Psychologists have hitherto failed to realize that imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself.¹

THE uses, and applications, of the terms 'image', 'imagine', 'imagination', 'imaginative', and so forth make up a very diverse and scattered family. Even this image of a family seems too definite. It would be a matter of more than difficulty exactly to identify and list the family's members, let alone establish their relationships of parenthood and cousinhood. But we can at least point to different areas of association in each of which some members of this group of terms ordinarily find employment. Here are three such areas: (1) the area in which imagination is linked with image and image is understood as mental image—a picture in the mind's eye or (perhaps) a tune running through one's head; (2) the area in which imagination is associated with invention, and also (sometimes) with originality or insight or felicitous or revealing or striking departure from routine; (3) the area in which imagination is linked with false belief, delusion, mistaken memory, or misperception. My primary concern here is not with any of these three areas of association, though I shall refer to them all, and especially to the first. My primary topic is Kant's use of the term 'imagination', in the Critique of Pure Reason, in connection with perceptual recognition—a use which may appear something of an outsider, but nevertheless has claims to affinity which are worth considering. I shall refer also to Hume and to Wittgenstein. My paper in general belongs to the species loosely ruminative and comparative-historical rather than to the species strictly argumentative or systematic-analytical.


Sometimes Kant used the term 'imagination' and its cognates in what is apparently a very ordinary and familiar way; as when, for example, he seems to contrast our imagining something with our having knowledge or experience of what is actually the case. Thus in a note in the 'Refutation of Idealism' he writes: 'It does not follow that every intuitive representation of outer things involves the existence of these things, for their representation can very well be the product merely of the imagination (as in dreams and delusions). . . . Whether this or that supposed experience be not purely imaginary, must be ascertained from its special determinations, and through its congruence with the criteria of all real experience.¹² Sometimes, however, indeed more frequently, his use of the term seems to differ strikingly from any ordinary and familiar use of it, so that we are inclined to say he must be using it in a technical or specialized way of his own. Suppose, for example, that I notice a strange dog in the garden, and observe its movements for a while; and perhaps also notice, a few minutes later, that it is still there. We should not ordinarily say that this account of a small and uninteresting part of my history included the report of any exercise of the imagination on my part. Yet, in Kant's apparently technical use of the term, any adequate analysis of such a situation would accord a central role to imagination, or to some faculty entitled 'imagination'.

In both these respects there is a resemblance between Kant and Hume. That is to say, Hume, like Kant, sometimes makes an apparently ordinary use of the term (as when he is discussing the differences between imagination and memory) and sometimes makes an apparently technical use of it; and the latter use is such that he, too, like Kant, would say that imagination enters essentially into the analysis of the very ordinary situation I described a moment ago. It may be instructive to see how far this resemblance goes.

Let us return to our simple situation. Both Hume and Kant would say (a) that my recognizing the strange dog I see as a dog at all owes something to the imagination; and (b) that my taking what I continuously, or interruptedly, observe to be the same object, the same dog, throughout, also owes something to the imagination. By both philosophers imagination is conceived as a connecting or uniting power which operates in two dimensions. In one dimension, (a), it connects perceptions of different objects of the same kind; in the other dimension, (b), it connects different perceptions of the same object of a given kind. It is the instrument of our perceptual appreciation both of kind-identity and of individual-identity, both of concept-identity and of object-identity. The two dimensions or varieties of connecting power are, doubtless, not independent of each other, but they
can, to some extent, be handled separately. I begin by referring briefly to (a); then I treat more fully of (b); and then return in section IV, below, to (a).

Kant's doctrine (or part of it) on (a) is sketched in the chapter on schematism, and Hume's in the chapter in the Treatise called 'Of abstract ideas'. Kant declares the schema to be a product of, and also a rule for, the imagination, in accordance with which, and by means of which alone, the imagination can connect the particular image or the particular object with the general concept under which it falls. Hume speaks, in his usual way, of the resemblance of particular ideas being the foundation of a customary association both among the resemblant particular ideas themselves and between them and the 'annex'd' general term; so that the imagination is, or may be, ready with an appropriate response whenever it gets a cue, as it were, from anywhere in the associative network. How the mechanism is supposed exactly to work is not very clear either in the case of Hume or in that of Kant. But the obscurity of this very point is something which both authors emphasize themselves, in sentences which show a quite striking parallelism. Thus Kant says of schematism that it is 'an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze'. And Hume, speaking of the imagination's readiness with appropriate particular ideas, describes it as a 'kind of magical faculty in the soul which, though it be always most perfect in the greatest geniuses, and is properly what we call a genius, is, however, inexplicable by the utmost efforts of human understanding'.

Imagination, then, in so far as its operations are relevant to the application of the same general concept in a variety of different cases, is a concealed art of the soul, a magical faculty, something we shall never fully understand.

Let us turn now to (b), to the matter of different phases of experience being related to the same particular object of some general type. In both authors this question is absorbed into a larger one, though the larger question is somewhat differently conceived in each of them. The main relevant passages here are, in the Critique, the section on 'Transcendental Deduction' and, in the Treatise, the chapter 'Scepticism with Regard to the Senses'. Let us begin with Hume.

Hume makes a threefold distinction between sense (or the senses), reason (or understanding), and imagination. His famous question about the causes which induce us to believe in the existence of body resolves itself into the question to which of these faculties, or to what combination of them, we should ascribe this belief, that is, the belief in the continued and distinct existence of bodies. Certainly, he says, not to the senses alone and unassisted.

For 'when the mind looks further than what immediately appears to it, its conclusions can never be put to the account of the senses'; and the mind certainly 'looks further' than this, both in respect of the belief in the continued existence of objects when we are no longer, as we say, perceiving them, and in respect of the obviously connected belief in the distinctness of their existence from that of our perceptions of them. Equally certainly, he says, we cannot attribute these beliefs to Reason, that is to reasoning based on perceptions. For the only kind of reasoning that can be in question here is reasoning based on experience of constant conjunction, or causal reasoning. But whether we conceive of objects as the same in kind as perceptions or as different in kind from perceptions, it remains true that 'no beings are ever present to the mind but perceptions' and all perceptions which are present to the mind are present to the mind; hence it is equally certain that we can never observe a constant conjunction either between perceptions present to the mind and perceptions not present to the mind or between perceptions on the one hand and objects different in kind from perceptions on the other.

The belief in question, then, must be ascribed to the Imagination – or, more exactly, to the 'concurrence' of some of the qualities of our impressions with some of the qualities of the imagination. And here Hume launches into that famous account of the operations of imagination which, on account of its perversity ingenuousness, can scarcely fail to command admiration both in the original and the modern senses of the word. It runs roughly as follows: imagination engenders such a propensity to confound the similarity of temporally separated and hence non-identical perceptions with strict identity through time that, in defiance of sense and reason combined, we feign, and believe in, a continued existence of perceptions where there is patently no such thing; and so strong is the hold of this belief that, when the discrepancy is pointed out, the imagination can still find an ally in certain philosophers who try, though vainly, to satisfy reason and imagination at the same time by conceiving of objects as different in kind from perceptions and ascribing continued existence to the former and interrupted existence only to the latter.

When we turn from Hume to Kant, it is probably the divergencies rather than the parallels which we find most striking in this case – at least at first. And perhaps we can come at these by considering a simpliciter criticism of Hume. For Hume's account is full of holes. One of the most obvious relates to his bland assertion that the unreflective, as opposed to the philosophers, take the objects of perception to be of the same species as perceptions of those objects; so that the problem of accounting for the belief, in its vulgar form, in the continued existence of objects is the problem of accounting for
a belief which reason shows to be ungrounded and ungroundable, namely a belief in the existence of perceptions which nobody has. Of course it is quite false that the vulgar make any such identification and hence quite false that they hold any such belief as Hume presumes to account for. The vulgar distinguish, naturally and unreflectively, between their sensings andhearings (perceivings) of objects and the objects they see and hear, and hence have no difficulty in reconciling the interruptedness of the former with the continuance of existence of the latter. Indeed these distinctions and beliefs are built into the very vocabulary of their perception-reports, into the concepts they employ, the meanings of the things they say, in giving (unsophisticated) accounts of their hearings and sightings of things. So Hume's problem does not really exist and his solution to it is otiose.

I think Kant would regard these criticisms as just, but would deny that there was therefore no problem at all for the philosopher. That is, he would agree that the problem was not, as Hume conceived it, that of accounting, on the basis of the character of our perceptual experience, for certain beliefs (beliefs in the continued and distinct existence of bodies). For he would agree that it would be impossible to give accurate, plain reports of our perceptual experience which did not already incorporate those beliefs. The beliefs form an essential part of the conceptual framework which has to be employed to give a candid and veridical description of our perceptual experience. But this does not mean that there is no question to be asked. Hume starts his investigation, as it were, too late; with perceptual experience already established in the character it has, he leaves himself no room for any such question as he wishes to ask. But we ought to ask, not how it can be that on the basis of perceptual experience as it is, we come to have the beliefs in question, but how it is that perceptual experience is already such as to embody the beliefs in question; or, perhaps better, what it is for perceptual experience to be such as to embody the beliefs in question.

I do not want to invoke more of the complex apparatus of the critical philosophy than is necessary to bring out the parallels with Hume that lie below or behind or beside the divergencies. We know that Kant thought that perceptual experience did not just happen to have the general character it has, but had to have at least something like this character, if experience (that is the temporally extended experience of a self-conscious being) was to be possible at all. Just now we are not so much concerned with the soundness of this view as with the question of what he thought was involved in perceptual experience having this character. One of the things he certainly thought was involved is this: "A combination of them [perceptions or representations], such as they cannot have in sense itself, is demanded." And this 'such as they cannot have in sense itself' arouses at least a faint echo of Hume's view that sense itself could never give rise to the opinion of the continued and distinct existence of body. The reason Hume gives for this view, it will be recalled, is that in embracing such an opinion, 'the mind looks further than what immediately appears to it'. Now could Kant have a similar reason for holding that, for the use of concepts of relatively permanent bodies (that is for perceptual experience to have the character it does have), a combination such as perceptions cannot have in sense itself is demanded?

I think he could have. For even when Hume is submitted to the sort of correction I sketched above, there is something right about the phrase of his I have just quoted. When I naively report what I see at a moment (say, as a tree or a dog), my mind or my report certainly 'looks further' than something - not, usually, than 'what immediately appears to me' (tree or dog), but certainly further than the merely subjective side of the event of its immediately appearing to me. Of a fleeting perception, a subjective event, I give a description involving the mention of something not fleeting at all, but lasting, not a subjective event at all, but a distinct object. It is clear, contra Hume, not only that I do do this, but that I must do it in order to give a natural and unforced account of my perceptions. Still, there arises the question of what is necessarily involved in this being the case. The uninformative beginnings of an answer consist in saying that one thing necessarily involved is our possession and application of concepts of a certain kind, namely concepts of distinct and enduring objects. But now, as both Kant and Hume emphasize, the whole course of our experience of the world consists of relatively transient and changing perceptions. (The changes, and hence the transience, may be due to changes in the scene or in our orientation, broadly understood, towards the scene.) It seems reasonable to suppose that there would be no question of applying concepts of the kind in question unless those concepts served in a certain way to link or combine different perceptions - unless, specifically, they could, and sometimes did, serve to link different perceptions as perceptions of the same object. Here, then, is one aspect of combination, as Kant uses the word, and just the aspect we are now concerned with. Combination, in this sense, is demanded. We could not count any transient perception as a perception of an enduring object of some kind unless we were prepared to count, and did count, some transient perceptions as, though different perceptions, perceptions of the same object of such a kind. The concepts in question could get no grip at all unless different perceptions were sometimes in this way combined by them. And when Kant says that this sort of combination of perceptions is such as they (the perceptions) cannot have in sense itself, we may perhaps take him to be making at least the two following unexceptionable, because tautological, points:
(1) that this sort of combination is dependent on the possession and application of this sort of concept, that is, that if we did not conceptualize our sensory intake in this sort of way, then our sensory impressions would not be combined in this sort of way;

(2) that distinguishable perceptions combined in this way, whether they are temporally continuous (as when we see an object move or change colour) or temporally separated (as when we see an object again after an interval), really are distinguishable, that is, different, perceptions.

Of course, in saying that we find these two unexceptionable points in Kant's Hume-echoing dictum about combination, I am not for a moment suggesting that this account covers all that Kant means by combination; only that it may reasonably be taken to be included in what Kant means.

But now how does imagination come into the picture, that is into Kant's picture? Kant's problem, as we have seen, is not the same as Hume's; so he has no call to invoke imagination to do the job for which Hume invokes it, that is the job of supplementing actual perceptions with strictly imaginary perceptions which nobody has, which there is no reason to believe in the existence of and every reason not to believe in the existence of, but which we nevertheless do believe in the existence of as a condition of believing in the existence of body at all. This is not how imagination can come into Kant's picture. But certainly imagination does come into his picture; and the question is whether we can give any intelligible account of its place there. I think we can give some sort of account, though doubtless one that leaves out much that is mysterious in Kant and characteristic of him.

To do this we must strengthen our pressure at a point already touched on. We have seen that there would be no question of counting any transient perception as a perception of an enduring and distinct object unless we were prepared or ready to count some different perceptions as perceptions of one and the same enduring and distinct object. The thought of other actual or possible perceptions as related in this way to the present perception has thus a peculiarly intimate relation to our counting or taking — to our ability to count or take — this present perception as the perception of such an object. This is not of course to say that even when, for example, we perceive and recognize (reidentify as the object it is) a familiar particular object, there need occur anything which we could count as the experience of actually recalling any particular past perception of that object. (It is not in this way, either, that imagination comes into the picture.) Indeed the more familiar the object, the less likely any such experience is. Still, in a way, we can say in such a case that the past perceptions are alive in the present perception. For it would not be just the perception it is but for them. Nor is this just a matter of an external, causal relation. Compare seeing a face you think you know, but cannot associate with any previous encounter, with seeing a face you know you know and can very well so associate, even though there does not, as you see it, occur any particular episode of recalling any particular previous encounter. The comparison will show why I say that the past perceptions are, in the latter case, not merely causally operative, but alive in the present perception.

Of course when you first see a new, an unfamiliar thing of a familiar kind, there is no question of past perceptions of that thing being alive in the present perception. Still, one might say, to take it, to see it, as a thing of that kind is implicitly to have the thought of other possible perceptions related to your actual perception as perceptions of the same object. To see it as a dog, silent and stationary, is to see it as a possible mover and barker, even though you give yourself no actual images of it as moving and barking; though, again, you might do so if, say, you were particularly timid, if, as we say, your imagination was particularly active or particularly stimulated by the sight. Again, as you continue to observe it, it is not just a dog, with such and such characteristics, but the dog, the object of your recent observation, that you see, and see it as.

It seems, then, not too much to say that the actual occurrent perception of an enduring object as an object of a certain kind, or as a particular object of that kind, is, as it were, soaked with or animated by, or infused with — the metaphors are à choix — the thought of other past or possible perceptions of the same object. Let us speak of past and merely possible perceptions alike as 'non-actual' perceptions. Now the imagination, in one of its aspects — the first I mentioned in this paper — is the image-producing faculty, the faculty, we may say, of producing actual representatives (in the shape of images) of non-actual perceptions. I have argued that an actual perception of the kind we are concerned with owes its character essentially to that internal link, of which we find it so difficult to give any but a metaphorical description, with other past or possible, but in any case non-actual, perceptions. Non-actual perceptions are in a sense represented in, alive in, the present perception; just as they are represented, by images, in the image-producing activity of the imagination. May we not, then, find a kinship between the capacity for this latter kind of exercise of the imagination and the capacity which is exercised in actual perception of the kind we are concerned with? Kant, at least, is prepared to register his sense of such a kinship by extending the title of 'imagination' to cover both capacities; by speaking of imagination as 'a necessary ingredient of perception itself'.
Suppose we so understand – or understand as including at least so much – the Kantian idea of the synthesis of imagination. The connection of the idea, so understood, with the application of concepts of objects is already clear. Can we also explain the introduction of the qualification ‘transcendental’? If we bear in mind the opposition between ‘transcendental’ and ‘empirical’, I think we can put two glosses on ‘transcendental’ here, both with a common root. First, then, we must remember the distinction between what Kant thought necessary to the possibility of any experience and what he thought merely contingently true of experience as we actually enjoy it. There is, in this sense, no necessity about our employment of the particular sets of empirical concepts we do employ, for example the concepts of elephant or ink bottle. All that is necessary is that we should employ some empirical concepts or other which exemplify, or give a footing to, those very abstractly conceived items, the categories, or concepts of an object in general. Synthesis, then, or the kind of exercise of the imagination (in Kant’s extended sense) which is involved in perception of objects as objects, is empirical in one aspect and transcendental in another: it is empirical (that is non-necessary) in so far as it happens to consist in the application of this or that particular empirical concept (elephant or ink bottle); transcendental (that is necessary) in so far as the application of such concepts represents, though in a form which is quite contingent, the utterly general requirements of a possible experience.

The second, connected, gloss we can put upon ‘transcendental’ can be brought out by comparison, once more, with Hume. Hume seems to think of the operations of imagination as something superadded to actual occurrences, the latter having a quite determinate character independent of and unaffected by the imagination’s operations (though, of course, our beliefs are not unaffected by those operations). The Kantian synthesis, on the other hand, however conceived, is something necessarily involved in, a necessary condition of, actual occurrences representable perceptions having the character they do have. So it may be called ‘transcendental’ in contrast with any process, for example any ordinary associative process, which presupposes a basis of actual, occurrence, reportable perceptions.

IV

In so far as we have supplied anything like an explanation or justification of Kant’s apparently technical use of ‘imagination’, we have done so by suggesting that the recognition of an enduring object of a certain kind as an object of that kind, or as a certain particular object of that kind, involves a certain sort of connection with other non-actual perceptions. It involves other past (and hence non-actual) perceptions, or the thought of other possible (and hence non-actual) perceptions, of the same object being somehow alive in the present perception. The question arises whether we can stretch things a little further still to explain or justify the apparently technical use of ‘imagination’ in connection with our power to recognize different (and sometimes very different) particular objects as falling under the same general concept.

We can begin by making the platitudinous point that the possession of at least a fair measure of this ability, in the case, say, of the concept of a tree, is at least a test of our knowing what a tree is, of our possessing the concept of a tree. And we can progress from this to another point, both less platitudinous and more secure: namely, that it would be unintelligible to say of someone that whereas he could recognize this particular object as a tree, he could not recognize any other trees as trees. So it would not make sense to say, in the case of a particular momentary perception, that he who had it recognized what he saw as a tree unless we were prepared also to ascribe to him the power of recognizing other things as well as trees. Now, how are we to regard this power or potentiality as related to his momentary perception? Is it just something external to it, or superadded to it, just an extra qualification he must possess, as it were, if his momentary perception is to count as a case of tree-recognition? This picture of the relation seems wrong. But if we say it is wrong, if we say that the character of the momentary perception itself depends on the connection with this general power, then have we not in this case too the same sort of link between actual and non-actual perceptions (now of other things) as we had in the previously discussed case between actual and non-actual perceptions (then of the same thing)? But if then we have another reason, similar to the first reason though not the same as it, for saying that imagination, in an extended sense of the word, is involved in the recognition of such a thing as the sort of thing it is. Once more, this is not a matter of supposing that we give ourselves actual images, either of other trees perceived in the past or of wholly imaginary trees not perceived at all, whenever, in an actual momentary perception, we recognize something as a tree. It is not in this way, that is, by being represented by actual images, that non-actual (past or possible) perceptions enter into actual perception. They enter, rather, in that elusive way of which we have tried to give an account. But may we not here again, for this very reason, find a kinship between perceptual recognition (of an object as of a certain kind) and the more narrowly conceived exercise of the imagination –
enough of a kinship, perhaps, to give some basis for Kant's extended use of the term 'imagination' in this connection too, and perhaps, this time, for Hume's as well.

V

It does not, of course, matter very much whether we come down in favour of, or against, this extended or technical application of the term 'imagination'. What matters is whether, in looking into possible reasons or justifications for it, we find that any light is shed on the notion of perceptual recognition. And here I want to summon a third witness. The third witness is Wittgenstein. I consider his evidence, first, in this section, without any reference to any explicit use, by him, of the term 'imagination'; then, in the next, I refer to some of his own uses of terms of this family.

On page 212 of the Investigations Wittgenstein says: 'We find certain things about seeing puzzling enough.' This comes nearly at the end of those twenty pages or so which he devotes to the discussion of seeing as, of aspects and changes of aspect. Nearly all the examples he considers, as far as visual experience is concerned, are of pictures, diagrams, or signs, which can present different aspects, can be seen now as one thing, now as another. He is particularly impressed by the case where they undergo a change of aspects under one's very eyes, as it were, the case where one is suddenly struck by a new aspect.

What, I think, he finds particularly impressive about this case is the very obviously momentary or instantaneous character of the being struck by the new aspect. Why does this impress him so much? Well, to see an aspect, in this sense, of a thing is, in part, to think of it in a certain way, to be disposed to treat it in a certain way, to give certain sorts of explanations or accounts of what you see, in general to behave in certain ways. But, then, how, he asks, in the case of seeing an aspect, is this thinking of the thing in a certain way related to the instantaneous experience? We could perhaps imagine someone able to treat a picture in a certain way, painstakingly to interpret it in that way, without seeing the relevant aspect, without seeing it as what he was treating it as, at all. But this does not help us with the case of the instantaneous experience. It would be quite wrong to speak of this case as if there were merely an external relation, inductively established, between the thought, the interpretation, and the visual experience: to say, for example, that 'I see the x as a y' means 'I have a particular visual experience which I have found that I always have when I interpret the x as a y.' So Wittgenstein casts around for ways of expressing himself which will hit off the relation.

Thus we have: 'The flashing of an aspect on us seems half visual experience, half thought'; or again, of a different case, 'Is it a case of both seeing and thinking or an amalgam of the two, as I should almost like to say?'; or again, of yet another, 'It is almost as if "seeing the sign in this context" [under this aspect] were an echo of a thought. "The echo of a thought in sight" - one would like to say.'

Beside Wittgenstein's metaphor of 'the echo of the thought in sight' we might put others: the visual experience is irradiated by, or infused with, the concept; or it becomes soaked with the concept.

Wittgenstein talks mainly of pictures or diagrams. But we must all have had experiences like the following: I am looking towards a yellow flowering bush against a stone wall, but I see it as yellow chalk marks scrawled on the wall. Then the aspect changes and I see it normally, that is I see it as a yellow flowering bush against the wall. On the next day, however, I see it normally, that is I see it as a yellow flowering bush against the wall, all the time. Some persons, perhaps with better eyesight, might never have seen it as anything else, might always see it as this. No doubt it is only against the background of some such experience of change of aspects, or of the thought of its possibility, that it is quite natural and non-misleading to speak, in connection with ordinary perception, of seeing objects as the objects they are. But this does not make it incorrect or false to do so generally. Wittgenstein was perhaps over-impressed by the cases where we are suddenly struck by something – be it a classical change of figure-aspects or the sudden recognition of a face or the sudden appearance of an object, as when an ordinary rabbit bursts into view in the landscape and captures our attention. Though there clearly are distinctions between cases, there are also continuities. There is no reason for making a sharp conceptual cleavage between the cases of a sudden irruption – whether of an aspect or an object – and others. We can allow that there are cases where visual experience is suddenly irradiated by a concept and cases where it is more or less steadily soaked with the concept. I quote once more: 'We find certain things about seeing puzzling because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough.' Perhaps we should fail less in this respect if we see that the striking case of the change of aspects merely dramatizes for us a feature (namely seeing) which is present in perception in general.

Now how do we bring this to bear on Kant? Well, there is a point of analogy and a point of difference. The thought is echoed in the sight, the concept is alive in the perception. But when Wittgenstein speaks of seeing as involving thinking-of-as, as involving the thought or the concept, he has in mind primarily a disposition to behave in certain ways, to treat or describe what you see in certain ways – such a disposition itself presupposing (in a
favourite phrase) the mastery of a technique. This is the criterion of the visual experience, the means by which someone other than the subject of it must tell what it is. This, taking us on to familiar Wittgensteinian ground, gives us indeed a peculiarly intimate link between the momentary perception and something else; but the ‘something else’ is behaviour, and so the upshot seems remote from the peculiarly intimate link we laboured to establish in connection with Kant’s use of the term ‘imagination’: the link between the actual present perception of the object and other past or possible perceptions of the same object or of other objects of the same kind. But is it really so remote? Wittgenstein’s special preoccupations pull him to the behavioural side of things, to which Kant pays little or no attention. But we can no more think of the behavioural dispositions as merely externally related to other perceptions than we can think of them as merely externally related to the present perception. Thus the relevant behaviour in reporting an aspect may be to point to other objects of perception. Or in the case of seeing a real, as opposed to a picture-object, as a such-and-such, the behavioural disposition includes, or entails, a readiness for, or expectancy of, other perceptions, of a certain character, of the same object.

Sometimes this aspect of the matter – the internal link between the present and other past or possible perceptions – comes to the fore in Wittgenstein’s own account. Thus, of the case of sudden recognition of a particular object, an old acquaintance, he writes: ‘I meet someone whom I have not seen for years; I see him clearly, but fail to know him. Suddenly I know him, I see the old face in the altered one.’ Again, he says of the dawning of an aspect: ‘What I perceive in the dawning of an aspect is . . . an internal relation between it [the object] and other objects.’

VI

I have mentioned the fact that there are points in these pages at which Wittgenstein himself invokes the notions of imagination and of an image. I shall discuss these points now. He first invokes these notions in connection with the drawing of a triangle, a right-angled triangle with the hypotenuse downmost and the right angle upmost. ‘This triangle’, he says, ‘can be seen as a triangular hole, as a solid, as a geometrical drawing; as standing on its base, as hanging from its apex; as a mountain, as a wedge, as an arrow or pointer, as an overturned object which is meant to stand on the shorter side of the right angle, as a half-parallelogram, and as various other things.’ Later he reverts to this example and says: ‘The aspects of the triangle: it is as if an image came into contact, and for a time remained in contact, with the visual impression. He contrasts some of the triangle-aspects in this respect with the aspects of some of his examples; and a little later he says: ‘It is possible to take the duck-rabbit simply for the picture of a rabbit, the double cross simply for the picture of a black cross, but not to take the bare triangular figure for the picture of an object that has fallen over. To see this aspect of the triangle demands imagination [Vorstellungskraft].’ But later still he says something more general about seeing aspects. ‘The concept of an aspect is akin to the concept of an image. In other words: the concept “I am now seeing it as . . .” is akin to “I am now having this image”.’ Immediately afterwards he says: ‘Doesn’t it take imagination [Phantasie] to hear something as a variation on a particular theme? And yet one is perceiving something in so hearing it.’ Again on this page he says generally that seeing an aspect and imagining are alike subject to the will.

It is clear that in these references to imagination and to images Wittgenstein is doing at least two things. On the one hand he is contrasting the seeing of certain aspects with the seeing of others, and saying of some only that they require imagination; and, further, that some of these are cases in which an image is, as it were, in contact with the visual impression. On the other hand he is saying that there is a general kinship between the seeing of aspects and the having of images; though the only respect of kinship he mentions is that both are subject to the will. Perhaps we can make something of both of these.

As regards the first thing he is doing, the contrast he is making, cannot we find an analogy here with a whole host of situations in which there is some sort of departure from the immediately obvious or familiar or mundane or established or superficial or literal way of taking things; situations in which there is some sort of innovation or extravagance or figure or trope or stretch of the mind or new illumination or invention? Thus, beginning from such simplicities as seeing a cloud as a camel or a formation of stalagmites as a dragon, or a small child at a picnic seeing a tree stump as a table, we may move on to very diverse things: to the first application of the word ‘astringent’ to a remark or to someone’s personality; to Wellington at Salamanca saying ‘Now we have them’ and seeing the future course of the battle in an injudicious movement of the enemy; to the sensitive observer of a personal situation seeing that situation as one of humiliation for one party and triumph for another; to a natural (or even a social) scientist seeing a pattern in phenomena which has never been seen before and introducing, as we say, new concepts to express his insight; to anyone seeing Keble College, Oxford, or the University Museum or Balliol Chapel as their architects meant them to be seen; to Blake seeing eternity in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower. And so on. In connection with any item in this rather wild list the
words ‘imaginative’ and ‘imagination’ are appropriate, though only to some of them is the idea of an image coming into contact with an impression appropriate. But we must remember that what is obvious and familiar, and what is not, is, at least to a large extent, a matter of training and experience and cultural background. So it may be, in this sense, imaginative of Eliot to see the river as a strong, brown god, but less so of the members of a tribe who believe in river-gods. It may, in this sense, call for imagination on my part to see or hear something as a variation on a particular theme, but not on the part of a historian of architecture or a trained musician. What is fairly called exercise of imagination for one person or age group or generation or society may be merest routine for another. To say this is not, of course, in any way to question the propriety of using the term ‘imagination’ to mark a contrast, in any particular case, with routine perception in the application of a concept. It is simply to draw attention to the kind, or kinds, of contrast that are in question and in doing so to stress resemblances and continuities between contrasted cases. It should not take much effort to see the resemblances and continuities as at least as striking as the differences and so to sympathize with that imaginative employment of the term ‘imagination’ which leads both Hume and Kant to cast the faculty for the role of chief agent in the exercise of the power of concept-application, in general, over a variety of cases; to see why Hume described it as a ‘magical faculty’ which is ‘most perfect in the greatest geniuses’ and is ‘properly what we call a genius’.

So we find a continuity between one aspect of Wittgenstein’s use of the term and one aspect of Hume’s and Kant’s. What of the other aspect of Wittgenstein’s use, where he finds a kinship, in all cases, between seeing an aspect and having an image? Well, let us consider the character of Wittgenstein’s examples. Some are examples of what might be called essentially ambiguous figures, like the duck-rabbit or the double cross. Others are, as it were, very thin and schematic, like the cube-picture or the triangle. If we attend to the essentially ambiguous figures, it is clear that imagination in the sense just discussed would not normally be said to be required in order to see either aspect of either. Both aspects of each are entirely natural and routine, only they compete with each other in a way which is not usual in the case of ordinary objects. We can switch more or less easily from one aspect to another as we cannot normally do with ordinary objects of perception. But we might sometimes switch with similar ease in what on the face of it are ordinary cases: thus, standing at the right distance from my yellow flowering bush, I can switch from seeing it as such to seeing it as yellow chalk marks scrawled on the wall. So if the affinity between seeing aspects and having images is simply a matter of subjection to the will, and if subjection to the will is thought of in this way as ease of switching, then the affinity is present in this case as in the case of the visually ambiguous figures.

But is the general affinity between seeing aspects and having images simply a matter of subjection to the will? One may point out that the subjection of seeing as to the will is by no means absolute or universal. And it may be replied that the same is true of having images. One may be haunted or tortured by images, whether of recall or foreboding, from which one vainly seeks distraction but cannot dismiss, or escape the return of, if dismissed; or, alternatively, one may fail to picture something in one’s mind when one tries. So at least a parallel between seeing as and having images, in respect of subjection to the will, continues to hold.

But surely one may ask whether there is not a deeper affinity between seeing as and having an image, one which goes beyond this matter of subjection to the will, and can be found in general between perception and imaging. And surely there is. It has already been expressed in saying that the thought (or, as Kant might prefer, the concept) is alive in the perception just as it is in the image. The thought of something as an x or as a particular x is alive in the perception of it as an x or as a particular x just as the thought of an x or a particular x is alive in the having of an image of an x or a particular x. This is what is now sometimes expressed in speaking of the intentionality of perception, as of imaging. But the idea is older than this application of that terminology, for the idea is in Kant.

Of course it is essential to the affinity that the having of an image, like perceiving, is more than just having a thought; and that the more that it is is what justifies us in speaking of an image as an actual representative of a non-actual perception and justifies Hume (for all the danger of it) in speaking of images as faint copies of impressions. As for the differences between them both in intrinsic character and in external, causal relations, there is perhaps no need to stress them there.

VII

I began this paper by mentioning three areas of association in which the term ‘imagination’ and its cognates find employment: in connection with images, in connection with innovation or invention, and in connection with mistakes, including perceptual mistakes. I have referred to the first two areas of use, but not, so far, to the last. But perhaps, it is worth glancing briefly at the quite common use of ‘imagine’ and ‘imagination’ in connection with the seeing as of perceptual mistakes. Suppose that when I see the yellow flowering bush as yellow chalk marks on the wall, I actually take what I see to be yellow chalk marks on the wall — as I may well do once, though
probably not when I have the experience again. In such a case, as opposed to that of seeing as without taking as, it would be natural and correct to say: 'For a moment I imagined what I saw to be yellow chalk marks on the wall; then I looked again and saw it was a yellow flowering bush against the wall.'

Now it would be easy, and reasonable, to explain this 'mistake' use of 'imagine' by taking some other use or uses as primary and representing this use as an extension of it or them in such a way as to allow no role for imagination in ordinary routine perception. But we should consider how it would be possible to give a kind of caricature-explanation on different lines. Of course, the explanation would run, this indispensable faculty of imagination is involved in ordinary routine perception. It is just that it would be highly misleading to single it out for mention as responsible for the outcome in the case of ordinary routine perception. For to do so would be to suggest that things are not as they normally are in ordinary routine perception. Thus we single the faculty out for mention when it operates without anything like the normal sensory stimulus altogether, as in imaging, delivering mental products unmistakably different from those of ordinary perceptions; when, in one or another of many possible ways, it deviates from, or adds to, the response which we have come to consider routine; or when, as in the present case, we actually mistake the character of the source of stimulus. But it is absurd to conclude that because we only name the faculty in these cases, the faculty we then name is only operative in these cases. We might as well say that the faculty of verbalizing or uttering words is not exercised in intelligent conversation on the ground that we generally say things like 'He was verbalizing freely' or 'He uttered a lot of words' only when, for example, we mean that there was no sense or point in what he said.

It is not my purpose to represent such a line of argument as correct. Still less am I concerned – even if I could do so – to elaborate or defend any account of what we really mean, or ought to mean, by 'imagination', such as that line of argument might point to. I am not sure that either the question, what we really do mean by the word, or the question, what we ought to mean by it, are quite the right ones to ask in this particular case. What matters is that we should have a just sense of the very various and subtle connections, continuities and affinities, as well as differences, which exist in this area. The affinities between the image-having power and the power of ordinary perceptual recognition; the continuities between inventive or extended or playful concept-application and ordinary concept-application in perception: these are some things of which we may have a juster sense as a result of reflection on Kant's use of the term 'imagination'; even, in the latter case, as a result of reflection upon Hume's use of the term. A perspicuous and thorough survey of the area is, as far as I know, something that does not exist; though Wittgenstein's pages contain an intentionally unsystematic assemblage of some materials for such a survey.

2 Kant, B 278–9 (my italics).
3 Kant, A 141/B 180–1.
5 Hume, p. 189.
6 Hume, p. 212.
7 I modify at least the appearance of Hume's argument here. He seems to suppose that the required premise at this point has an empirical character.
8 Kant, A 120.
9 Perhaps it is necessary to add that I do not mean that we could not conceive of any circumstances at all (for example, of mental disorder) in which this would be an apt thing to say.
12 Wittgenstein, p. 197.
13 Ibid.
14 Wittgenstein, p. 212.
15 Wittgenstein resists the generalization. See p. 197. 'Seeing as' is not part of perception', and p. 195. But he also gives part of the reason for making it; see pp. 194–5.
16 Wittgenstein, p. 197.
17 Cf. p. 194; and p. 207: 'Those two aspects of the double cross might be reported simply by pointing alternately to an isolated white and an isolated black cross.'
18 Wittgenstein, p. 197. (my italics).
19 Wittgenstein, p. 212.
21 Wittgenstein, p. 207.
22 Ibid.
23 Wittgenstein, p. 213.
24 Ibid.
27 As, for example, by saying that when what presents itself as a perception (or memory) turns out to be erroneous, we reclassify it by assigning it to that faculty of which the essential role is, say, unfettered invention; somewhat as we sometimes refer to falsehood as fiction.
28 It would be, it will be seen, an application (or misapplication) of a principle due to H. P. Grice. See 'The Causal Theory of Perception', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, suppl. vol. XXXV (1961), 121–68.