1984b): vol. II, sec. 63 and 627; see also Budd (1989): 104ff.).

However, since the present book is not only finite in its length, but also primarily centred on the issue of the unity of imagining and aimed at giving a balanced overview of the various approaches to this issue, the discussion of the Agency Account has to be confined to roughly the same number of pages as the two other main theories (or, in the case of the Dependency Account, as its most promising – namely representational – version). This means, unfortunately, that there is not enough space for a comprehensive elaboration and vindication of the Agency Account, which definitely merits a monograph on its own. The chapters devoted to this theory therefore concentrate just on the principal aspects of this theory, such as its characterisation of imaginings as mental actions of a certain kind, the essentiality of the imaginative activity involved in voluntary imaginings, or the special status of spontaneously occurring images and thoughts in relation to imaginative agency. Other necessary elements of a full defence of the Agency Account – such as its application to daydreams and other imaginative projects, or a discussion of pictorial experience, association, guessing, and other problematic cases – have to be left for another occasion.

### *(iii) Other Theories of Imagining*

In addition to the three parts dealing with the main theories of imagining, there is a fourth and introductory part of the book in which, among other things, I briefly consider and argue against less important contenders for a satisfactory account of the unity of imagining. Some of these additional views start from the same – or at least very similar – basic ideas as the Epistemological, the Dependency or the Agency Account. This is part of the explanation of why there are some considerable overlaps in convictions, arguments and motivations among the individual major and minor views. But these shared elements do not undermine the fact that the various accounts of imagining exclude each other as unified theories in so far as they identify different features as the fundamental constituents of the common nature of the otherwise heterogeneous forms of imaginings.

One alternative proposal – the *Quantitative Account* – takes imaginative and non-imaginative phenomena to differ solely in degree (e.g., a difference in vivacity), rather than in kind. As a result, imaginings are assumed

to possess the same essence as their non-imaginative counterparts.<sup>10</sup>

The *Phenomenal Account* assumes the most basic differences between imaginative and non-imaginative phenomena to be phenomenal in nature: that is, to be differences in what the respective episodes are subjectively like. Accordingly, theories of imagining should focus on the phenomenological description of imaginings and their non-imaginative counterparts, rather than on the formulation of more fundamental explanations of the noted phenomenal differences. The Phenomenal Account therefore takes it to be distinctive of imaginings that they subjectively *seem* to have a certain kind of object, attitude or origin – in contrast to some of the following theories which assume that it is distinctive of imaginings that they indeed *have* a certain kind of object, attitude or origin.

The *Ontological Account*, for instance, elucidates the distinctive character of imaginings in terms of the specific nature of the imagined entities. The central idea is that there is a categorical ontological difference between objects which are perceived, remembered or judged to be a certain way and objects which are visualised or supposed to be a certain way. In particular, it may be said that imagined and cognised objects differ in their type of existence, their spatio-temporality, their determinacy or (as also proposed by one version of the following account) their modal status.<sup>11</sup>

The central idea of the *Modal Account* is that, while it is characteristic of imaginings that they represent possibilities, it is characteristic of cognitions that they represent actualities.<sup>12</sup> The most promising version of this theory maintains that the difference is one in attitude, rather than content. This means that both types of representation are concerned with the same kind of objects and states of affairs. But while cognitions purport to represent them as part of the actual world, imaginings lack such a commitment and replace it with a stance of non-neutrality towards some possible world (or situation). That is, imaginings are said to make a claim, not about how

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<sup>10</sup> The idea that perceptions and imaginings differ merely in vivacity is central to Hume's view (see Section 9.1). Compare also Hopkins' (2011a) approach to sensory memories, according to which they belong to the class of sensory imaginings and differ merely contextually from its non-mnemonic members.

<sup>11</sup> Some of these ideas can be found in Sartre (1940) and Casey (1976), for instance.

<sup>12</sup> The view presented in White (1990) comes close to the Modal Account, although White presumably does not intend to restrict imaginings only to mere possibilities.

things actually are, but about how things might possibly be.

The resulting modal theory of imagining is, in fact, nothing but a specific version of the *Attitude Account*, according to which the difference between imaginative and cognitive episodes is fundamentally attitudinal. Minimally, the idea is that cognitions involve a cognitive attitude – that is, the commitment that reality is just like they represent it to be – while imaginings lack it. Versions of the Attitude Account may stay neutral on the issue of whether this means that imaginings possess instead a distinctively imaginative attitude. However, the need to distinguish imaginative episodes not only from cognitive episodes, but also from other kinds of episode has moved proponents of the Attitude Account to assume that imaginings are non-neutral as well, and to specify the commitment distinctive of imaginings in more positive terms, such as by reference to an act of positing entities as non-existent, absent or, indeed, non-actual.<sup>13</sup>

Next comes the *Spontaneity Account* which maintains that imaginings differ from cognitions in their specific origin in the – voluntary or involuntary – ‘spontaneity’ of the mind, rather than in the impression of the external world onto the mind. In its most promising incarnation, the view comes close to the Agency Account – especially in its insistence that the origin of imaginings is not merely causal, but essentially involves some subjective response or doing. But the two theories differ in that the Spontaneity Account extends the realm of the imagination to the involuntary, thereby loosely drawing on a distinction between perceiving and imagining that is similar to the Kantian distinction between ‘receptivity’ and ‘spontaneity’.

The *Subjection to the Will Account* is also similar to the Agency Account. While the last-mentioned takes imagining to always involve voluntary control, the first-mentioned requires merely that there is the possibility of such control, without the need for its actual exertion. The Subjection of the Will Account has the advantage of being able to capture what seem to be involuntary instances of imagining, while distinguishing them none the less strictly from, say, perceptions and impression, the passivity of which resists any attempts to bring them under voluntary control.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The idea of a specifically imaginative attitude has been put forward notably in the writings of the phenomenologists, such as Husserl (2006), Sartre (1940) and Casey (1976).

<sup>14</sup> The noted similarities among the Agency, Spontaneity and Subjection to the Will

Finally, the *Subpersonal Account* – the only one that I do not return to at one point or another in the subsequent chapters – characterises imaginings in terms of the specific nature or use of the subpersonal neurofunctional processes or modules involved in imagining, as they are studied by the cognitive sciences. In other words, proponents of this approach maintain that what is distinctive about imaginings is that they are subpersonally formed in a special way, whether by means of the stimulation of certain ‘imaginative’ areas in the brain, or by means of certain ‘imaginative’ ways in which standard cognitive mechanisms are employed. It is of course an empirical – and, especially, experimental – question whether it is possible to identify neurofunctional areas or operations that are unique to imagining and, if so, what their nature is. Accordingly, the formulation of the Subpersonal Account is primarily a matter of the empirical sciences, and only secondarily a matter of philosophy, which is by and large a non-experimental discipline. In this respect, the Subpersonal Account differs sharply from the much more philosophical theories of imagining listed above.<sup>15</sup> This difference is closely related to the three main reasons of why I do not discuss the Subpersonal Account any further.

The first is that the cognitive sciences are yet simply not advanced enough to formulate a satisfactory unified theory. Central to the explanation of this fact is that the unity of imagining has not been of much scientific interest, and that, hence, the relevant studies have typically focused on particular forms of imagining, notably visualising and belief-like ima-

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Accounts may also be captured by reference to the fact that they are all instances of the more general *Origin Account*: that is, the view that imaginative and non-imaginative phenomena differ essentially in what does or can determine their occurrence and representationality.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, philosophy should take into account experimental findings; and philosophers may be engaged in experimental investigations. But philosophical methodology is not itself experimental – at least not in the sense of being concerned with the designing and carrying out of repeated observations or experiments with replicable results. This is true even of the so-called ‘empirical’ or ‘experimental’ philosophy: it simply incorporates some scientific discipline (e.g., cognitive psychology) and applies its experimental methodology to empirical phenomena or problems, that are selected because of their relevance for certain philosophical issues. Hence, there is still a division of labour between philosophy and the empirical sciences.

gining.<sup>16</sup> What this may reflect is that the mental category of imagining is perhaps not a very interesting category with respect to the subpersonal level; while, as noted above, it plays an important role on the personal level. Indeed, at least to my knowledge, there has been no serious attempt so far to spell out, in terms of the neurofunctional entities and processes recognised by the cognitive sciences, what the sensory, affective, intellectual, experiential and more complex forms of imagining have fundamentally in common.

Moreover, it is unclear whether it is reasonable to expect to be able to formulate such a theory. Perhaps there are several distinct and fairly independent neural or otherwise subpersonal correlates of the feature distinctive of all imaginings on the personal level – for instance, one correlate for each of the basic forms of imagining. That is, it is unclear whether such correlates need to share a scientifically interesting feature in virtue of which they count as correlates of one and the same personal-level phenomenon (i.e., imagining). For instance, green – or, more generally, coloured – objects arguably do not have any physical property in common that is significant from the perspective of physics.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the same is true of

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<sup>16</sup> Tye (1991), Thomas (1999) and (2010) provide an overview of recent empirical studies on sensory imagining, while Nichols (2006) and especially Gendler (2011) do the same with respect to different kinds of intellectual imagining and related phenomena, such as pretense, empathy or delusions. Harris (2000) offers a developmental perspective on intellectual imagining and pretense, while Currie & Ravenscroft (2002), Heal (2003) and Goldman (2006) look at it from a simulationist perspective. More specifically, Currie & Ravenscroft (2002) and Gendler (2011) discuss evidence linking intellectual imagining to empathy, autism and delusion; while Weinberg & Meskin (2006) develop an empirically-based account of intellectual imagining – partly based on the work by Nichols & Stich (2003) – and apply it to various philosophical problems – namely the problems of emotional responses to fiction (see Chapter 11), of imaginative resistance, and of distinguishing imagining from supposing (see Note 18 in Chapter 1). By contrast, the empirically informed debate about the nature of sensory imagining has been largely dominated by the dispute between Kosslyn (see, for instance, his 1980) and Pylyshyn (see, for instance, his 2002).

<sup>17</sup> If at all, colour hues of surfaces should be identified with certain classes of reflectance properties, the members of which are individuated and grouped together in terms of their dispositional power to bring about a certain pattern of stimulation in the relevant opponent processing channels – and, hence, to bring about certain phe-

the neurofunctional correlates of imagining. Besides, the prospects of securing a satisfactory unified theory of imagining are likely to dwindle further, the more removed from the personal level an account becomes. Perhaps, generality is to be had only very close to – or, indeed, only at – the level of theorising about persons.

My second reason for not further investigating the prospects of the Subpersonal Account is that it is not really in competition with the unified theories aiming to capture the personal level of imagining. Rather, the two kinds of account should be seen as complementing each other. While the previously introduced theories aim to capture the nature of imagining in relation to subjectively accessible features (e.g., representationality, rational role, origin, passivity, and so on) and in contrast to other conscious mental phenomena (i.e., perception, feeling, judgement, action, and so on), the Subpersonal Account intends to identify the neurofunctional foundation of whichever aspects of our conscious mental lives are essential to imagining. That is, the Subpersonal Account is concerned with how imagining is realised in the brain, and not what it means to imagine something from the point of view of persons. Accordingly, personal and subpersonal theories – that is, philosophy and the cognitive sciences – have different goals and employ distinct notions of fundamentality. The same is true of physics or biochemistry and their concern with happenings in the mind or brain.

My third and final motivation for not spending more time on discussing the Subpersonal Account is that the more philosophically minded theories show a certain priority over it – most notably with respect to issues of epistemic authority. If philosophy comes up with a satisfactory account of imagining that makes good sense of the unity of the various forms of imagining on the personal level, it would be no reason to revise or give up this philosophical view that the cognitive sciences were to reveal that there are no significant or interesting commonalities among all the different in-

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nomenally individuated colour experiences. However, from the perspective of physics, these classes of reflectance properties – in contrast to the reflectance properties themselves – are of no scientific interest. Physicists have been concerned with developing and experimentally testing theories of how much of the incoming light surfaces reflect, but not of the extent to which surfaces stimulate the opponent processing system or cause phenomenally different colour experiences (see Dorsch (2009a) and (2010b)).

stances of imagining. Instead, and in the absence of further reasons to question the philosophical view, it would be more reasonable to conclude that imagining, as a personal-level phenomenon, has no single correlate on the subpersonal level. Similarly, the fact that physics is not really concerned with colours does not undermine the attempt to formulate an adequate philosophical theory of colours (see Notes 17f. above). Of course, philosophical theories of imagining need to be given up if they contradict empirically well-supported versions of the Subpersonal Account (if there are any). But, on the whole, the best philosophical theories of imagining tell the cognitive sciences what to look for (e.g., for the neurofunctional correlate of a particular kind of mental agency), and not the other way round.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, whether a given version of the Subpersonal Account is successful should in part be evaluated in respect of whether it captures the feature, or set of features, identified as being distinctive of all instances of imagining by the best philosophical unified theory.

#### *(iv) The Structure of the Book*

As already touched upon, the book consists of four parts. Part I has the function to set the stage for the subsequent critical discussions of the Epistemological, the Dependency and the Agency Account. It does so in three steps.

First, it specifies the two main desiderata for any unified account of imagining: extensional adequacy and explanatory power (see Chapter 1). As part of this characterisation, Part I involves a characterisation of the five central forms of imagining to be unified: sensory imagining, affective imagining, intellectual imagining, experiential imagining, and imaginative projects (see Chapter 1). It also includes a description of the main features of imaginative episodes to be explained – most notably their lack of a cognitive attitude and of an epistemic function – and, indeed, provides a first tentative reason for the endorsement of the Agency Account, namely that it promises the best explanation of the quasi-observationality of sensory ima-

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<sup>18</sup> See Dorsch (2010b) and Dorsch (2010a) for a similar division of labour between philosophy and the empirical sciences in the case of colours and of hallucinations, respectively.

ginings (see Chapters 2f.).

Second, Part I is concerned with the relationship between imagining and knowledge. In particular, it argues that certain instances of sensory imagining can constitute knowledge in a way very similar to that of perceptual experiences and, in response to this observation, asks in which sense (if any) imaginings can still be said to be uninformative with respect to the external world (see Chapter 4).

Third, Part I finishes with a discussion of the less important unified accounts of imagining listed above (see Chapter 5). The only exceptions are the Causal Account and the Subjection to the Will Account, which are briefly discussed in the Chapters 9 and 13, respectively; as well as the Subpersonal Account, which is, as mentioned above, not further discussed at all.

Part II is concerned with the characterisation (see Chapters 6f.) and rejection (see Chapter 8) of the various versions of the Epistemological Account of imagining, formulated in terms of the alleged inability of imaginings to be reliable or rationally integrated with our picture of reality, to inform us or provide us with knowledge about the external world, or to possess the commitment, justificatory power or epistemic function essential to cognitions. The central component of this discussion is a detailed and scholarly examination of O'Shaughnessy's version of the Epistemological Account.

Part III deals with the various versions of the Dependency Account. Chapter 9 highlights the relevant causal and representational elements in Hume's conception of imaginings and reveals its continuity with more contemporary 'neo-Humean' views that understand the assumed dependency of imaginings on cognitions in purely representational terms. Together with the following two chapters, it is also devoted to the applicability of the resulting *Representational Account* – that is, the representational version of the Dependency Account – to intellectual imaginings (see Section 9.5), imaginative projects (see Section 9.6), sensory imaginings (see Chapter 10) and emotional imaginings (see Chapter 11). The conclusion to be put forward is that, while the Representational Account is probably true of sensory and emotional imaginings, it fails to pay justice to the nature of the other two forms of imagining. Part III concludes with a negative assess-

ment of the prospects of devising a unified account of imagining by reference to the idea that imaginings simulate or otherwise imitate cognitions (see Chapter 12).

The final Part IV develops and defends the Agency Account of imagining. It does so, first of all, by spelling out the main thesis of the theory, distinguishing it from the Subjection to the Will Account and presenting an argument in favour of the endorsement of the Agency Account (see Chapter 13). The central claim of this account is that imaginings are to be identified with mental actions that have the purpose of producing mental representations and of applying direct control over which states of affairs are thereby represented. And it is crucial for the truth of this view is that the kind of mental agency involved is essential to the formed imaginative representations, thus ruling out the possibility of passive imaginings. In addition, Part IV illustrates how the Agency Account can meet the two desiderata for unified theories of imagining established earlier and deal with potential counterexamples, notably the imaginative counterparts to non-representational phenomena, as well as spontaneously occurring images and thoughts (see Chapter 14).

Many of the parts, chapters and sections of the book are more or less self-contained and can be read fairly independently of the others. Engagement with Part II and the Epistemological Account requires mainly knowledge of Chapter 1 and Sections 2.1f., although reading at least the first half of Chapter 4 will be helpful as well. In addition, the reader may decide to skip most of Chapter 6 and all of Chapter 7 if (s)he is not interested in the details of O'Shaughnessy's theory of imagining and his more general approach to conscious awareness. For Chapter 6 begins with a brief synopsis of the main claims and arguments of O'Shaughnessy's, which provides all the information necessary to proceed directly with Chapter 8. Part III (the Dependency Account) and Part IV (the Agency Account) presuppose even less than Part II, namely really not much more than acquaintance with the content of Chapter 1, as well as perhaps Sections 2.1f.. Both Chapter 10 and Chapter 11 – on sensory and on emotional imagining, respectively – can be read largely on their own, which is in part due to the fact that they are based on previously published material. Similarly, the discussion of the (neo-)Humean approach to imagining and its rejection as a unified account

in Chapter 9 is relatively self-contained; as is the discussion of the idea that imaginings imitate cognitions in Chapter 12. Chapter 13 constitutes a reasonably free-standing vindication of the Agency Account, with some additional support by Chapter 14. Besides, the Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5 in Part I may be used as introductory readings to the topic of imagining, given that they highlight the main forms and features of imagining and portray many of the theories of imagining to be found in the literature.

Although the outlook and structure of the book is primarily systematic in its focus on the issue of the unity of imagining, it also includes substantial critical studies of the views of particular philosophers. These views do not always constitute proper theories or provide comprehensive accounts of imagining, or of some of its specific forms (the views of Hume and Wittgenstein are good examples). But even if not, they are informative and instructive with respect to the ambition to provide a unified theory of imagining and, more generally, to understand what it means to imagine something. Discussions of the views of the following philosophers, among others, are scattered across the book: Hume (Chapter 9); Husserl (Sections 2.1, 3.1f., 5.2f. and 5.5); Sartre (Sections 3.4ff., 4.5f., 5.2f. and 5.4f.); Wittgenstein (Sections 3.4f., 4.7 and 5.3); Ryle (section: 12.3); Casey (Sections 3.3, 5.2, 5.5f. and 13.5); White (Section 5.4); Peacocke (Sections 3.2, 3.5f. and 9.4); Walton (Chapter 11 and Section 13.5); Moran (Chapter 11); O'Shaughnessy (Chapters 6ff. and Sections 9.4ff.); Martin (Sections 2.3, 3.2, 9.4 and Chapter 10); and Currie and Ravenscroft (Sections 12.1f.). Especially Husserl's theory of imagining would deserve more attention. But it is some compensation that most of his relevant and important ideas still receive due attention in so far as they can be found again in the Husserlian account defended by Sartre (1940).

Finally, due to the partially modular structure of the book, many passages depend on or allude to discussions in other parts, chapters, sections or footnotes of the book. Throughout the text, I use capital letters (and no abbreviations) to distinguish these internal cross-references from external references to particular elements or portions of cited works.

## Conclusion

### *(i) The Agency Account*

The principal aim of this book has been to investigate the prospects of formulating a satisfactory unified account of imagining. Its main conclusion has been partly negative and partly positive: while most theories – notable among them the Epistemological and the Dependency Account – fail to explain the unity of imagining, the Agency Account in its presented manifestation promises to be true. Although the presented defence of this view has by no means been complete and needs to be continued in more detail elsewhere, it put forward four arguments for endorsing the Agency Account: first, that all alternative theories cannot account for the unity of imagining (see especially Chapters 5, 8f., 12, and Section 13.5); second, that the Agency Account satisfies the chief desiderata for a unified theory of imagining (see Chapter 14); third, that it promises the best explanation of the quasi-observationality of sensory imaginings (see Section 3.6); and, fourth and most important, that the imaginative agency involved in voluntary instances of imagining is essential to them and, hence, rules out the possibility of involuntary instances (see Section 13.4).

The championed Agency Account takes imaginings to be mental actions of a particular kind. More precisely, it claims – with certain qualifications – that imaginings are mental actions aimed at the formation of one or more mental representations of specific states of affairs, that are directly determined by the mental agency involved (see Chapter 13). That the determination of which states of affairs are represented is direct means thereby that our voluntary control over what is represented is not mediated by the reliance on epistemic or merely causal processes as means. The resulting account can distinguish imaginative episodes from their cognitive counterparts and other non-imaginative episodes, given that the latter allow at best for an indirect voluntary determination of their content. It also can distin-

guish imaginative projects from other kinds of mental projects, notably from cognitive ones, which aim instead at the formation of cognising representations.

More generally, while the explanatory power and fundamentality of the Agency Account with respect to the unity of imagining should be fairly uncontroversial, its extensional adequacy needs to be further defended against several potential counterexamples. On the assumption that cognitive and other non-imaginative representations do not allow for the voluntary and direct determination of their content, my discussion has been primarily concerned with cases that appear to be either non-representational, or passively or indirectly determined instances of imagining.

The best candidates for non-representational imaginings are imaginings with non-representational counterparts. Plausible examples are imagined pains or imaginatively felt anxiety – assuming, for the sake of argument, that genuine feelings of pain or anxiety do not show any form of representationality. However, such cases are most fittingly understood as instances of experiential imagining: namely as representations of their non-imaginative counterparts. Imagining a pain thus amounts to imaginatively representing the occurrence of a real pain.

The array of potential examples of passively or indirectly determined imaginings, on the other hand, is more varied, ranging from spontaneous images and thoughts via obsessive mental representations to pictorial experiences or non-purposive associations (although the last two are not really discussed in this book). The already mentioned argument to the effect that the direct mental agency involved in voluntary imagining is essential to its instances entails, however, that there is a basic difference in nature between active imaginings and all passive representations, indicating that the latter belong to a different – and, presumably, non-imaginative – mental kind. Hence, none of the listed phenomenal poses a threat to the Agency Account of imagining. Spontaneous representations, for instance, are simply very closely related to imaginings in so far as – and in contrast, say, to perceptual images – they allow for their voluntary sustainment and transformation, albeit with the major consequence that they change in nature and turn from spontaneous into imaginative episodes, once they are subjected to imaginative activity. I return to the issue of how the Agency

Account might deal with obsessive images and thoughts further below.

The explanatory power and extensional adequacy of the Agency Account also ensures that it has the resources to satisfy the basic need that has motivated the search for a unified account of imagining: namely the desire to explain the fact that we group together a variety of apparently very different phenomena under the heading ‘imaginings’, as well as the fact that our corresponding categorisations of phenomena as either imaginative or non-imaginative are typically immediate, assured and stable. The idea is, of course, that our classifications track a certain feature that is responsible for the unity of the class of imaginings, and the presence of which we can normally become aware of by means of introspection. According to the Agency Account, the feature in question is the distinctive and phenomenologically salient active character of imaginings, as specified by the thesis (ACT).<sup>1</sup>

There is a closely related – and particularly noteworthy – respect in which the approach of the Agency Account differs from the other theories of imagining, notably the Epistemological and the Dependency Account. The strategy of the alternative views has usually been to investigate the nature of imaginative *episodes* (e.g., visualisings or suppositions) and to compare them with, and set them apart from, *cognitive* episodes. As a result, they fail to pay attention or do justice to imaginative projects or other mental complexes involving imaginative episodes. In contrast, the Agency Account deliberately centres on mental activity, of which imaginative *projects* are a prime example, and contrasts it with mental *passivity* (independently of whether it pertains to cognition or not).

Before I continue with this last point in a short moment, it is worthwhile to briefly pause and consider one especially significant consequence of the active nature of imagining: namely that at least some visual imaginings manage to constitute quasi-perceptual knowledge about the external world. For they do so if – and, presumably, only if – they occur in the context of mental projects, the successful pursuit of which guarantees that the visual imaginings concerned turn out to be reliable and possibly non-arbitrarily veridical representations of certain aspects of reality (see Chapter 4). The projects in question involve the active imaginative manipulation of percep-

<sup>1</sup> See Dorsch (2009b) for further – and independent – arguments and observations in support of the phenomenological salience of direct (but not indirect) mental agency.

tually acquired or mnemonically stored information; and they thereby take into account the relevant ways, in which entities like the originally perceived or remembered objects behave in the actual world. Thus, despite the fact that imagining cannot provide us with new evidence about reality, it can none the less provide us with (a priori) access to new information about the external world, that could not be read off of the underlying cognitive states by non-imaginative means (e.g., simply by means of introspection and reflection). The existence of such cognising imaginings is one reason why the Epistemological Account does not come to much. But there are others, to which I turn now.

### *(ii) The Epistemological and the Dependency Account*

While the Agency Account is able to satisfy the two desiderata for a unified account of imagining, its two main rivals remain wanting in this respect. This is primarily due to the fact that both the Epistemological and the Dependency Account characterise imaginings in terms of their non-cognitivity. While the Epistemological Account takes imaginings to be non-cognitive in so far as they lack one or more features distinctive of cognitive or cognising phenomena (e.g., an epistemic function, or the power to constitute knowledge), the Dependency Account assumes imaginings to be non-cognitive in so far as they are constitutionally dependent on and, hence, distinct from cognitive phenomena (namely in some substantial way that reaches beyond the general restriction on what we can imagine by our conceptual capacities and our past experiences). Both the Epistemological and the Dependency Account are therefore first and foremost concerned with differentiating imaginings from cognitions. By contrast, and as already mentioned, the Agency Account does not particularly concentrate on the relationship between these two kinds of mental state, but instead takes the distinction between mental actions and mental passions to be fundamental.

The focus on the non-cognitivity of imaginings is problematic since characterising imaginings solely in terms of, and in contrast to, cognitive phenomena significantly limits the scope of the Epistemological and the Dependency Account. For certain forms of imagining – notably affective

imaginings and imaginative projects – do not have cognitive counterparts and, hence, resist specification in terms of them. As a result, the relevant theories turn out to be explanatorily unilluminating – if not extensionally inadequate – with respect to certain central cases of imagining. For instance, it is not a substantial truth about affective imaginings that they cannot constitute knowledge, because this applies to all kinds of affective states, including non-imaginative ones. And that emotional imaginings are, indeed, representations of non-imaginative experiences does not distinguish them from, say, episodic memories and, moreover, does not amount to a characterisation of them in terms of cognitive phenomena.

However, accounting for imaginings instead by reference to both cognitive and non-cognitive phenomena threatens to lead to a disjunctive theory: while the nature of some imaginings (e.g., sensory or intellectual ones) would be elucidated in terms of how they differ from or depend on cognitions, the nature of others (e.g., affective imaginings) would be described by mention of how they differ from or depend on cognitions. The pair of intellectual and affective imaginings shows that this would result in some form of disjunctivism, given that intellectual imaginings depend merely generally and semantically on judgements or beliefs, whereas affective imaginings are representationally dependent on specific emotional feelings. Such a disjunctive treatment is, by itself, unproblematic – but becomes untenable once it is presumed to provide a unified account of imagining.

In addition, the Epistemological Account – and, in particular, O’Shaughnessy’s rich and sophisticated version of it – faces objections that are more specifically directed at its central claim that imaginings lack a cognitive concern with reality, or a closely related cognitive feature. To begin with, the Epistemological Account possesses only limited explanatory power. For postulating such an absence of a cognitive property does not say anything positive about what it means to imagine something – which is in part why O’Shaughnessy, as the principal proponent of the Epistemological Account, supplements his theory with a representational version of the Dependency Account.

Another problem is that, depending on which cognitive feature imaginings are said to lack, the respective versions of the Epistemological Account are either false, or uninteresting, with respect to the ambition to

provide a unified account. Some are interestingly false because they cannot allow for the already noted possibility that sensory imaginings may, under suitable circumstances, constitute knowledge and possess the required cognitive features (see above and Chapter 4). Accordingly, imaginings are not always deprived of the properties of being reliable, informative, grounded in perception, rationally integrated with our picture of the world and, possibly, constitutively linked to the relevant aspects of reality. The other versions of the Epistemological Account, by contrast, are uninterestingly true because their denial that imaginings do not show certain other cognitive features does not distinguish imaginings from other non-cognitive phenomena. The observation that imaginings lack a cognitive attitude, have no epistemic function and possess no *prima facie* justificatory power with respect to first-order beliefs does not reveal much about their nature, given that the same may be discerned, say, in emotional or conative states and in non-imaginative mental projects.

On the other hand, much of the Dependency Account – notably in its representational version – can be preserved, not the least its identification of a core divide, on the level of sensory and affective episodes, between original or genuine occurrences and mere representations or imitations of such occurrences. This crucial distinction has already constituted a central element of Hume’s approach to (non-intellectual) imaginings and is – as illustrated in Part III – still present in many contemporary theories, the history of which can often be traced back to Hume’s theory of the mind. However, the Dependency Account does not apply to intellectual imaginings and imaginative projects and should therefore be rejected as a theory of the unity of imagining.

Moreover, the main truths noted by the Dependency Account – as well as by the Epistemological Account – can be accommodated and explained by the Agency Account. For example, visualising a tree amounts to imagining seeing a tree in part because the only direct way of actively bringing about a visual image of a tree is precisely to represent the instantiation of the phenomenal character of a perceptual image of a tree, given that we do not have any voluntary control over perceptual or mnemonic images, and only some limited active influence on spontaneous images (see Section 14.4). Similarly, imaginings do not normally play a role in cognition pre-

cisely because they originate in epistemically unreliable imaginative activity (see Section 14.1). Because of this explanatory power, the Agency Account is also more fundamental as a unified account than its two rivals.

### *(iii) Other Theories of Imagining*

In Chapter 5 and Section 13.5, I discussed further alternatives to the Agency Account of imagining and argued that they are equally untenable as theories of the nature shared by, and unique to, imagining.

The Quantitative Account, which takes the basic difference between imaginative and cognitive episodes to be merely one in degree, cannot capture the various phenomenologically salient differences in kind between the two types of phenomena, notably the episodic differences in attitude and epistemic function.

By contrast, the Phenomenal Account is wrong in assuming the fundamental difference between imaginative and non-imaginative episodes to be phenomenal in nature, primarily because phenomenal differences among mental episodes (such as the difference in attitude and seeming origin between imaginings and cognitions) should – and can – be explained in more fundamental terms.

One problem for the Ontological Account – which claims that the difference between imaginative and cognitive phenomena consists fundamentally in the fact that they are concerned with entities of two very different ontological categories – is that its postulation of the two distinct categories of objects lacks independent motivation. In particular, neither semantic considerations about the status of fictional entities, nor phenomenological considerations about the difference in attitude can be of help here. More important, however, the Ontological Account fails to accommodate the fact that imaginings can – and often do – refer to precisely those entities which we can cognise, namely aspects of the actual world.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Besides, any ontological difference between imagined and cognised objects would very likely be linked to – and perhaps even due to – some co-extensional difference in how imaginings and cognitions relate to the world or the will (e.g., if imagined objects would turn out to be mind-dependent). The investigation of the latter difference might thus render the investigation of the former at best supplementary, and at worst superfluous.

The best version of the Modal Account of imaginings assumes that what is distinctive of them is that they are committed to things being a certain way in some possible world, rather than the actual world. The resulting view is, in fact, an instance of the Attitude Account and faces the same general objections as the latter. On a more specific level, the Modal Account cannot satisfactorily deal with cases in which we imaginatively take some state of affairs to be impossible.

The idea of one or more distinctive imaginative attitudes, as proposed by the Attitude Account, is problematic for two main reasons. First, it has difficulties to avoid the conclusion that non-imaginative phenomena like episodic memories, spontaneous images or pictorial experiences also involve the proposed kind(s) of attitude. Second, it does not identify the most fundamental difference between cognitions and imaginings, given that the phenomenologically salient attitude of mental episodes is further constituted by some underlying aspects of their nature. Besides, some versions of the Attitude Account apply only to some forms of imagining, but not others.

The Spontaneity Account, too, is forced to treat spontaneously occurring images and thoughts as imaginative. For it specifies the nature of imaginings in terms of their special origin in the mind, namely in subjective responses or doings – rather than in externally imposed mere happenings – which may be either voluntary (in the shape of agency) or involuntary (in the shape of spontaneity). But the view's attempts at characterising spontaneity do not enable us to distinguish imaginings from hallucinations or episodic memories. Moreover, the account fails to unify the postulated voluntary and involuntary forms of imagining and, relatedly, wrongly entails that spontaneous representations are phenomenologically closer to rational judgemental thoughts and mental actions than to passive perceptions and sensations.

Finally, the Subjection to the Will Account (which was discussed in Section 13.5 rather than Chapter 5) is a watered down cousin of the Agency Account, given that it demands the possibility – rather than the actuality – of voluntary and direct control over what imaginings represent. But, partly because of this weakening of the requirement on the involvement of imaginative agency, it is to be rejected for three reasons. First, it cannot pay

justice to the fact that directly determined mental actions are essentially active in this way. Second, it wrongly locates the difference between imaginative and non-imaginative phenomena in the ability to engage in imaginative activity, rather than in the nature of that activity. Third, it wrongly turns the question of whether an episode is an instance of imagining into an essentially empirical question, thus ignoring the phenomenological salience of the difference between imaginative and non-imaginative phenomena.

#### *(iv) Outlook*

The acceptance of the Agency Account as the most promising unified theory of imagining does not mark the end of inquiry. As already pointed out in the Introduction to this book, it is indeed necessary to provide further support for the Agency Account and to elucidate in more detail how it can accommodate a whole range of mental phenomena, in particular those which could not be discussed in this book – a task which I have to leave for a future occasion.

As it stands, the Agency Account is true only if pictorial experiences, non-purposive associations and similar passive phenomena are indeed not imaginative; and only if we really cannot actively and directly determine the content of our judgements, beliefs, memories, intentions, and other non-imaginative representations. Although these two assumptions are presumably less controversial than many other claims made in the book, more work needs to be done to furnish them with a satisfactory argumentative grounding (see Dorsch (2009b) and (2012c)). Similarly, some of the accounts discussed in Chapter 5 probably deserve more attention, not the least with respect to how they are related to the idea that imaginings are mental actions of a certain kind. Especially the Modal and, more generally, the Attitude Account may have much to say about the nature of imaginative episodes (if not also of complexes thereof) and, in particular, about the distinctive commitment of imagining.

It would also be interesting to investigate the extent to which mental phenomena, that are neither clearly imaginative nor clearly non-imaginative, involve – or are at least closely related to – imagining. I already briefly

listed examples of such phenomena in Section 1.3 and discussed there also why their status is rather undecided. But the truth of the Agency Account may have interesting consequences for them, which are worthwhile of further exploration. Pathological or psychologically unusual phenomena (e.g., intrusive or inserted thoughts, compulsive representations, delusions, hallucinations, etc.) may turn out to involve some form of suppressed, non-deliberate or unacknowledged imaginative activity. Hopes, wishes, expectations, anticipations or speculations may likewise involve imagining, perhaps to the extent to which they mark or recognise the concerned non-actual states of affairs as unrealistic or unlikely to occur (i.e., to the extent to which they fail to take the represented states of affairs to be present in the actual future). Finally, although experiences of grouping phenomena, or of noticing aspects, allow for voluntary switches between experiencing one thing and experiencing another (or, perhaps more precisely, between experiencing something as one thing or experiencing it as another), it is unlikely that they involve some imaginative activity as part of, or in addition to, active attention. For which groupings or aspects we can choose between does not seem to be up to us. In particular, we cannot decide to see a horse in the famous duck-rabbit picture, just as we cannot decide to see a horse in an unambiguous picture of a duck (see Dorsch (2012c)). And this list of applications of the Agency Account to borderline cases can surely be extended much further.

Besides, it is very appealing to bring the conclusions about the distinctive nature of imagining to bear on relevant issues in other areas of philosophy. As mentioned in the Introduction to this book (see especially Note 2), the imagination is a central ingredient in accounts of such diverse phenomena as thought experiments, modal knowledge and knowledge of counterfactuals, our simulation of and empathy with other people, pretense and acting, games of make-believe, the aesthetic appreciation of artworks and other linguistic or pictorial representations, or moral evaluation. The gained insight that imaginings are mental actions of a certain kind may very well help to clarify the nature of some of these phenomena – even if only by disclosing that they involve imagining to a far lesser extent than originally thought.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In this book, I discussed three specific applications of the imagination to other philosophical issues: to the acquisition of factual knowledge (see Chapter 4); to the ac-

However, the general limits on the length of a book like this meant that the discussion of the nature and unity of imagining had to be restricted to the critical presentation of the various candidates for a unified account of imagining to be found in the literature, as well as to an elementary defence of the Agency Account as the best available unified theory. As the main thesis (ACT) of this theory states, a mental phenomenon is imaginative just in case – and, fundamentally, because – it constitutes a mental action with the ultimate intrinsic purpose of actively forming one or more representations with specific and directly determined contents.

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quisition of conditional and modal knowledge (see Sections 2.1 and 2.3, as well as Williamson (2008)); and to our (emotional) engagement art and fiction (see Chapter 11, as well as Walton (1990) and Moran (1994)). I intend to elaborate on these and other utilisations of the imagination in epistemology and aesthetics in a future monograph.

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