

PHILOSOPHICAL LECTURE

IMAGINATION AND THE SELF

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Read 2 March 1966

I START with a notorious argument of Berkeley's.

Phil. But (to pass by all that hath been hitherto said, and reckon it for nothing, if you will have it so) I am content to put the whole upon this issue. If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so.

Hyl. If it comes to that, the point will soon be decided. What more easy than to conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any mind whatsoever? I do at this present time conceive them existing after that manner.

Phil. How say you, Hylas, can you see a thing which is at the same time unseen?

Hyl. No, that were a contradiction.

Phil. Is it not a contradiction to talk of *conceiving* a thing which is *unconceived*?

Hyl. It is.

Phil. The tree or house therefore which you think of, is conceived by you.

Hyl. How should it be otherwise?

Phil. And what is conceived is surely in the mind.

Hyl. Without question, that which is conceived is in the mind.

Phil. How then came you to say, you conceived a house or tree existing independent and out of all minds whatsoever?

Hyl. That was, I own, an oversight; but stay, let me consider what led me into it—it is a pleasant mistake enough. As I was thinking of a tree in a solitary place, where no one was present to see it, methought that was to conceive a tree as existing unperceived or unthought of, not considering that I myself conceived it all the while. But now I plainly see, that all I can do is to frame ideas in my own mind. I may indeed conceive in my own thoughts the idea of a tree, or a house, or a mountain, but that is all. And this is far from proving, that I can conceive them *existing out of the minds of all spirits*.

Phil. You acknowledge then that you cannot possibly conceive how any one corporeal sensible thing should exist otherwise than in a mind.

Hyl. I do.

First Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous

It is not very difficult to refute this argument. I shall not rehearse a number of the considerations that might be brought against it. Yet it seems to have something in it which is not utterly implausible; the difficulty is to pin this down. A first step to doing this is to recall the familiar Berkelian insistence on the connexion of thinking and images, and to take him to mean by 'conceiving' a thing, having an image of it or—to concentrate on the leading case—visualizing it. Not, of course, that this interpretation will save the argument for the very ambitious purpose to which, as I suppose, Berkeley assigned it, that of showing that an unperceived object is logically impossible. For one thing, in the sense of 'conceive' in which what is conceivable is logically possible, and what is not conceivable is not logically possible, conceiving and visualizing are clearly different things; as Descartes explicitly and correctly remarked. Indeed, Berkeley himself had to concede this for the case of minds, and in particular of God, but then they were not the sorts of things that could be perceived at all; for things of such a sort that they could be perceived, to think of them is for him (roughly) to visualize them. This is a mistake, and inasmuch as the argument rests on it, it fails. But if we jump over that mistake, and inspect the ground on the further side of it, we meet a much more interesting question: whether we can visualize something that is not seen. At least here, it might seem that Berkeley has a good point—not indeed to establish his idealism, but a good point nevertheless. For it is plausible to say that if I visualize something, then I think of myself seeing it; and that I could think of myself seeing something which was not seen does look as though it involved a contradiction. Does it indeed do so?

There is one sense, certainly, in which it does not, and this must be got out of the way first. This is the sense in which the relative clause, 'which is not seen', is taken in a purely extensional manner: that is to say, that in which the statement 'A thinks of himself seeing x , which is not seen' is equivalent to the bare conjunction, with external quantification, 'A thinks of himself seeing x , and x is not seen'. Such a conjunction can obviously be true: the fact that someone in the nineteenth century visualized the South Pole had no tendency to anticipate the feat of those who first saw that place. This rather blank consideration is enough to dispose of Berkeley's argument for his idealist purpose, I think, even with respect to visualization; if at least he really wants to 'put the whole upon this issue'. It would only be if we had already accepted his earlier arguments

about the status of the objects of sense that we might find the considerations drawn from visualization persuasive for idealism.

This extensional sense, however, constitutes only one way of taking a relative clause of this type and it is of limited application. The question of taking the statement in this way would seem to arise only in those cases in which what I visualize is something that actually exists; only in this case can we quantify over the statement 'A thinks of himself seeing *x*' and conjoin it with the statement '*x* is not seen'. But the fact that what is visualized is an actual object, while it may allow the extensional interpretation, certainly does not demand it. For—to change the example for the moment—the statement 'He thought of himself seeing the Queen, who was riding a bicycle' admits, as well as the extensional interpretation, an intensional interpretation by which it means the same as 'he visualized the Queen riding a bicycle'; under this latter interpretation the statement is not equivalent to a conjunction of the previous type, and not falsified by its being the case that the Queen was not at that time, or indeed at any other time, riding a bicycle.

I said just now that it was only with the visualization of actual objects that the extensional interpretation could even present itself; if that is true, with imaginary objects only an intensional one is available. I gave as a reason for this claim the consideration that only with actual objects could one make the quantification required for the bare conjunction which is the mark of the extensional interpretation. I think that this is right, but there is a complication about it that I shall explore a little since it will be relevant to the argument later on.

The complication emerges if we consider the following case. A man is invited to visualize an ideal girl friend; and he visualizes a girl who turns out to be exactly like Claudia Cardinale. We might report this state of affairs by saying, 'Asked to visualize his ideal girl, he visualized a girl just like Claudia Cardinale.' At first glance we may be inclined to take the expression 'just like Claudia Cardinale' here in the same way that we took the expression 'riding a bicycle' in the earlier example 'he visualized the Queen riding a bicycle'. But this could be misleading. For in that former example, the phrase 'riding a bicycle' represents an essential element of what he visualized: if he were to give as exact an account as he could of his thought he would tell a story in which the Queen was described as riding a bicycle. Now this *could* be the case with the man who visualized a girl just like Claudia Cardinale; Claudia Cardinale might occur essentially in

his account of what he visualized—if he constructed his ideal girl to the specification of Claudia Cardinale, as it were. But this does not have to be so. It might merely be that he visualized a girl, and that that girl happened to be just like Claudia Cardinale—he may, indeed, never have heard of Claudia Cardinale, and no reference to her would appear in his description of the girl he visualized. Since, in these circumstances, the description ‘just like Claudia Cardinale’ does not occur essentially in the characterization of what he visualized, it is tempting to revert to the bare conjunction analysis and represent the state of affairs by saying, ‘He thought of himself seeing a certain girl; and that girl was just like Claudia Cardinale.’ But this of course will not do, since it keeps the description ‘just like Claudia Cardinale’ out of the content of his thought only if we read it fully extensionally, with a quantifier external to the whole thing, so that it comes to saying that there is a certain girl of whom it is true both that he thought of himself seeing her, and that she is just like Claudia Cardinale: which is of course false. Recoiling from this, we may seem to be left with no option but to put the description ‘just like Claudia Cardinale’ straightforwardly into the account of his thought; which obscures the fact that this was not in the present case an element of his thought, but an *ex post facto* comment on it.

I think that in this present case a solution might be achieved on the lines of representing the statement ‘He visualized a girl just like Claudia Cardinale’ as ‘He visualized a girl of a certain sort; and Claudia Cardinale is a girl of that sort’—that is to say, as indeed a conjunction, but a conjunction that does not rest on quantifying over individuals. However, even if such a solution might do here, I think that there will prove to be a wider range of problems of a similar kind, which may well require other sorts of treatment. They concern more generally the role that a man’s knowledge and beliefs may play in relation to what he visualizes, imagines, and so forth; and if we take a further look at this we shall see that the complication introduced by the present example goes deeper than this example by itself reveals. I have discussed this example in terms of a contrast between what is essential to what the man visualized, as he visualized it, and what comes into a description of it only via an *ex post facto* comment—an external fact, as we might say. But if we now take a case that introduces not merely ignorance (in the sense that the previous man had not heard of Claudia Cardinale), but false belief, we shall see that the phrase ‘essential to what he visualized’ is not

merely vague (as it evidently is) but also in an important way ambiguous.

Suppose a man imagines assassinating the Prime Minister; and that his imagining this takes the form of visualization. Suppose, further, that being rather radically misinformed about political developments, he supposes Lord Salisbury to be the Prime Minister. What is it in fact that this man imagines? It seems difficult to deny that he does imagine assassinating the Prime Minister, since that is the act—let us suppose him to be a violent anarchist—which he sets himself to imagine. Nevertheless it would be very misleading just to say without qualification that he had imagined assassinating the Prime Minister, since it would naturally imply that he had been imagining the assassination of Mr. Wilson: in the fact that this could be misleading we see an illustration of the difficulty of keeping intensional contexts pure. At the same time, if his mistaken belief was operative in this piece of imagining, it will also be that he imagined assassinating Lord Salisbury. Elements drawn from Lord Salisbury will occur in his visualizing; his image of the fallen Prime Minister will be an image of Lord Salisbury.

Another way of putting the situation here, which will be useful to us later on, is to introduce the notion of the story that the man would ideally tell if telling what he imagined. I do not mean by this a genuine autobiographical story, rehearsing for instance the sequence of his images, but rather the story, as full as possible, of what, as he imagined it, happened—a piece of fiction, which in this case might start off 'I was standing in front of 10 Downing Street, the gun in my pocket . . .'. Such a story I shall call—merely using the term as a label and no more—the *narration*. In this present case, if indeed the man's mistake about the Prime Minister's identity was operative in his imagining, the narration will introduce Lord Salisbury—very possibly by name. In this sense, the introduction of Lord Salisbury is essential to the account of what the man on this occasion imagined, in a way in which the introduction of Claudia Cardinale was not essential to the account of what the man in our first example imagined; in that case, we made an addition for him in telling the tale, in this case not. Yet, while Lord Salisbury is in this way essential to the account of what the man imagined, it may not be that Lord Salisbury is essential to what he was really trying to imagine—and if it at all depends on false belief, as we are supposing, he is probably not essential in this second sense. For it may be that

precisely what this man wants to do is to imagine assassinating the Prime Minister *whoever he may be*; and when his mistake is pointed out to him, he regards the Salisbury elements in his previous act of imagining as at best an irrelevance, at worst an embarrassment.

In this sense of 'essential'—the sense in which an element is not merely essential to the account of what I do imagine, but is essential to my particular imaginative *project*—the Salisbury element will be essential, not to a man who is imagining the assassination of the Prime Minister and merely believes that Lord Salisbury is the Prime Minister, but rather to a man who is imagining the assassination of the Prime Minister and also *imagining Salisbury as the Prime Minister*. For such a man, it will be a misunderstanding to point out, with respect to his narration, that Salisbury is not the Prime Minister; it is part of the point of his imaginative tale that Salisbury should occur in it in this role.

The point about the different nature of the project in the two cases seems not merely to *emerge* in the difference of the treatments which would be appropriate to the narrations, but in some more basic way to be characterized by that difference. For if we take the two men I have described, one of whom merely thinks that Salisbury is the Prime Minister, the other of whom is, as part of his imagining, imagining Salisbury as the Prime Minister, it is surely obvious that there need be no difference at all in the *content* of their respective narrations. Exactly the same story could come from either; similarly, on the purely psychological level, the same visualizings, the same images, could surely occur in both cases. The difference lies rather in how the story is meant.

Let us now go back to the problem of whether one can visualize an unseen object. We saw earlier on that if what is in question is a real object, together with a purely extensional interpretation of the statement that it is not seen, there is evidently no difficulty at all. We then broached an intensional interpretation, and have been pursuing a complication that attended getting clearer about what was involved in intensional interpretations. Using a distinction we have made in the course of that, we may now consider the case of visualizing an object—let us say a tree—where the idea that it is not seen by anyone is intensionally contained and is essential in the strongest sense: that is to say, the idea that it is not seen is essential to the imaginative project (it was such a project that Hylas was invited to undertake, presumably, in the original Berkeley argument).

Consider now two possible narrations. One goes roughly: 'A tree stands on an utterly deserted island; no one has ever seen it or will see it. It is a green deciduous tree, flowers on one side of it, etc., etc.' The second goes: 'I see in the middle distance a tree. As I get nearer I see that it is green. Moving round, on the far side I glimpse some flowers. This tree has never been seen by anyone and never will be.'

The first of these two narrations would surely be that of a man whose project it was to *imagine an unseen tree*. If that was his project, his narration reveals him as having succeeded in it. Notice that the narration does not contain any incoherence; nor does any incoherence arise from the fact that he is able to give this narration. A difficulty of this latter kind *would* arise if what we were considering were not an imaginative narration, but a description which claimed to be factually true of the world; for in that case, one could of course ask, 'If what you are saying is true, how do you or anyone else know that it is?' But since it does not claim to be factually true, but is a product of imagination, no such question can arise. It is *his* story. So we can coherently *imagine* an unseen tree: but, remember, we knew that already. Our question is about visualization.

The second narration would seem to be that of a man whose project it was to *imagine himself seeing a tree*. And in his narration, surely, there is something incoherent. For the last element in it, that the tree was not seen by anyone, really does clash with the rest of the narration, which is precisely a narration of his seeing it. Thus there does seem to be some incoherence in imagining oneself seeing an unseen tree, unless—boringly—this merely meant that one imagined oneself seeing a tree never seen by anyone else.

Now how are we to take the claim that it is impossible to *visualize* an unseen tree? One way of taking it would perhaps be this: that a man who was a visualizer, who did his imagining by way of visual images, would be bound in honesty to give the second type of narration and not the first. If he visualized this tree, he would by that fact be *imagining himself seeing a tree*; and that, as we have seen, does appear incoherent with an element in what he imagines being that the tree is unseen. Hence a visualizer, on this view, cannot imagine an unseen tree; he can only imagine himself seeing a tree, and that tree cannot be unseen. But if this is what the claim about visualization means, it is patently absurd. For if, as has been said, there is a coherent project of imagining an unseen tree, how can the fact that a man is a

visualizer debar him from carrying it out? The narration—which is the fullest account of what he imagined—makes no reference to anything being seen, and is coherent. How could such a narration be in some way impugned by the discovery that the man was a visualizer?

Well, it may be said, what this shows is that the correct thesis about the relations of imagination, visualization, and the unseen is not *that* thesis, namely that one who does his imagining by way of visualizing is incapable of imagining an unseen tree. The correct thesis will rather be this: that although a man may imagine an unseen tree, and do it by visualizing, he cannot do it by *visualizing an unseen tree*. For visualizing, it was suggested earlier, means ‘thinking of oneself seeing’: and to think of oneself seeing an unseen tree is (the thesis claims) a nonsense, in much the same way as (we have already seen) imagining oneself seeing an unseen tree is. So we cannot visualize an unseen tree; though we can imagine one, and possibly by way of visualizing.

If this is the thesis, what now is the relation between what I imagine and what I visualize? It is tempting to say that if I imagine by visualizing, then what I visualize is what I imagine, or at least part of it; but clearly this temptation must be resisted, if the present thesis is to stand up. But perhaps there is a way of doing this, in terms of the distinctions I made earlier. We recall the man who imagined assassinating the Prime Minister, and who suffered at the time from a false belief that Lord Salisbury held that office. There were Lord Salisbury elements in his visualizing which, I suggested, were not essential to his imaginative project. Now it might be the case that a man who visualized found himself visualizing various elements which he realized were unsuitable to his imaginative project, and correspondingly left them out of his narration.

Thus suppose a man to be imagining a bath, and that he indeed visualizes a bath. Having been recently much at the Bonnard exhibition, he finds himself unable to visualize a bath without a woman in it. However, the woman being irrelevant to his imaginative project, he leaves her out of the narration. If, moreover, his imaginative project positively demanded the absence of the woman—if he were required to imagine an empty bath, for instance—he would *have* to leave her out.—But, it may be objected, the narration was said to be the fullest account of what he imagined; and if he leaves out these elements in what he visualizes, surely it is not the fullest account?—Yes, it can still be the fullest account of what he *imagined*; what it is not, is

the fullest account of what he *visualized*. What this means is that, for certain purposes at least, and for certain applications of 'imagine', we can properly make the determinant of *what he imagined* his imaginative project, and not what he visualized, if he visualized anything. There seems to be a strong case for this in the example of the man and the bath; for it seems insane to say that this man could not imagine an empty bath, while it is perfectly true that in his present state he cannot visualize one.

Thus even when we imagine by way of visualizing, we can properly be said to imagine something lacking an element which is present in what we visualize. The suggestion I am now considering is that this is how things are with imagining and visualizing the unseen; it is like the bath example, with the man precisely setting out to imagine an empty bath, but with this difference: that the inseparability of the woman from the bath is a contingent fact about this man's present visualizings, whereas the inseparability of *being seen* from the objects of visualization is a necessary and ubiquitous feature of them. Thus on this account, a man can imagine an unseen tree, and by way of visualizing a tree; but he does not, and cannot, visualize an unseen tree, and the reason why what he visualizes is different from what he imagines is that he is allowed to discard elements from his visualization incompatible with the essentials of his imaginative project.

One merit of this cumbersome proposal is that it at least seems to leave a place for something like the visual in visualizing, without jeopardizing the truth that visualizers are not debarred from imagining the unseen. Moreover, the idea which it introduces of a man constructing his narration to suit his imaginative project fits well what I take to be a fact, that a man who vividly visualizes may be incautiously drawn on into a narration which actually does not suit his imaginative project. Thus the bath man, narrating a scene supposedly with an empty bath, might make a lunge in his narration into suggestions of the presence of the woman. Rather similarly, the man who was a visualizer giving the narration of the tree, while he is unlikely to move off into talking about his own perceptual activities, as in the second narration I considered before, might very well find himself saying things like this: 'A tree stands on a deserted island. On this side there are green leaves, round towards the back some flowers. To the right, a cactus plant . . .'—a narration not incoherent like the one before, but which, as a narration of an unseen tree, gives grounds, let us say, for disquiet.

But not for ultimate disquiet; and we shall now see that the cumbersome account I have just been considering made too many concessions. The fact that the narration just given introduces something like a perceptual point of view may well reveal something familiar about visualization; visualization is (at least usually, and if vivid) visualization of an object as seen from a point of view. The object may well be as though seen from one side rather than another. But this does not in fact mean that any imagined seeing is going on *in* the visualized scene. Even if we accept the description of visualizing as *thinking of oneself seeing*—and we shall come back to that later—this still does not mean that an element or feature of what I visualize is that it is being seen; as it was an element or feature of the visualized bath that it contained a woman. I as perceiver do not necessarily belong inside the world that I visualize, any more than I necessarily do so in the world that I imagine; or the painter in the scene that he paints; or the audience in the world of the stage. The cumbersome account I have been considering was wrong in treating the ‘seeing’ element in visualizing as an element in what is visualized. Let us then abandon that account—though not, I hope, everything that was said in the course of formulating it—and see what sense we can make of what is surely nearer the truth here, that we can in fact even visualize the unseen, because the fact that in visualization I am as it were seeing is not itself necessarily an element of what is visualized.

We may start with the analogy of the stage; and I shall consider, begging a large number of interesting questions which revolve around this point, only what may be called very vaguely the illusionist stage, problems of alienation and so forth being left on one side. The audience at such a play are spectators of a world they are not in. They see what they may well describe as, say, Othello in front of a certain palace in Venice; and they see that from a certain point of view—not meaning by that that they see it from a certain seat in the theatre, but rather that what they are presented with is a certain view of that palace, e.g. a view of its front. But they are not themselves at any specifiable distance from that palace; unlike Othello, who may be (thus he may be just about to enter it).

They are, of course, at a certain specifiable distance from certain pieces of scenery, as is Sir Laurence Olivier, and they again at a certain distance from him. It is also true that they would not be seeing Othello unless they were seeing Sir Laurence or another real man moving around in such an area, nor would

they be seeing the palace, unless they saw some such scenery. But we must not say that the reason why, in seeing Sir Laurence, they see Othello, is that Sir Laurence *is* Othello: at least if that 'is' is the 'is' of identity. For if Sir Laurence *is* Othello, then Miss Maggie Smith, or whoever, *is* Desdemona, and since Othello strangles Desdemona, it would follow that Sir Laurence strangles Miss Smith, which is false. What Sir Laurence does to Miss Smith is (something like) pretending to strangle her: but Othello does not pretend to strangle Desdemona, and it would be a very different play if he did. This lack of formal identity between actor and character holds also, of course, for the relations of scenery and setting: when in a play someone sets fire to the palace, they do not, hopefully, set fire to the scenery. It is just because of these failures of identity that we can sensibly say that we are, as spectators, at a certain distance from the scenery and the actors, but not from the palace or from Othello; if identity held, we should, in being 150 feet from Sir Laurence, be just that distance from Othello.

Although this is, of course, only the crudest gesture towards a complex and fascinating subject, it is enough perhaps to contribute some of the content to saying that we as spectators are not *in* the world of the play itself; we—in a sense—see what is happening in that world, but not in the same sense as that in which we see the actors, nor as that in which the characters see one another or events in the play. For if I see Othello and Desdemona, then I see Othello strangle Desdemona; but that will not entail that I, as part of my biography, have ever seen anyone strangle anyone. Nor need the actress who plays Emilia ever see a dead body; but Emilia does, for she sees the dead body of Desdemona. These points suggest a particular consideration relevant to our argument, that things can happen in the play unseen; not just in the sense, obvious enough, in which things can happen on the stage unseen (as when an actor skilfully conceals from us a prop left over from the last act), but in that sense in which the playwright can provide the direction, 'Enter First Murderer unobserved', and yet still consistently hope that his piece will have an audience, an audience who will indeed see this unobserved murderer.

The cinema provides more complex considerations of the same sort. Here the point of view from which things are seen moves. This point of view, relative to the actors and to the set, is in fact that of the camera. What is done artistically with this point of view can, of course, vary very greatly. It can in some

rather unusual films be itself, in the film, the point of view of a camera: that is to say, when the scene presents straight on the front of a mirror, what we see in it is the lens of a camera. In many films for some of the time, and in at least one film for all of the time, it is the point of view of a character: when it is directed to a mirror, we see the face of that character, and when that character is struck, a fist grows larger until it fills the screen, and so on. In most conventional films most of the time, it is neither of these things. What then is it? We cannot say, at least without great care, that it is *our* point of view; for we are not, in the usual case, invited to have the feeling that we are near to this castle, floating towards its top, or stealing around these lovers, peering minutely at them. This effect *can* be created, sometimes unintentionally—but in the general run, it is not. One thing, in the general run, is certain: *we* are not *there*. Nor, again, can we say in any simple way that this point of view is the director's, though this suggestion does not entirely fail to make a point. We cannot quite simply say it, since we are no more invited to think of Griffith or of Antonioni floating up towers or creeping around lovers. It is his point of view only in the derivative sense that he is directing our attention to this and that by showing it to us as it appears from that point of view. In the standard case, it is not anyone's point of view. Yet we see the characters and action from that point of view, in that sense, or near it, in which we saw Othello. Thus once more, and very obviously, we can see in this way what in terms of the action is unseen.

That there are clues to be found in the dramatic and visual arts to the problems of visualization is, I suppose, obvious and unsurprising. If, however, what we are concerned with is the *nature* of visualization, these clues notoriously run out at the crucial stage. One reason that they run out is that in both theatre and cinema we really see *something*—something which we might say (coming out into the open a bit more than I have done so far) *represents* the characters and action. But in visualization nothing is really seen—and this is a big difference. It is a big enough difference to defeat, I think, Sartre, who seems to hope (in *L'Imaginaire*) that he has acquired enough impetus from the representational cases to convey him through the air to visualization, where our 'intention', in his terminology, is not sustained by any matter at all. But the impetus does not seem sufficient.

Yet even if these analogies leave us baffled, as they certainly

leave me baffled, about the nature of visualization, they seem to provide sufficient clues to relieve us of puzzlement at least about visualizing the unseen. For even if visualizing is in some sense thinking of myself seeing, and what is visualized is presented as it were from a perceptual point of view, there can be no reason at all for insisting that that point of view is of one *within* the world of what is visualized; any more than our view of Othello is a view had by one in Othello's context, or the cinematic point of view is necessarily that of one stealing around the characters. We can, then, even visualize the unseen.

But now—if we are impressed at all by these analogies, and in particular by the cinematic analogy, should we remain satisfied with this formula: visualizing is thinking of myself seeing? Why does it have to be *myself*? The cinematic point of view, I suggested, did not have to be anyone's point of view; what is the ground for insisting that the point of view in visualization must be mine? Berkeley perhaps—to revert to him for the last time—was struck by a consideration that this point of view did not need to be distinctively mine. This may help to explain an extraordinary feature of his argument, that Hylas is not supposed to conclude from his thought-experiment, as one might suppose, that he cannot conceive an object unperceived by himself; he is supposed to conclude that he cannot conceive an object unperceived by any mind.

At this point we must distinguish some different kinds of visual imagery in relation to myself; something that we have so far not needed to do. The first is that which we have just been discussing at some length, that in which I merely visualize something, without myself being in the visualized world at all. The second is contrasted with this: that in which I visualize a world in which I am acting, moving around, seeing things, and so forth—a form of imagery involving, very often, kinaesthetic imagery of various sorts. This second sort is, of course, possible and frequent; in what I said earlier, I was not denying that I *could* be in my imagined scene, I was merely denying that I had to be. In terms of imagining, it is natural (though not inevitable) to associate the first sort of imagery with imagining a certain thing, the second with imagining (myself) doing, seeing, etc., certain things.

But the expression 'imagining myself doing, etc.' could cover also a third possibility for imagery, which constitutes not really a distinct third kind, but a special application of the first: namely that of visualizing from the outside a figure who is myself doing

the things in question. This sort is capable of alternating quite happily with the second—as we might say, *participation*—type: thus, if I am prone to fantasies of being a world champion racing driver, this could involve kinaesthetic imagery of tension, hands clasped on the steering-wheel, and visualization of wet tarmac as seen through an oil-spattered windscreen, and so forth; and, also, at some different point, some visual image of myself, as though in a newspaper photograph, having a garland hung around my neck.

All these types of imagery are familiar, of course, from dreams, as well as from fantasy in waking life. Dreams present also further possibilities, less common perhaps in waking life; notably that of an uncomfortable half-way house between the first type, in which I am not in the scene, and the second or participation type; that in which I am there, in the same space as the happenings, but am, for no apparent reason, a transfixed and impotent observer of them. Still more painful is that case in which all this is compounded with the third type of imagery, and the happenings of which I am a transfixed observer are happenings which I can see happening to me. The complexities of dream-dissociation, however, we may leave.

Now in a great deal of fantasy and imagination of the second, participation, type, there is no great problem concerning the *me* that the fantasy is about: it is the actual empirical me, or more or less so. This does not mean, of course, that in order to entertain this fantasy of myself as a champion racing driver I have to engage in an elaborate work of intercalating racing-driving activities hypothetically into my past career, or extending hypothetically my future career so as to embrace them; I do not have to join the imagined activities in any determinate way on to my actual history. Nevertheless, I am, very often, putting quite a lot of my actual self into it, and where not consciously doing this, am prepared, as it were, to accept a lot of my actual self in the fantasied scene. It is, for instance, relative to my real wants, ambitions, and character that the imagined happenings are, to me in them, satisfying or upsetting.

Again, in the third type, very often, there is no problem about the figure that I visualize being me; at least no more problem than there is anyway about any imaged figure being someone in particular: the problem, for instance, that it looks as though an image I have of someone can be an image of that person only because I *mean* it to be so, and yet at the same time there is such a thing as *recognizing* an imaged figure. These problems I shall

not pursue. The present point is that there is no special problem about the visualized figure being myself; he looks, for instance, like me (or at least like what I think I look like).

In the sense in which these types of imagining involve myself, simple visualizing—type one—does not involve myself, except as the person who, as a matter of simple biographical fact, does the visualizing. I indeed, at a certain point in my empirical history, visualize, say, a tree; but I do not occur in this operation again, as that person concerning whom, when I visualize a tree, I think that *he* sees a tree. So, bearing in mind those other relatively straightforward cases, it is misleading to say that straight visualizing is thinking of myself seeing something. It may indeed have actually misled people; for instance, Schlick. Schlick famously claimed that survival after death must be a contingent matter, because he could imagine watching his own funeral. In order to make good this claim, Schlick would have had to give a coherent account of how, as a participant at his own funeral, he could be himself, Schlick; all the problems of continuity, personal identity, and so forth are called up. It is no good trying to rest the case for this logical possibility merely on the alleged possibility of imagining oneself watching one's own funeral. In default of an independent argument that this is a coherent description of anything, we have only too readily to hand another account of the experience which, I suspect, was the one that Schlick reported in this way: namely, that he was not imagining himself watching his own funeral, he was *visualizing his own funeral*. And what that proves in the way of logical possibility, if it proves anything, is only the logical possibility *of his funeral*, which is not in dispute.

However, it is obviously not enough merely to eliminate from the discussion at this stage any reference to a 'myself' which is not the actual, empirical myself. I have said only that a *lot* of imagery about myself is recognizably about my actual self as—roughly—I am. But it looks as though some imagery, and in particular participation imagery, can be about myself, and yet precisely involve the elimination of my actual characteristics. I can imagine, in particular, being somebody else. It is with some remarks about this sort of possibility, which involves perhaps the most intimate relations between the imagination and the self, that I shall end.

'I might have been somebody else' is a very primitive and very real thought; and it tends to carry with it an idea that one knows what it would be like for this 'I' to look out on a different world,

from a different body, and still be the same 'I'. To start at the easiest place, we know perfectly well that a great deal of what we are, in terms of memory, character, and bodily development, is the product of accidental factors which we can readily conceive to have been otherwise: 'if my parents had, as they considered doing, emigrated when I was two . . .'—yet it would still have been me. Suppose, further, that I had had different parents, who had borne me in a different year, a different century, even. . . . Such speculations can retain a grip on the imagination only up to a certain point, perhaps; and it is a significant fact that the point at which the grip slips, as it were, will differ with different people. For instance, it may well be the case that many people would find the first line of speculation I just imagined, about the emigration of one's parents, much more compelling than the second, concerning one's parents' identity; and I suppose this to be not because of some beliefs about the overwhelming importance of heredity in the formation of character (which may well be false, and are dubiously relevant), but because in our form of society parents play such a large part in one's early history, one is emotionally involved with them, and so forth. In the Guardian class of Plato's Republic the difficult supposition would not have been that one might have had different parents (since one was not to know who they were, anyway), nor yet that one might have been born years earlier (since the state was supposed to go on without historical social change), but rather that one might have been born somewhere else, and not be a Platonic Guardian at all. One's sense of identity involves one's identifications.

Nevertheless, it is an important fact that, whatever the limits, one seems to be able to carry on these speculations about *oneself* in a way in which one cannot about other people. 'I might have been . . .' is a form of thought that holds up much longer than 'he might have been . . .', although the latter, too, does better if there is identification, in the sense for instance of a close emotional attachment. In general, if we carry speculations about him very far, there soon comes a point where it is vacuous to say that we are talking about *him* at all—we are just imagining some arbitrary historical figure. In thinking that I might have been . . ., it is not like this; or not so soon.

If we press this hard enough, we readily get the idea that it is not necessary to being *me* that I should have any of the individuating properties that I do have, this body, these memories, etc. And for some of them, such as the body, we may think that it is

not necessary to have one at all; and, quite readily, we might not have any memories. The limiting state of this progress is the Cartesian consciousness: an 'I' without body, past, or character. In pursuing these speculations to this point, we do not so far meet any obvious dilemma or paradox—at most, there is a sense of strain, an increasing attenuation of content. A dilemma or real philosophical obstacle occurs, however, when one adds to these speculations another consideration: that it must also be true that I might not have existed. This we certainly want to agree to—few will be persuaded that their own existence is a necessary feature of the universe. Now it is clear that, if we admit the previous speculations, the 'I' of 'I might not have existed' must be the same attenuated 'I' that seemed to emerge from those speculations. For suppose we took 'I might not have existed' to mean (as it might naturally be taken to mean) that there might not have been someone who had such and such a history, such and such an appearance, etc., filling this out with a list of one's actual empirical properties. If the previous speculations in fact made sense, then this filling-out cannot be an adequate account of what it means to say 'I might not have existed'. For if, on the line of the previous speculations, I had been someone else, lived at a different time, and so forth, then it might well be true that there would not have existed someone with just the properties I actually have, and yet not be true that I did not exist—I would exist, but not with those properties. The same point can be approached from the opposite end: it looks as though we might admit that someone could exist with just those empirical properties of history, appearance, etc., that I as a matter of fact have, and yet that person not be me. So, by these arguments, 'I might not have existed' cannot mean 'there might not have existed a person with just this specification', where the specification is that of the properties I actually have. Nor will any other specification of properties do better. So it looks as though the 'I' of this statement must again be the attenuated 'I', the Cartesian centre of consciousness. But if this is so, what can 'I might not have existed' possibly mean? For it now looks as though there is absolutely nothing left to distinguish any Cartesian 'I' from any other, and it is impossible to see any more what would be subtracted from the universe by the removal of *me*.

Once the difficulty has presented itself in this form, it works back to the original set of speculations. For suppose I conceive it possible that I might have been Napoleon—and mean by this

that there might have been a world which contained a Napoleon exactly the same as the Napoleon that our world contained, except that he would have been me. What could be the difference between the actual Napoleon and the imagined one? All I have to take to him in the imagined world is a Cartesian centre of consciousness; and that, the real Napoleon had already. Leibniz, perhaps, made something like this point when he said to one who expressed the wish that he were King of China, that all he wanted was that he should cease to exist and there should be a King in China.

Thus we seem to reach an impasse: on the one hand, we have a type of speculation which can, perhaps rather compulsively, seem to make sense; on the other hand, considerations which show that the speculations must fail. The way out of this impasse lies, I think, in diagnosing an illusion that lies in the speculations. This illusion has something to do with the nature of the imagination.

If the activity of imagining being Napoleon involves in any important way imagery, it is bound, I think, to involve participation imagery. Images of myself being Napoleon can scarcely merely be images of the physical figure of Napoleon, for they will not in themselves have enough of me in them—an external view would lose the essence of what makes such imaginings so much more compelling about myself than they are about another. They will rather be images of, for instance, the desolation at Austerlitz as viewed by me vaguely aware of my short stature and my cockaded hat, my hand in my tunic.

Consider now the *narration*, to revert to the model we used earlier, appropriate to this sort of imagination. It is going to be of the general form: 'I have conquered; the ideals of the Revolution in my hands are sweeping away the old world. Poor Maria Walewska, I wonder where she is now' and so on and so on, according to whatever knowledge or illusions I possess about Napoleon. Now suppose that we actually heard someone saying things like this. In general, when we hear utterances in the first person, there is only one question to be asked relative to the identity of the 'I' involved: 'Who is the speaker?' But in the case of utterances as unlikely as this, there are two questions: 'Who is the speaker?' and 'Who is it that he either believes that he is, or is pretending to be?' In the present case, the latter alternative is in question: a man engaged in an imaginative narration like this would be a man pretending to be, or playing the role of, Napoleon. The 'I' of his discourse is to be taken as an

'I' uttered by Napoleon; who it stands for, if it stands for anybody, is Napoleon. But, of course, this being the playing of a role, the actual utterer is someone else, who in the next moment may use 'I' in its ordinary way with respect to his ordinary self.

Now this narration does not, of course, have to be actually produced. I am using it, as I was using it before, as a model to display what the man is imagining; some of his imaginative activity may actually take the form of saying some of these things to himself, but much of it may take such forms as imagery of his doing and seeing things, of which this narrative merely represents the ideally best verbal expression. But what is true, as we have seen, for the public verbal performance is true also for the private fantasy; what I am doing, in fantasy, is something like playing the role of Napoleon. In this respect, if not more generally, I agree with Professor Ryle's association, in *The Concept of Mind*, of the imagination with pretending. In the description of this activity, only two people need figure: the real me and Napoleon. There is no place for a third item, the Cartesian 'I', regarding which I imagine that *it* might have belonged to Napoleon. To suppose that such an entity is involved seems, in some part at least, to follow from a confusion of two modes of the imagination: that of imagining with regard to a certain thing, distinct from myself, that it is such and such; and that of imagining being such and such.

I have used several times in this lecture the formula 'imagining myself doing, being, etc., such and such'. Where this 'myself' is, roughly, my ordinary self, as in the case of the racing driver fantasy I discussed before, there is no great harm in this formula. But where the question is of imagining being, for instance, Napoleon, the formula 'imagining *myself* being Napoleon' is possibly misleading. It draws us near to a formula that may also be used, and which may be even more misleading—though misleading, of course, only when I start reflecting on it: the formula 'imagining that I am (or was) Napoleon'. For with regard to this formula, we may feel bound to ask what this 'I' is that turns up inside the expression of what I imagine. If it is the ordinary empirical me, as I am, what I imagine seems to be straightforwardly self-contradictory, which stops me in my tracks; and this will not do, for I know that, in imagining being Napoleon, I am not stopped in my tracks. Impressed by the fact that I am not stopped in my tracks, I may come to embrace the only apparent alternative: that this 'I' is a Cartesian one. The same sort of alternatives may seem to present themselves with the formula

'imagining myself being Napoleon', when we ask about the identity of the *myself*.

The mode of imagining appropriate to these fantasies, when they are not stopped in their tracks, is least misleadingly expressed as 'imagining being Napoleon': what this represents, the fantasy enactment of the role of Napoleon, is the only mode that has the power to sustain the speculations we have been discussing at all. And this mode, properly understood, does not introduce a further 'me' to generate these difficulties: there are only two persons involved in this, as I said, the real me and Napoleon. It is as unproblematic that I can imagine being Napoleon as that Charles Boyer could act the role of Napoleon.

It is perhaps in some such way, then, that we can explain why it is that although I can certainly imagine being Napoleon—or if I cannot, this is a limitation of mine—I still do not understand, and could not possibly understand, what it would be for me to have been Napoleon. For the fact that I can, in the only way that arouses my interest, imagine being Napoleon has no tendency at all to show that I can conceive, as a logical possibility, that I might have been Napoleon; any more than the fact that Charles Boyer can be Napoleon on the screen enables us to understand (in any serious sense) what it would be for Charles Boyer to have been Napoleon. Here we meet yet once more something that, in different ways, we have met twice before in this lecture, once with Berkeley and once with Schlick; that at least with regard to the self, the imagination is too tricky a thing to provide a reliable road to the comprehension of what is logically possible.