Imaginative Presence

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ABSTRACT: When looking at an object, we perceive only its facing surface, yet we nonetheless perceptually experience the object as a three-dimensional whole. This gives us what Alva Noë has called *the problem of perceptual presence*, i.e., the problem of accounting for the features of our perceptual experience that are present as absent. Although he proposes that we can best solve this problem by adopting an enactive view of perception, one according to which perceptual presence is to be explained in terms of the exercise of our sensorimotor capacities, I argue that this is a mistake. Rather, we can best account for presence in absence in terms of the exercise of our imaginative capacities.

Sense is the power of intuiting when the object is present; imagination, that of intuiting when the object is not present.

--Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* §15[1]

Reflection on ordinary instances of perception suggests that our perceptual experience regularly outstrips what we actually perceive. In looking at a basketball, we see only its facing side, and yet we experience the basketball as a whole. In looking at a speaker standing behind a lectern, we see only her upper body, and yet we experience the person as a whole. This gives us the problem that Alva Noë (e.g., 2004) has called *the problem of perceptual presence*: How can we explain the fact that typical instances of perceptual experience involve more than what we strictly speaking perceive? This paper proposes that we can best solve this problem by invoking the imagination and, in particular, by explaining the perceptual presence of unperceived aspects of objects in terms of imaginative presence.

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[1] I first came across this quotation in Stevenson 2003.

Noë's own solution to this problem comes from his theory of enactive perception. On his view, perception is not something that happens to us; rather, it is something that we do: "Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills. *What we perceive* is determined by *what we do* (or what we know how to do); it is determined by what we are *ready* to do." (2004, 1) When we look at a basketball, for example, Noe argues that our visual sense of its sphericality consists in our implicit understanding that its appearance would change in a characteristically spherical way if we were to move around it. (2005, 246) Noë sometimes refers to the phenomenon to be explained as "presence in absence," and he claims that the perceptual presence of the absent features of objects consists in the fact that they are present *as accessible* even if not as given.

In my view, this is a mistake. Rather than understand the hidden features as present *as accessible*, we'd do better to understand them as imaginatively present. Thus, as I argue in what follows, what fundamentally matters for the perceptual presence of unseen features of objects is not the exercise of our sensorimotor capacities but rather the exercise of our imaginative capacities.

Part I

To start, it may be helpful to put the issue before us in a broader context. Recall Descartes' second meditation discussion of the wax. Reflecting on the ball of wax before him, Descartes notes that it would be natural to say that he sees it. But his ensuing hats-and-coats example calls into question this common sense point:

> But then if I look out the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? (Descartes, 21)

Descartes ultimately concludes that he does not see the ball of wax; rather, he judges it to be there on the basis of the colors and shapes presented to him.

To switch to a more contemporary example from Thompson Clarke, when we look at a tomato, we are visually presented only with its facing side. This situation can be fully generalized: "[N]ormally we can see no more of a physical object than part of its surface." (1965, 98) But whereas Descartes takes this kind of fact to show that we do not literally see things like balls of wax and tomatoes – rather, we know them through our faculty of judgment – Clarke disagrees. Just as we can nibble on a piece of cheese by nibbling on a part of the piece of cheese, so too can we see an object by seeing a part of the object.

Descartes and Clarke are dealing with the question of what we see: Do we see whole objects, or do we see only object features or object parts? The question before us, though closely related, is a different one. Our question is not: "What do we perceive?" but rather the related question: "What is perceptually present to us?"[2] In standard cases of perceiving, something's being perceived goes hand in hand with its being perceptually present to us, but this need not always be the case. When something that impinges on one's senses goes completely unnoticed, it may be perceived without being perceptually present. Blindsight cases are an especially dramatic example of this, but there are other examples from ordinary life. Conversely, something may be perceptually present without being perceived, as when the backside of the tomato has perceptual presence without impinging on our senses. It's precisely these kind of cases that generate the *puzzle* of perceptual presence since, after all, it's not at all puzzling why something perceived has perceptual presence.

Though the question of what's perceived is different from the question of what's perceptually present, one's stance on the former question may affect one's stance on the latter. For example, I take it that Descartes, in denying that we see objects, would also deny that objects are perceptually present to us. On Descartes' view, not only does the wax as a whole fail to be perceived but it also fails to be perceptually present to us; the wax is not present to us perceptually but only via judgment. And, of course, there is nothing special about the wax. Thus, on the Cartesian picture the problem of perceptual presence does not arise; rather, Descartes simply denies the phenomenological considerations that generate it.

Early in the twentieth century, Husserl takes a position on this issue that is reminiscent of Descartes. Grappling with the issue of how perception represents objects as transcending our experience of them – an issue that might be considered "the most basic problem of phenomenology" – Husserl takes the unseen aspects of objects to be *hypothesized* rather than phenomenally present. (Husserl 1913/1983)[3] It's on precisely this point, however, that Merleau-Ponty criticizes Husserl for getting the phenomenology of our experience wrong. According to Merleau-Ponty, the unseen aspects of objects are indeed positively present to us. Although Merleau-Ponty agrees with Husserl that the hidden aspects of objects, unlike the seen aspects of objects, are in some ways indeterminate, he denies that this indeterminacy prevents them from being present in experience. Rather, "we must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon." (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 6). His view thus provides a clear endorsement of the phenomenon of perceptual presence.

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[2] Nanay (2010) helpfully distinguishes these two issues.
[3] The quote comes from Kelly 2003, 135. My understanding of both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty owes much to Kelly's work (2003, 2004).

In fact, we can find endorsement of this phenomenon even as far back as the British Empiricist tradition of the eighteenth century. The issue arises for these early modern philosophers primarily in the context of our visual sense of the spatial properties of objects – their distance, their three-dimensionality, etc. For example, according to the view Berkeley sets forth in his *New Theory of Vision*, we cannot visually perceive spatial properties of objects; vision presents us only with colors, shading, and light. [4] Nonetheless, Berkeley argues that spatial properties of objects can still be visually present to us: "[I]t is plain that distance in its own nature is imperceivable, and yet it is perceived by sight." (Berkeley 1709/1938, 15) Although spatial features such as distance are not strictly speaking perceived, they are not (*contra* Descartes and Husserl) merely inferred or hypothesized. Rather, they are "suggested" to us by what we do perceive and thus after repeated experience become part of our visual perceptual phenomenology. [5]

Like Berkeley, Reid is also committed to the claim that aspects of objects that are not strictly speaking seen are part of our visual phenomenology. Central to Reid's theory of vision is his distinction between original and acquired perception, a distinction which derives from Berkeley's account of the difference between what is given to visual sense and what, via suggestion, becomes part of our visual experience. The three-dimensionality of an object, for example, for Reid is not given in original perception – it is not originally part of one's visual experience – but over time, as we become more perceptually capable, our perceptual experiences change:

> [W]hen I look at a globe that stands before me, all I perceive by the original powers of sight is something that is circular and variously coloured. The visible figure has no distance from the eye, isn't convex, and has only two dimensions.... But when I have learned to perceive the distance from the eye of each part of this object, this perception gives it convexity and a spherical shape, adding a third dimension to the two that it had before. (Reid 1769, Ch. 6, §23)

This three-dimensionality, having been visually acquired, becomes (non-inferentially) part of our perceptual experience, even though it is not given to the senses in original perception, i.e., even though it is not strictly speaking seen.

Despite these historical precedents, however, the phenomenon of perceptual presence had been largely forgotten in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind until it was brought to

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[4] My understanding of both Berkeley and Reid in what follows owes much to Copenhaver.
[5] Berkeley 1733, §42. For more on Berkeley's notion of suggestion, and how it is distinct from inference, see Copenhaver (Forthcoming). As she explains, although Berkeley treats spatial ideas as the mediate objects of vision (as compared to ideas of light, colors, and shading, which are the immediate objects of vision), he intends the immediate/mediate distinction to be psychological, not epistemic, i.e., "it is the distinction between what is given to the senses and what is given in experience."

renewed prominence by Noë.[6] In arguing for his sensorimotor view of perception, Noë attempts to draw our attention to various phenomena that are not easily explained on the standard picture of perception as a brain process that consists in the production of internal representations. For example, Noë rehearses the experimental data concerning change blindness that shows that perceivers are often unaware of changes in the various aspects of a scene before them, even when the changes are sudden and dramatic. (see, e.g., 2004, 51-59) He also focuses considerable attention on what he calls the *two-dimensional character* of perception. Perception is two-dimensional in that it presents us with both the world as it is and the world as it seems to be: "Two tomatoes, at different distances from us, may visibly differ in their apparent size even as we plainly see their sameness of size; a silver dollar may look elliptical—when we view it from an angle, or when it is tilted in respect of us—even though it also looks, plainly, circular." (2005, 235; see also 2004, 78)

These phenomena all relate directly to the phenomenon of perceptual presence. One of the things that makes change blindness so puzzling is that we take ourselves to have perceptual awareness of at least some features of a visual scene to which we are not directly attending; this, according to Noë, is "a basic fact of our phenomenology." (2004, 59) Likewise, although the circularity of the coin is not directly presented to us visually, Noë takes it to be "phenomenological bedrock" that it is sensibly present – it is *experienced*, not merely inferred, just as the elipticality of the coin is experienced. (2005, 238) These phenomena, like the phenomenon of perceptual presence, are all instances of presence in absence.[7]

According to Noë, his enactive view shows us how to make sense of these phenomena. Rejecting the traditional picture according to which perception is the process of producing internal representations as the result of passively receiving inputs from the environment, Noë claims that perception consists in an active interplay between perceivers and the world. On his view, perceptual experience is "not something that takes place within us, but something we do, in the world." (2005, 251) As perceivers, we have implicit understanding of various sensorimotor contingencies; we know how the movements of our bodies would affect what we see. To experience an object as a tomato is to experience it as having a characteristic "sensorimotor profile," i.e., the fact that the back side of the tomato is accessible to us in a

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[6] Outside of philosophy, the phenomenon of perceptual presence was a central study of the Gestalt psychologists. The psychological literature tends to refer to the phenomenon of perceptual presence as *amodal completion* or *amodal perception*, i.e., as perception that occurs without direct information from any particular sensory modality, i.e., perception without modality. Unfortunately, however, there is some ambiguity in this literature; the same term "amodal perception" is also used to refer to our perception of information that is common to more than one sensory modality, e.g., the perception of an object's size can be done via either visual or tactile perception.

[7] This point is made explicit in his (2005, 243) and (2006, 422). As additional examples of presence in absence, he discusses color constancy (our ability to experience a surface as uniform or regular or stable in color even when it is visibly variable and differentiated in its color) and the "filling-in" of blind spots (2004, 38; 2005, 242; 2006, 416-419).

characteristic sensorimotor way is what enables us to visually experience the tomato as a whole even though we are only directly presented with its front side. I know how to bring the unseen back side of the tomato into view by moving around it, or by picking it up and rotating it in my hand. It is this kind of know-how that accounts for the perceptual presence of the back side of the tomato. The enactive view explains our sense of unseen aspects of objects as a sense of something *accessible*. When some aspect of an object is present as absent, its presence consists in its access to me via appropriate bodily movements and my knowledge that I have this access.

Although the theory of enactive perception boasts an impressive list of followers, it has also attracted considerable critical attention (see, e.g., Prinz 2006; Block 2005). For our purposes here, it will not be necessary to rehearse these criticisms. My interest with the theory centers solely on its attempted solution to the problem of perceptual presence, and so we will not be required to reach any kind of general assessment of it. It's worth noting, however, that the fate of the theory might well hang on the very issue before us. As Pierre Jacob claims, "Solving the puzzle of perceptual presence is the litmus test—or a condition of adequacy—for the enactive conception of perception." (Jacob 2006, 4) It will be the task of the next section to argue that this adequacy condition has not been met.

Part II.

In an effort to assess whether Noë's view provides an adequate solution to the problem of perceptual presence, it will be useful if we first do some phenomenological accounting – that is, if we each take stock for ourselves of some of the objects and features of objects that we currently experience as perceptually present. I'll here focus on visual perceptual presence. Although you have different objects before you from the ones I have before me, as I describe my own current visual phenomenology I suspect that yours will be largely analogous to mine in the relevant respects.

It will come as no surprise to anyone who knows me that, as I type, I have a Diet Coke can in front of me on my desk. The can has two large instances of the Diet Coke logo, one of which is entirely out of sight on the back side of the can. The side of the can facing me includes its nutritional (so to speak) information, and part of the other large logo: I can just see the bottom halves of the ascending red letters spelling out the word "Coke." In assessing my current phenomenological experience, it seems clear to me that (1) The can is present to me as a voluminous whole, not as a can facade; (2) The entirety of the partly seen logo is present in some way in my experience, even though I cannot see the black cursive letter spelling out the word "Diet" at all, and I can only see part of the word "Coke"; (3) The unseen logo on the back

of the can is also present to me, though its presence is slightly less forceful than the partly seen logo; and (4) Although I know that there are several other cans in the refrigerator in the kitchen and several unopened cases in the garage, neither the cans in the fridge nor the cases in the garage are at all perceptually present to me.

Now what about the liquid inside the can on my desk? Is it also perceptually present to me? About this, I'm less sure that I know what to say, even after scrutinizing my phenomenology closely. Certainly I believe (even know) that there is liquid in the can – I've only just opened it five minutes or so ago, and I heard liquid sloshing around in it when I put it back down on the desk after I last picked it up to take a sip. But I don't feel confident about whether that currently unseen liquid is perceptually present to me or not. At the very least, it's less present to me than the unseen part of the logo.

This fact seems to pose a problem for Noë's view, however, since I am without doubt in possession of the sensorimotor knowledge of what I would have to do to bring the liquid into view. I know how to pick up the can and peer directly into it – although I also know that this won't give me a very good look. To get a better look, I know how to tip it so that the liquid spills out, or even how to tip it just far enough so that I can see the liquid without its spilling out. Moreover, my knowledge of these sensorimotor contingencies seems every bit as deep and secure as my knowledge of the sensorimotor contingencies relevant for bringing the unseen part of the logo into view. Just as I know exactly how to turn the can so that the unseen Diet Coke logo comes into view, I know exactly how to tip the can so that the unseen liquid inside it comes into view.[8]

I also have the sensorimotor know-how necessary to bring the currently unseen cans in the refrigerator into view; I know how to get up from my desk, walk through the family room and up the three steps into the kitchen, and open the refrigerator door (*mutatis mutandi* for the cases in the garage). But despite my possession of this sensorimotor information, the unseen cans in the refrigerator play no part in my current phenomenology, and likewise for the cases in the garage. I believe that they are there, but they are not perceptually present to me – even as absent. So doesn't this cause trouble for Noë's view? Given my knowledge of the relevant sensorimotor contingencies, wouldn't his view predict that the unseen cans in the fridge are as perceptually present to me as the unseen logo on the backside of the can on my desk?

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[8] Perhaps there are some minor differences here, in that I'm slightly better at turning the can just the right amount than I am at tipping it just the right amount (I know less about the precise level of liquid in the can). But it's hard to see how this minor difference could account for the deeper difference between the perceptual presence of the back side of the can and the comparable lack of perceptual presence the liquid within it.

Dealing directly with this kind of problem, Noë suggests that the answer lies in distinguishing two different kinds of sensorimotor relation: *movement-dependence* and *object-dependence*. A sensorimotor relation is movement-dependent when movements of one's own body affect what is present to one's senses. In contrast, a sensorimotor relation is object-dependent when movements of the object affect what is present to one's senses. My relation to the Diet Coke can on my desk is both movement- and object-dependent, and robustly so. And, in general, this will be the case when we see an object: "To perceive an object, in general, is to deploy sensorimotor skills of both sorts; perceivers are familiar with not only the sensory effects of movement, but also the sensory effects produced by environmental changes." (2004, 64-5) For an object to be perceptually present to us, that is, we must stand in both movement-dependent and object-dependent relations to it, and presumably both sets of relations must be relatively robust. Since my relation to the unopened cans of Diet Coke in the fridge is at best only very weakly object-dependent – for example, even if vibrations in the fridge were to cause them to fall over, it would not affect my visual sensory stimulation at all – my relation to them is not a visual one.

Noë also suggests that these sorts of considerations "reveal that the difference between the sense of the perceptual presence of something strictly unseen" – like the back side of the Diet Coke can on my desk – "and the sense of the (nonperceptual presence of an unseen item)" – like one of the Diet Coke cans in my fridge – are matters of degree. (2004, 65) For even though my sensorimotor relations to both cans are movement-dependent, my relation to the can on my desk is more sensitive to my movements than my relation to any of the cans in the fridge. Briefly closing my eyes or turning my head affects my relation to the can in front of me in a much more significant way than it affects my relation to any of the cans in the fridge.

Presumably, these points are meant to explain why the back of the can is perceptually present to me in a way that the liquid inside it is not, and also why the liquid might at least have some very weak, perhaps vague or ambiguous, perceptual presence, unlike the cans in the fridge that have none whatsoever. With respect to this second point, the explanation seems relatively plausible. My sensorimotor relation to the liquid inside the can is both more movement-dependent and more object-dependent than my sensorimotor relation to the cans in the fridge. But how does this explanation help us with respect to the first point? However my sensorimotor relations to the back side of the can are affected by my briefly shutting my eyes or turning my head, it seems that my sensorimotor relations to the liquid inside it are affected as well. The movement-dependent and object-dependent profiles of the back side of the can and the movement-dependent and object-dependent profiles of the liquid within it seem remarkably similar in degree.   And yet the back side of the can is present to me in a way that the liquid inside it is not.

To pursue this line of thought further, it will be helpful to return to one of our earlier examples. Suppose you are attending a lecture of some sort, with an eminent speaker delivering the talk from behind a lectern. Her upper body is clearly visible to you. You can see her face, her conservatively tailored blue jacket, her arms as they gesture, etc. Though you cannot see any of her lower body, it still has perceptual presence, and you perceptually experience her as a whole person – not as an upper-body person half. Now suppose that she steps out from behind the lectern for a moment, and you discover that although she is wearing a blue skirt to match her jacket, she is also wearing bright orange high top sneakers. Once she's back behind the podium, your experience of her is likely to have changed; looking at her now feels different in that the perceptual presence of her lower body, and in particular, her footwear, has become stronger. A natural way to put the point is that they are now *more present* to you than they were before. Importantly, however, it's hard to see how the change in perceptual presence that's occurred could be explained purely in terms of changes to our sensorimotor relations to the speaker. Even if we grant the sensorimotor theorist that we now stand in different sensorimotor relations to the speaker and her footwear, such changes seem insufficient to account for the increase in perceptual presence that has occurred.

Here's one way to see the point. After the speaker retreats behind the podium, it seems plausible that the perceptual presence of her footwear will be quite strong for a time, but will then wane. How is the enactive perception theorist to explain this? Likewise, suppose she were to briefly emerge from behind the podium a second time. It's hard to see how this second emergence significantly changes our sensorimotor relations to the speaker and her footwear. The relevant changes occurred after her first emergence. Yet after she retreats behind the podium a second time, it seems plausible that the perceptual presence of her footwear might again newly deepen. Again, it's not clear how the enactive perception can explain the waxing and waning of perceptual presence that we experience.

I take one of the morals of our discussion thus far to be that the perceptual presence of unseen aspects of objects varies greatly from experience to experience. The back side of the can is more present to me than the liquid inside it, and the liquid inside it is more present to me than the cans in the fridge. Moreover, sometimes the back side of the can seems more present to me than it does at other times. Any satisfactory solution to the problem of perceptual presence will have to account for this variability, but given that our sensorimotor capacities do not vary accordingly from experience to experience, the enactive view is unable to do so.

There is a second moral to draw as well. To account for perceptual presence is, in large part, to account for the qualitative character of our perceptual experience. But it's hard to see how sensorimotor knowledge offers a sufficient explanation of the distinctive phenomenology of my perceptual experience. How does my implicit knowledge of the fact that I can turn the

can around so that its back side is visible explain the fact that my phenomenal experience includes the back side of the can? Noë intends his view to make progress towards closing the explanatory gap; as he claims, "The enactive approach offers a way of understanding the qualitative character of experience: Experience isn't determined by neural states set up by patterns of stimulation alone; the qualitative character of experience depends on the perceiver's mastery and exercise of sensorimotor skills." (2004, 231) But while it is indeed plausible that the phenomenal character of our experience *depends* in some way on our sensorimotor knowledge, Noë is not just making a dependence claim. Rather, he is attempting to reduce the phenomenal character of our experience to sensorimotor knowledge. This project, which carries a strong hint of behaviorism, is much less plausible.

Reflecting on these morals suggests an alternative account of perceptual presence, one in terms of the imagination. It will be the task of the next section to spell out this view.

Part III

The general view that imagination plays an important role in our perception of the world has been around at least since Kant, who claimed in the Transcendental Deduction that "imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception." (Kant A120)[9] But the last few years have witnessed increasing attention being paid to the idea that we cannot properly understand perception without invoking the imagination, with several philosophers working independently to pursue this line of thought in different ways and to solve different problems. [10] The view that I'll develop in what follows falls broadly in this category of work. However, rather than invoking imagination to help explain perception, I here invoke imagination to help explain perceptual presence. On my view, perceptual presence is best explained in terms of imaginative presence.

The list of philosophical contexts in which the imagination has been assigned a particularly central role is a long one. One obvious example comes from modal epistemology, where the imagination has been thought to justify modal judgments. It is also supposed to explain our ability to engage with works of fiction, to dream, to predict and explain the behavior of others, to empathize, to engage in counterfactual reasoning ... and the list goes on.[11] In spite of – or perhaps because of – the invocation of the imagination in such a large variety of contexts, it is clear that the word "imagine" and its cognates are used in many different ways in philosophical discussion. As P.F. Strawson has claimed, "The uses, and

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[9] A helpful discussion and development of this Kantian view is in Sellars 1978.

[10] For three quite different examples of the sort of work I have in mind, see Church (2010), Nanay (2010) and Briscoe (2003).

[11] See Kind 2013 for discussion of the multiplicity of contexts in which the imagination is invoked.

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." (Strawson 1970, 31)[12] Though I will not here attempt to sort out all of these different uses, the variability in the notion of imagination requires me to indicate at least briefly what kind of mental activity I here have in mind in employing it to solve the problem of perceptual presence.[13] Let me make three points in this regard.

First, sometimes the words "imagine" and "imagination" are used simply to mark out cases of false belief, as when we say of a naïve professor that she imagines that her students using laptops in class are taking notes on the lecture. This is not how I will be using the terms. As I intend the notion of imagination, there is no implication of counterfactuality or falsity; one can imagine something that is true or that one takes to be true just as one can imagine something that is false or that one takes to be false.

Second, sometimes the words "imagine" and "imagination" are used in a broad sense to cover all cases of what we might call hypothetical thinking. In contrast, I intend these terms to be construed in a much narrower sense. Most importantly, I want to distinguish acts of imagination from mere acts of supposition. The contrast I intend can be highlighted by reflecting on the kind of activity involved in proof by *reductio*, where we suppose something for the sake of argument. To do so, all we need to do is bring the claim to mind, and we needn't exert much mental energy to do so. In contrast, I'll be taking imagining to require something more.

One way to understand this point is to recall Descartes' characterization of the imagination in terms of mental imagery:

> When I imagine a triangle, for example, I do not merely understand that it is a figure bounded by three lines, but at the same time I also see the three lines with my mind's eye as if they were present before me; and this is what I call imagining. But if I want to think of a chiliagon, although I understand that it is a figure consisting of a thousand sides just as well as I understand the triangle to be a three-sided figure, I do not in the same way imagine the thousand sides or see them as if they were present before me. (Descartes 1641/1986, 50)

Unlike Descartes, many contemporary philosophers deny that imagination—even imagination considered as distinct from mere supposition—requires imagery.[14]   I myself side with

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[12] See also Stevenson (2003) who claims that imagination is an "extremely flexible notion" and distinguished twelve different common conceptions of it.

[13] My account of imagination is developed in Kind 2001.

[14] See, e.g., Walton 1990 or Yablo 1993. "Imagery" here is meant in a broad sense that encompasses sensory presentations in any sensory modality, not simply visual imagery.

Descartes on this point, but for our purposes here, the disagreement can be sidestepped. The kind of imagining I will be focused on in what follows will be the class of imagistic imagining—regardless of whether this class exhausts the class of imaginings or is merely a subset of it.

Third, the literature on imagination commonly recognizes two types of imagining: *objectual* imagining and *propositional* imagining. I might imagine *that* Barack Obama has just come over for dinner; alternatively, I might simply imagine Barack Obama himself. For our purposes here, what will be important will be objectual imagining.

With these clarifications made, we are ready to see how the imagination can help to solve the problem of perceptual presence. It will be useful to begin by considering a few different examples of common sorts of imagining, and since we have been dealing with visual perceptual presence, I'll focus solely on visual imaginings:

(a) I'm in the garage when I realize I don't have my car keys. As I head back inside the house I conjure up an image of my messy desk in an effort to help me remember if that's where I left them.

(b) While away at a conference, I am talking to my children by phone. As I hear their voices and the arguing over who gets to hold the phone, I imagine the scene at home.

(c) Lying in bed and trying to fall asleep, I'm startled by a creaking noise. Though I know that it was just the house settling, I find myself imagining a burglar sneaking around the kitchen.

These cases differ in various respects. For one thing, the first case is both voluntary and deliberate, while the third is involuntary and spontaneous; the second case, as described, might best be thought of as somewhere in between. For another thing, in the first two imaginings, I'm imagining something that I take actually to be the case while in the third, I'm not. Rather than focus on the differences between these cases, however, I'd like to focus on what they have in common, namely, that they make vivid something that I'm not actually seeing. Moreover, they do this in a way that feels, at least to some degree, similar to seeing.

Philosophers have long recognized that perceiving and imagining have similar phenomenological profiles.[15] From the inside, perceiving and imagining feel alike—so much so, in fact, that they can at least in some cases be mistaken for one another. This point is supported by experimental data, in particular, the oft-cited study conducted by C.W. Perky in the early 20th century in which subjects took themselves to be visually imagining a banana when in fact they were seeing a faint banana image projected on a screen in front of them.

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[15] For a discussion of the phenomenological similarity between imagining and perceiving, see Kind 2001.

(Perky 1910) Of course, in most cases, imagining and perceiving do not feel *exactly* the same; our imaginings often seem to us less vivid and distinct than our perceivings. In Hobbes' term, imagining is "decaying sense." But insofar as what we imagine is less vivid than what we perceive, it is precisely because the object of an imagining – unlike the object of a perception – is not present to the eye.

This is what's distinctive about the imagination: It enables us to have an experience of something not present as if it were present. When I visualize my kids while talking to them on the phone, they become present to me in a way they weren't before. They still seem absent to me—it's not as if my act of imagination convinces me that they are now right before my eyes— but they now have phenomenological presence even in their absence.

This, I believe, is precisely what's needed to solve the problem of perceptual presence. Working in tandem with our perceptual capacities, our imaginative capacities contribute to our perceptual experience by making unseen features of objects seem present. As I'm looking at the Diet Coke can on my desk, it's via a conjunctive effort of vision and imagination that I have the perceptual sense of the can as a voluminous whole. The front side of the can is seen; the back side of the can is imagined.

Before going on, I should deal directly with what may seem like an unwelcome consequence of my view. In claiming that imagining works in tandem with perception to explain perceptual presence, I am committed to the claim that we are regularly engaged in a lot more imagining than we realize. After all, Noë has persuasively shown that the phenomenon of presence in absence is constantly occurring. Thus, my view requires that we are constantly imagining the unseen aspects of what we see, even though it doesn't seem to us that we are constantly engaged in imaginative efforts. Here I will simply bite the bullet, though I should stress that I don't think that it's much of a bullet to bite. Granted, our imagination is considerably more active than we might have pretheoretically realized, but it is important to recognize that in most cases the imaginative effort is spontaneous and non-deliberate.   It's thus not surprising that I typically don't even notice that I'm doing it. Just as my perceiving the front side of the can occurs in a completely effortless way, so too my imagining the back side of the can occurs in a completely effortless way.

We've already seen that imaginings can be wholly spontaneous. Recall case (c) above, when a strange noise prompts me to imagine a burglar in the kitchen downstairs. In cases such as this, the imagining occurs spontaneously without any conscious effort on our part. [16] Moreover, our spontaneous imaginings often seem to be entirely outside of our control. This is

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[16] This is not to say that the state itself is *unconscious*. After all, it has a phenomenological character that unconscious states lack. Importantly, this seems to differentiate my view from the one presented in Church 2010. See also Church 2008 for an extended discussion of unconscious imagining.

particularly apparent when the imaginings are unwelcome. For example, as I'm watching my daredevil young son on the playground, I find myself imagining various horrific scenarios – falls, stumbles, broken bones. When I'm walking home with him from the playground and he pulls his hand from my grasp, I find myself imagining a car hitting him as he runs into the street. In these situations, I cannot prevent these imaginings from occurring, and I find myself powerless to stop them once they do. But imaginings need not be unwelcome to simply pop into our head and lodge themselves there. For example, while grading final exams, I find myself imagining the summer vacation that awaits me once I'm finished. My imaginings of the beach are quite pleasant, but once they've taken hold, they're hard to shake off so I can get back to work.

These examples of spontaneous imaginings provide us a useful model for thinking about our imaginings of the unseen aspects of objects. Such imaginings are not imaginings that we deliberately set out to undertake; rather, they are imaginings that simply happen as we perceive objects in the world. In many of these, we are essentially powerless to prevent the imaginings from occurring, and once they do occur, we are essentially powerless to stop them. But, with effort, we can sometimes put an end to them. Staring at the Diet Coke can on my desk, if I try to force myself to see it as a can facade rather than a whole can, I can (at least sometimes) pull off the effort. But, as my view would predict, once I stop imagining the can as a voluminous whole, and stop imagining the unseen back side, the phenomenology of my experience changes, and the can as a whole is no longer perceptually present to me in the same way that it was before.

Let us now recall one of the morals drawn from the discussion of the previous section: The phenomenon of perceptual presence is a variable one. There are several dimensions to this variability. Sometimes the same unseen aspect of an object will seem more present to an observer than at other times, sometimes the same unseen aspect of an object will seem more present to one observer than to another, and some unseen aspects of objects are more perceptually present than others. None of this variability is well explained by the enactive perception view. My sensorimotor capacities do not generally change from day to day, they are not generally different from the sensorimotor capacities of other adult perceivers, and they generally apply equally well to most unseen aspects of objects. All of this variability, however, can be easily accommodated if perceptual presence is explained by imaginative presence.

Hume famously wrote in the *Treatise* that we are nowhere more free than in imagination, but as free as our imaginative capacities are, some things are more easily imagined than others. This varies both intra- and interpersonally. I find Diet Coke cans easier to imagine than Doctor Pepper cans. When I try to imagine a Doctor Pepper can, it's somewhat fuzzy and indistinct. For me, the back side of a Diet Coke can is very easily imagined, but someone who

doesn't look at Diet Cokes cans as often and as regularly as I do may find it more difficult to imagine the back side of the can distinctly and determinately.

Moreover, someone's imaginative capacities with respect to a given object may vary over time and across features of the object. Suppose I'm presented with a piece of fruit I've never seen before, a pomegranate say. In such a case I have no trouble imagining its back side, but my imagining of its inside is somewhat vague – I imagine flesh colored similarly to its outside, sort of like the inside of a tomato. But once I've cut into the fruit and seen its inside, subsequent pomegranate imaginings take on new distinctness. Now I can effortlessly picture the light colored flesh and the bulging, bright reddish kernel-shaped seeds.

Likewise, recall the case of the hightop-wearing lecturer discussed in the previous section. As we saw, the enactive view has no way to explain why the hidden shoes become more perceptually present to me after I've seen them. My sensorimotor relations to them have not changed, but my imaginative relations to them have. Once I've seen the shoes, it becomes much easier to imagine them when the speaker's lower body is again blocked by the lectern. Moreover, the sight of the shoes has made them more salient, so that imaginings of them are not just more determinate and vivid but more easily prompted when looking at the speaker.

I also think that these facts about variability help to explain why not all parties to the debate about perceptual presence agree about its phenomenology. Prinz, for example, disagrees with Noë's claim that occluded portions of objects have perceptual presence. On Prinz's view, "it's far from obvious that the occluded elements are part of the phenomenology." (Prinz 2006, 8) The proponent of the enactive perception view cannot tolerate this sort of disagreement, and thus must deny that Prinz has accurately described the phenomenology.[17] But on my view, such disagreement is to be expected. Given that both imaginative capacity and the disposition to engage in spontaneous imagining vary considerably from individual to individual, it comes as no surprise at all that people will give different assessments of what's perceptually present to them.

In support of his claim that the occluded elements are not part of the phenomenology, Prinz warns that we should be careful not to draw unwarranted conclusions from the fact that we would be surprised to discover upon the removal of an occluder that the object behind it was incomplete. According to Prinz, such surprise shows only "that we had an unconscious expectation, not that we were, paradoxically, experiencing the hidden part." (Prinz 2006, 8) The view that perceptual presence is explained by imaginative presence not only helps to make sense of this kind of disagreement about phenomenology but also to dissipate the apparent

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[17] See Kelly 2004 for an account of a related phenomenological disagreement.

paradox that Prinz is pointing to.[18] Although there is something paradoxical in the claim that we are perceiving something unperceived, there is nothing paradoxical in the claim that we are imagining something unperceived. We can imaginatively experience something that is not seen, and it is by way of this imaginative experience that things unseen are imbued with perceptual presence.

Part IV

I began this paper with a quotation from Kant, and the view that I have developed is in some respects a neo-Kantian one. But, as we noted above, Kant took the imagination to be necessary for *perception itself*; as helpfully explained by J.M.Young, for Kant imagination is needed "to make perception possible in the first place, his view being that mere sensible awareness, on which imagination operates, does not by itself constitute awareness *of* anything." (Young 1988, 142) In contrast, my claim is that imagination is necessary for perceptual presence – or, to put things more carefully, for perceptual presence in absence.

I don't take the argument of this paper to have shown that we should reject the enactive view of perception. Something seems importantly correct about the claim that sensorimotor capacities are needed to explain perception, and nothing I have said here counts against that claim. But the argument for the enactive view often seems to take the form of an inference to the best explanation. Enactive perception, it is claimed, is what's needed to account for the problem of perceptual presence. Thus, while the argument of this paper may not count against some form of the enactive perception view itself, it does count against the argument for that view. As I have argued, we cannot adequately account for the phenomenon of perceptual presence in terms of enactive perception, and in fact, we can best account for perceptual presence by an account in terms of imaginative presence.

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[18] Recall also Noë's remarks quoted above about the two-dimensionality of perception, i.e., that a silver dollar looks both circular and elliptical to us (and at the same time). According to Noë, both of these looks are part of our experience, but many others disagree. Some deny that the coin really looks circular; some deny that it really looks elliptical. (For discussion of this disgreement, see Noë 2005, 236-241.)

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