

PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Journal of the APPA

Volume 3 Number 2 July 2008

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Philosophical Counseling for Philosophers

A Confession of Images

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Abstract

The main aim of this essay is to open up an area of philosophical counseling (PCg) that may be described as philosophical counseling for philosophers, where philosophical disabilities or impairments can be identified and treated. This is done by going to the field of mental imagery, which is the context in which the author presents his own imagery impairments and the negative impact they have had on his work in philosophy. The author also tries to show how attending to differences in imaging ability can help to settle such classic disputes in philosophy as that between Locke and Berkeley on abstract general ideas.

Keywords: *philosophical impairment, non-imagers, typical mind fallacy, Francis Galton, William James, eidetic imagers.*

Introduction

Nowadays, philosophy is written almost entirely in the form of individual essays and books, the books themselves often starting out as essays. But in the past there were also dialogues (Plato, Berkeley, Hume), meditations and confessions (Augustine, Descartes, Rousseau), geometric or Euclidean presentations (Spinoza), aphorisms and epigrams (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche), novels and letters (Rousseau). Bearing this diversity in mind, I hope there will be no objection if I draw on the confessional mode, which I think is not only cathartically good for the soul, but is also a way that the soul can understand itself.

My own personal confession is chiefly about an impairment from which I suffer, which is like myopia in being a deficiency, but more serious as it affects not only my perception, as does myopia, but my thinking and particularly my philosophical thinking.

But before coming out of the closet I need to make a few preliminary observations about how I understand Philosophical Counseling—or PCg for short—so that I can then situate my impairment within it, as a way of both identifying and treating it.

Philosophical Counseling

By PCg, then, I understand the practice of those who have been trained in philosophy and are using it for the purpose of counseling those with problems that can be helped by philosophy, where those being helped will usually not have a training in philosophy. But this needn't always be the case. For someone with philosophical training might have a personal problem which he is unable to resolve but might be resolvable with the help of a Philosophical Counsellor or PCr. So in that case, the philosopher would be in the situation of a dentist who, unable to drill and fill one of his own decayed teeth, would have to go to another dentist. So a philosopher might have to go to a PCr to be helped with his difficulties.

That would be one way that philosophers could benefit from PCg. But that is not what I mean here by PCg for philosophers. My idea of PCg for philosophers is considerably more restrictive. It is directed to philosophers not insofar as they are subject to the many problems which non-philosophers are subject to, but as practioners of philosophy or as philosophers qua philosophers. In this

respect the analogy with dentistry breaks down. For I cannot think of any dental problem for which a dentist would need to go to another dentist, which would be essential to him as a dentist and which a normal patient wouldn't also have.

What I have in mind can, I think, be brought out if we compare a philosopher and a PCr. It is generally agreed that (for formal purposes at least) both have a basic university training in philosophy at least to BA standard or its equivalent and, ideally, a higher degree in philosophy as well. What a PCr also has, I would say, is a talent and interest in counseling with philosophy, as well as some training in using philosophy for counseling. With this he is then able to practice PCg, treating non-philosophers and, as I have suggested, also philosophers. And just as a PCr has something that most philosophers haven't, so I want to suggest that there is also something additional required if a PCr is going to be able to treat philosophers qua philosophers.

What additional something, then, do PCrs need if they are going to help philosophers? That, I hope, is going to come out in this essay, but one way I could initially describe it is: insight into the minds of philosophers, especially the relevantly different ways that philosophers think.

My Confession

And now, having dispatched these preliminaries, I need to make my confession, which is that I am an extremely weak mental imager, having little or no visual images. And the images that I am able to form are fugitive, flickering, sketchy, indistinct, weak and incomplete. So even when I try to form an image as simple as a triangle, I usually get little or nothing, or when I do get something resembling a triangle, it has never, as far as I can remember, had all three sides clearly connected. For me there is always some bit of the triangle that is missing. And this deficiency in imagining a triangle applies to all my images—natural things, like cats and flowers, as well as man-made artifacts, like books, tables, cars. Probably the only slight exception is faces. My strongest images are of human faces, but even in this case, the images tend to be more sketchy or schematic than detailed; they are also uneven in that there are only certain faces that I can form useful images of. The only other exception to my general weakness is that I sometimes get very lively and detailed involuntary images just before falling asleep—what psychologists call hypnagogic images.

Measuring Imaging Ability

Having made my confession, I would understand it if the reader's reaction is something like: Is that it? Is that what you have been building us up to? That being so, I need to show that what I take to be my impairment is consequential and serious, that it is not something that I have magnified out of proportion—like a normally industrious person castigating himself (either ingenuously or disingenuously) for laziness. And that is what I try to do in sections 7 and 8 below, where I set out the specific ways that my impairment has actually impacted on my life and philosophical work. But first there is an even more fundamental problem that needs to be addressed. For to confess that I have weak imagery could be like bemoaning the fact that I have only a little piece of string. But how long is a little piece of string? And how weak is my imagery? To determine both we need some kind of standard or grid or means of measurement. But this seems the very thing that is lacking in the case of mental imagery, since by its nature it is private and subjective. And it was mainly for that reason that imaging virtually ceased to be studied by psychologists from the 1930s to the 1960s, during the heyday of Behaviorism.

Yet there is, I believe, a way of largely overcoming this difficulty, if we focus on the extremes, since they provide something very close to objective criteria. To appreciate this, we can picture imaging ability (and images themselves) as on a scale of 0 to 10, as in the following diagram:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Those with 10, the maximum, have photographic and eidetic imagery. Although most photographic imagers are also eidetic, the two kinds of images and imaging ability needn't go together. What photographic imagery is should be reasonably clear. Briefly, an image is eidetic if it has more rather than less independence from the mind or will of the imager, enabling him to scan or move around his images. And while the images of most eidetics are of photographic or near photographic detail, they needn't be (see Haber). Probably the most famous case of someone with both photographic and eidetic ability was the subject of A. R. Luria's classic study, the *Mind of a Mnemonist*, who could form images that were indiscernible from objects seen in the physical world, both in their detail and substantiality. Moving to the minimum extreme of the spectrum, to 0, there are those individuals who have no images, two examples of which I shall be discussing in section 6 below.

So here we have the two fixed parameters, the maximum and minimum, for assessing our and all other images and imagining abilities. For we know what it is like to see things with our eyes open and probably we also know well enough what it is like to see nothing, or virtually nothing— as for example when our eyes are closed or blindfolded or we are initially looking out in the darkest night or in a closet. With those fixed points, we should then, *mutatis mutandis*, be able to move into the imaging realm, understanding respectively 0 images or non-imaging and 10 images and imaging.

With these two extremes as the fixed parameters it should then be feasible to situate with reasonable accuracy all intervening images or imaging abilities as on the line between 1 to 9, helped by using the descriptions of those who have made an effort to determine where, between the two extremes, their ability and images fall. And while I concede that my grid is considerably simplified in conflating different aspects of images, e.g. their vividness and detail, I don't think such simplification affects its viability or my argument. Thus I can be pretty confident that my own imagery can be situated around 1 or 2. And I think most people can be reasonably sure where they are, if they are prepared to accept that this is not rocket science—which is the case with most feasible techniques for making ability distinctions.

Francis Galton

What we have then is something like a standard Bell curve, with most people clustering in the middle regions and, not surprisingly, with very very few at either extreme. But while this might seem fairly obvious now, it was not known to be the case until fairly recent times. The man responsible for discovering it was Francis Galton, the cousin of Charles Darwin, who published his findings in *Inquiries into Human Faculty* (1883; 2nd ed. 1907). Before Galton it was believed that imaging and images were fairly evenly distributed in the population, that while it might differ somewhat in degree, it did not differ in kind. Galton discovered that this was not the case and in doing so he revolutionized the understanding of images. But in fact Galton's work on images did much more than that. It also helped to bring scientific psychology, as we know it, into existence, moving it from being a part of philosophy to becoming an independent science. Thus in his own classic work, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James writes:

“Until very recent years it was supposed by all philosophers that there was a typical human mind which all individual minds were like, and that propositions of universal validity could be laid down about such faculties as ‘the Imagination’. Lately, however, a mass of revelations have poured in, which make us see how false a view this is. There are imaginations, not ‘the Imagination’, and they must be studied in detail.” (vol. 2, pp. 49-50).

And although it was Gustav Fechner who was the ‘first-breaker of ground in this direction’, it was the publication of Galton’s work, according to James, that ‘may be said to have made an era in descriptive Psychology’ (p. 51). James then quotes at length (pp. 51-6) Galton’s description of how he came to make his crucial discoveries concerning imagery.

To make a long story short, Galton devised a two-page questionnaire which he distributed widely, not only in England but also in France, America and elsewhere. The aim of Galton’s questions was to determine the vividness, detail, location, etc. of mental images in the population. This is usually called his ‘breakfast-table questionnaire’, because that was what Galton suggested that his subjects try to imagine.

What Galton found, to his astonishment, was that the range in imaging ability was enormous- and also that there were more forms of imagery than were generally known to exist.

So whereas it was formerly thought that human imagery was all of a piece, Galton found that a small percentage of people also had 0 or no images, another small percentage had 10 or eidetic/photographic images, and many of those who had these also had other forms of imagery for which there were then no names. One of these Galton called number forms. Another only took its present name in the 20th century, namely synaesthetic images- for example colors that are heard- as did eidetic images (see Galton 1883/1907, pp. 66-7 and Jaensch). I take it that at least 0 images, 1-9 images, eidetic images, synaesthetic images and number-form images are qualitatively different. But in order to keep things simple, I shall be confining my discussion here to 0, 1-9 and 10 images.

To appreciate the difference between the two extremes of 0 and 10 images, here are some responses which Galton received from those in the lowest and highest groups. I begin with lowest:

“Extremely dim. The impressions are in all respects so dim, vague, and transient, that I doubt whether they can reasonably be called images. They are incomparably less than those of dreams.”

“My powers are zero. To my consciousness there is almost no association of memory with objective visual impressions. I recollect the breakfast-table, but do not see it.” (Galton 1907, p. 64)

As for the highest, we have the following:

“The image once seen is perfectly clear and bright.”

“... I can see my breakfast-table or any equally familiar thing with my mind’s eye quite as well in all particulars as I can do if the reality is before me.” (Galton 1907, p. 62)

Non-Imagers

Much might be said about both groups (above), but since my focus in this article is on disability, I want to concentrate on the low or non-imagers. The most interesting of these, as we now know, was Major John Herschel, FRS, an astronomer and son of the astronomer Sir John Herschel (see Burbridge). In a letter sent with his response to Galton’s questionnaire, Herschel writes:

The questions presuppose assent to some sort of a proposition regarding ‘the mind’s eye’ and the ‘images’ which it sees. The more... that one tries to settle the preliminaries, so as to answer conscientiously, the more difficult does it become to answer them at all. This points to some initial fallacy. (Galton 1907, p. 59)

Herschel then goes on to say that he thinks the fallacy involves making an analogy between real seeing and mental seeing, which is like that between knitting wool and knitting or stitching together an argument. So the belief in mental images, Herschel thinks, arises from taking an analogy or metaphor too literally- like thinking that the terms or premises of an argument are really stitched together. Thus ‘It is only by a figure of speech [he says] that I can describe my recollection of a scene as a “mental image”. . . I do not see it . . . any more than a man sees the thousand lines of

Sophocles which under pressure he is ready to repeat' (1907, p. 59). For Herschel, then, people who believed that they perceive actual visual images were confusing or deceiving themselves.

In fact, what seems clear is that Herschel himself had no imaging power. As Galton puts it, he was one of those men who 'had a deficiency of which [he] was [previously] unaware, and naturally enough supposed that those who affirmed they possessed it, were romancing' (1907, p. 59). From Herschel's responses to the questionnaire, it seems clear that he did not even have the simplest imagery capacity or the passive imagery found in dreams. For those people with strong or moderately strong imagery, this will seem incredible: that someone could have no imaging power or images *at all*, yet function normally. On the other hand, for those in the opposite group, this is not going to appear that incredible—and for non-imagers like Herschel it is not going to appear incredible at all.

Judging from Herschel's detailed responses and his later correspondence with Galton, the questionnaire seems to have caused him a good deal of uncomfortable soul-searching. Apparently Herschel had never considered that he might be lacking mental images. He therefore struggled to understand whether he actually lacked them or whether others were, as Galton put it, romancing themselves. Eventually what convinced him that other people really did have images was Galton's allied work on number forms. These are visual configurations, strikingly specific and stable, which some people imagine whenever they think of numbers. As Herschel says in a letter to Galton of 21 Feb. 1880: 'The cases which you have elicited of numerical imagery reconcile me to the general fact of what you denote by visualization'. (Burbridge, pp. 461-2.) Herschel is almost certainly referring here to Galton's pioneer article published in *Nature* of January 1880, which sets out in graphic detail the number-form imagery of various individuals. What's clear is that Herschel was inferring from these cases that some people do have mental images, i.e. objects they could see in their minds without the use of their physical eyes. But though Herschel was 'reconciled', he still felt uneasy, understandably enough, since he still had no actual experience of mental images.

According to present-day psychologists, roughly about 2% or 3% of the population are in Herschel's position, are non-imagers (Brann, 1991). In my own study of imagery, which stretches over the past ten years, I have come across only one person who had no images whatever in his waking life—either voluntary or involuntary—although even he has imagery in dreams. Perhaps the most interesting and influential case of someone without even dream imagery is to be found in Charcot's *Clinical Lectures*. This was a merchant who originally had extremely strong imagery, but who lost all of it following a crisis in his life. In a letter to Charcot he described his condition in the following way:

. . . I possessed at one time a grand faculty of picturing to myself persons who interested me, color and objects of every kind . . . I made use of this faculty extensively in my studies. I read anything I wanted to learn, and then shutting my eyes I saw again quite clearly the letters with their every detail . . . All of a sudden this internal vision absolutely disappeared. Now . . . I cannot picture to myself the features of my children or my wife, or any other object of my daily surroundings . . . I dream simply of speech . . . I am obliged to say things which I wish to retain in my memory, whereas formerly it was sufficient for me to photograph them in my eye. (Charcot, pp. 158-9)

I believe I have now said enough about the variations of imaging and, in particular, those at the lowest end of the spectrum. I now need to show how this is relevant to counseling, and particularly PCg for philosophers. So in the next section, I try to show in some detail how my weak imaging has been an impairment to me.

Imagery Impairments

Because I have little or no imaging I find certain kinds of problems, such as those which engineers or architects or interior decorators typically tackle, extremely difficult if not impossible, since I can't form the requisite images, let alone manipulate them. For those who might find difficulty understanding this, I offer two specific ways of seeing what I and others like me can't do, but which 6-10 imagers can. I call the first the Thanksgiving Test. Although it is an easier test to administer in person, rather than to a reader, the basic idea is simple enough. I ask you: What is the 11th letter of the word 'Thanksgiving' or some other word with more than ten letters. Now if you are a strong imager, you are going to find this task pretty easy, for all you have to do is form an image of the word and count the letters. And if you are an eidetic and photographic imager then your task should be no more difficult than mine when I am able to write the word down and then count the letters off with the point of my pencil. But if you can't do that and if, like me, you can't form images of words, then you are going to find the task difficult. So you have an impairment.

Here is another similar test for image impairment. I say: let's play noughts and crosses. You agree. But instead of your playing it on paper, I ask you to play it in your head or mind's eye, using the a, b, c and 1, 2, 3 grid, as used by chess players. Here again the weak or non-imager is going to show his impairment; whereas the photographic and eidetic imager 10 could not only easily play noughts and crosses in his head, but (amazingly to me) actual chess as well.

Of course, working out the place of a letter in a word, or playing mental noughts and crosses, is not a task that comes up that often. But what does arise rather more normally is a question like: 'Dad, how do you spell the word . . . ?' For a low imager, that isn't difficult if the word is short. But it is extremely difficult, as I know from my own experience, if the word is long, for then it is hard to be sure which letter one has reached by the middle or end of the word. Again, it is easy enough to do it if you can write the word down, and that is precisely what the strong imager can do, although in his mind's eye. So here again, someone who can't do it has a disability, not unlike, I would say, dyslexia.

There is now a general category for educational problems such as dyslexia. They are called Print Disabilities. In my view, very low imagers have image disabilities, which, I hope some day, might be officially recognized. Thus the low imager will seem to be a poor speller in those situations where he cannot write the word down, for example in what are (or used to be) called spelling bees.

Here is an even more critical and far-reaching example, which again I have from my own sad experience. As a schoolboy I found it very difficult to read the novels assigned in English class. At the time, I believed this was because I was either not very bright or didn't like novels. And yet, I confess I would happily read novels in the form of comic books, called classic comics. (I don't know if they are still being sold, but now when I go into bookshops I see that are many similar things available, called graphic novels.)

In fact, I might as well come fully out of the closet and confess that I rarely read anything apart from comic books before I was seventeen, and that I had a vast collection of comic books. But it was only when I came to work on images that I found a way of understanding this. Most novels begin (and often continue) with long descriptive passages. But such passages are very heavy going for low or non-imagers and through no fault of their own. For a poor imager, these descriptive passages are essentially just words or dense forests of words, since the weak imager cannot see anything of the scene or people painted by the words. The comic book does that work for him by means of pictures.

Although I have given only a few specific examples of how low or non-imaging can impair thinking, I think it is clear that its impact must be felt in many other ways, given the pervasiveness

of imaging in the majority of human thinking- which material should be of use for general counseling and perhaps also PCg. But since my theme here is PCg for philosophers, I want to move on to that.

Philosophical Impairments

So how did my imagery impairment affect my philosophical work? One clear way, I believe, is that it prevented me from properly understanding the philosophers that have been the focus of much of my work- the classic empiricists, Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Of course, I knew that they put ideas at center-stage in their philosophies, and that ideas for them are very close if not identical to images. Thus Hume is clear that ideas are copies of impressions and impressions are what we experience.¹ And since for Locke and (with qualification) Berkeley, but especially for Hume, a word is only meaningful if it stands for an idea, it follows that for them meaningful thinking consists in having an appropriate train of images. Of course, I knew all of this, but really I could never take it seriously. For how could anyone seriously believe that all their thinking was carried out in images? On the other hand, I was aware that they did seem to take that theory of meaning very seriously, particularly, in Berkeley's case, to reject abstract general ideas and matter and, in Hume's, to reject necessary causal connection, substantial minds and even personal identity.

In short, I had a difficulty that I couldn't really resolve. The best I could do was to suppose that either these philosophers were confused or when they spoke about images or ideas as copies of impressions or sensations, they really, in their hearts, meant meanings or concepts. Yet I now wonder how I could have been working on these philosophers for so many years, without seeing that my incredulity and difficulty stemmed from my imagery deficiency and from not being able to accept that their minds worked differently from my own. Curiously, however, I remember that when I first encountered Berkeley as an undergraduate, I became aware of the difficulty, but, after some initial perplexity, assumed that I must be wrong to be puzzled by it, since no one else seemed to be. Now, however, I am prepared to accept that the empiricists meant what they said, because they had unusually strong imagery.

If my experience is anything to go on, what mainly stands in the way of this acceptance is not only the rarity of such strong imagery, but also the natural tendency that each of us has to suppose that what is mentally normal for us is just normal or normal for all human beings. This tendency does not operate in the bodily realm because there the differences are apparent. Hence it comes with a sense of shock for either a very weak and very strong imager to realize that he is unusual. But this only emerges when a discussion can be moved from the general to particulars and concrete details. I remember one strong-imaging student saying to me towards the end of one such discussion: 'I don't want to insult you, but I really can't believe that you are not lying to me when you say that you can't form an image of this room. You must, because how else could you remember its contents.' More often, however, nothing so candid is said but instead one or both parties gives the other a look of puzzlement and incredulity- not unlike the kind we give to the statements of children or the mentally ill.

So in trying to understand Locke, Berkeley and Hume, I now feel that I was like Herschel trying to make sense of images, or a color blind person trying to make sense of those with a full color array. I hope that making this confession will not have the effect of reducing me either as a human being or as a philosopher or historian of philosophy. But I can't be entirely sure. For if I was an art historian addressing other art historians, I can imagine that confessing to color blindness might, *mutatis mutandis*, have the effect of reducing me as an art historian in their eyes. They might say: you should never have gone into this subject, for you lacked a crucial instrument for assessing paintings.

Remembering non-Imagistically

Although we can't undo the bad we have done, perhaps we can do something to repair it. In any case, I now believe, along with Hume, that thinking can be carried out in images. Why? Partly from reading accounts by the strong imagers themselves, such as Arthur Danto (Danto, pp. 12-20) and Temple Grandin (Grandin, pp. 19-42), but also as much from first hand experience of such imagers. They have convinced me not only that they do think that way, but that for them it is hard to understand how human thinking can be carried out in any other way. So their situation is the vice-versa mirror image of my own. However instead of my question: How can all of your thinking be in images? they ask me: How can you think without images? More specifically, I'm asked: (1) How can I do maths if I don't have numerical images in my mind? (2) How can I remember x if I can't form an image of x ? (3) How can I read descriptive scenes in a novel if I can't form any images of them?

Until recent times, I have found it difficult to give a satisfactory answer to their questions, which, I think, has supported their suspicion that I don't know what I'm talking about. For I haven't been able to say very much more than that I know I can do (1) and (2) because I do just do them, although I usually add that instead of using images, I believe I use words in some kind of inner dialogue. About (3) I say that I do it very badly. But none of this has given much satisfaction to the strong imagers. However, since that time I have been on the lookout for better ways to get at my non-imagistic thinking.

So goaded on by these students, I think I have made a few modest discoveries, two of which are of a methodological nature. First, I am able to confirm Wilhelm Wundt's advice, as quoted by James, that 'The first rule for utilizing inward observation [i.e. serious introspection] consists in taking, as far as possible, experiences that are accidental, unexpected, and not intentionally brought about . . . ' (James, vol. 1, p. 189 note). The second is that it is necessary to be as particular and detailed as possible.

Here then are two chance occasions in which I was able to go a little further in answering my students's question: how can you remember x without imagery? The first, which unfortunately is not very detailed, occurred in March 2006; the second in May 2007.

(1) 'Just a few minutes ago (its now 9:40 am) I tried to remember what I had for lunch yesterday. I knew I had bacon and potato, but I wanted to know the other veg. I knew there was one. But it never occurred to me to form an image of what was on my plate to discover it, because I knew I couldn't. So I tried to think of the other veg and waited. Nothing occurred to me and so I tried again. Then after a minute or two, the thought or word just popped into my mind: spinach.'

(2) 'About half an hour ago, I was trying to remember a certain object which I sometimes used for holding liquid. But I couldn't remember it, although I knew where I used to keep it and I could form a rough shadowy image of that place. I also had a pretty good idea of its relative size and how much liquid it could contain, but I had no idea of its shape. However I knew the constraints of the shape, particularly what shape it couldn't be and what it could be to be barely satisfactory. And I knew that the shape of the particular object I was trying to remember was better than just satisfactory; but I still didn't know what it was; nor had I any image of it.

Now if I was an image person I'm sure I could have gone directly to the image. In that case the remembering would have been pretty much immediate and not laboured, as it was for me. I also believe that knowing the shape would have been difficult without having an image of it. Whereas, for whatever reason, knowing the size was feasible without an image.

Eventually I did remember it. The whole process, from the time I started trying to remember the object to the moment I remembered it, took about ten or fifteen minutes and went pretty much as follows. First I remembered it was a container that a certain food or drink was sold in. And while I

wasn't sure which or what, I did remember that it was my food or drink—not that of anyone else in my family. I also had a sense that it was something I didn't often buy. I then tried to imagine where it would initially have been kept, but (as I mentioned above) that didn't work. I then made a few other stabs, but they didn't work.

Then quite suddenly, thinking again of my positive lead—that it was a food or drink I sometimes used—I remembered what the item was. It was a large jar which contained wheat germ. Then, very quickly, I was able to form a schematic image of its shape, typical of my weak imagery.'

Locke and Berkeley on General Ideas

Both Galton and James were aware that there were philosophical implications flowing from the findings of the breakfast table questionnaire—the most central of which was that philosophers had hitherto wrongly assumed that there was only one form of imaging. But this mistake was pregnant with other mistakes, going in two directions: the general and the more specific. Of the more specific philosophical topics addressed, the most clear-cut and most discussed was the classic dispute between Berkeley and Locke on abstract general ideas, which I want to look at before concluding with the general mistake.

Very briefly, T.H. Huxley was the first to comment on the dispute, although his focus was on Berkeley's position and Hume's support for it, which Huxley disputed, at least for sensible or natural objects, on which he was clearly drawing on Galton's findings both on imaging and photographic work on generic images (Huxley, pp. 92-4). James, after quoting Huxley at length, then suggested that the dispute between Locke and Berkeley might be resolved if we looked at the differences in their imaging powers (vol. 2, p. 49). A.C. Fraser took this one step further in 1891, suggesting it was Berkeley's and Hume's exceptionally strong imaging powers, connected with their relative youth at the time, that encouraged them to believe, as against Locke, that there were no general ideas (Fraser, p. 241). Put in another way, their imaging power were so strong and detailed that it psychologically prevented them from forming vaguer general images; whereas Locke, being older and hence a somewhat weaker imager, could form such images (Berman 2005, p. 11).

Another somewhat different approach to the dispute was developed by Galton. Drawing on new methods of photography he was able to superimpose photographs of, for example, members of the same family and produce what he took to be a general family image. (See Pearson, vol. 2, Plate XXXI). One conclusion that Galton drew from the general images he had produced by photographic compositing was that there were two types of general images—a vague and imperfect kind, which human beings are, perforce, obliged to use, and a clear and distinct kind, shown in Galton's best photographic composites, which may, he thought, be 'considered as pictorial statistics' (Galton 1879, p.168). Galton then went on to consider whether and to what extent a 'mind superhumanly logical and active' would be able to form general images of the latter kind. Plainly, this would require, among other things, extraordinary eidetic and photographic powers. For to do such exact compositing, a mind would not only have to be able to form a distinct image of, say, one face, but also be able to lift it on to another image it had formed of a face, and then fit the two together while reducing the density of each. Of course, it might seem incredible (particularly to weak imagers) that there could be minds even approaching those envisioned by Galton, yet there is strong empirical evidence that there have been such minds.²

Probably the most searching contribution to the subject was by Edward Titchener (1909, pp. 14-19, 211-14), who comments on Fraser, but is particularly illuminating in his sympathetic interpretation of Locke and Huxley on general images.

The Typical Mind Fallacy

This brings me to the wider implications of Galton's discoveries adverted to by James: that the variations in imagery powers shows that there are basic differences in the way that human beings think, and hence that the idea of typical human thinking or typical human mind is a fiction. Following James, I have elsewhere described this as the Typical Mind Fallacy—or TMF for short.³ Put in another way there is no uniformity in our thinking and hence no uniform or typical human mind. As Galton put it in his *Inquiries*:

It will be seen how greatly metaphysicians and psychologists err, who assume their own mental operations, instincts, and axioms to be identical with those of the rest of mankind . . . The differences between men are profound, and we can only be saved from living in blind unconsciousness of our own mental peculiarities by the habit of informing ourselves as well as we can of those of others. (p. 32)

The TMF, however, is seductive and insidious, like a dream we are struggling to wake up from which then morphs into another dream about trying to wake up. It is hard for the philosopher not to see others as being essentially like himself. One way that I can underline this is by going to James, who, along with Galton, was one of the first to recognize the TMF and its importance. And yet James himself falls into it, I believe, in his criticism of Berkeley and Hume's empiricist account of thinking, what might be described as the necklace theory of images. As we have seen, Hume in particular held that *all* human thinking comes in trains of particular images. And here James was right to criticize Hume, for to say that everyone thinks this way is to commit the TMF, as is patently clear from Herschel and Charcot's client. But then to go on to maintain, as James also does (vol. 1, pp. 244-5, 254-5), that no-one can think that way, that also commits the TMF—although in the other direction; for, as I have observed above, there is strong evidence that some people—for example, Temple Grandin and at least two or three of my past students—do think in a Humean way.

PCg for Philosophers

It is here, then, around the TMF, that there is likely to be the most work for PCg for philosophers. Thus when a philosophical debate has reached a deadlock situation, or when philosophers find themselves repeating the same assertions and mounting the same arguments again and again, and to no apparent purpose, then something else should be tried. I would say it is time to bring in the PCrs for these philosophers (or for the philosophers to withdraw from each other and use PCg directly on themselves). In short, philosophers should go for PCg in the way that some husbands and wives eventually and reluctantly decide to go for marriage counseling—when they no longer seem to have any common ground, when using words and arguments no longer seems useful.

But as I see it, neither opponent should use the counseling method within philosophy.⁴ So Locke should not say to Berkeley: You are wrong about abstract general ideas. The reason why you disbelieve in general ideas is because your strong photographic imaging incapacitates you from having general images. The idea is that going to a marriage counsellor or PCr is not for the purpose of deciding who is right or wrong, but easing the conflict and bringing out the hidden sources of conflict, which (we suspect) lie in the minds rather than the theories of the disputants. So here the PCr is not looking at the truth of theories. That is not his province. In the matter of rightness or truth, the philosopher per se should decide. He says: you ought to hold x because it follows from y. The work of the PCr is more descriptive: he says to Locke: this is the way your mind works and to Berkeley: that is way your mind works. So the domain of the PCr is different from that of philosophy per se, although the subject matter is the same. Hence in order to be able to deal with philo-

sophical disputes the PCr needs to know the data of philosophy, just as the marriage counsellor needs to know about the ins and outs of marriage- about jealousy, about how the children of an earlier marriage might impact on the present marriage, and so on.

So the PCr brings to light relevant descriptive differences between the disputing parties. That sounds easy, but it is more difficult than it sounds, because the differences can be so basic. Hence their identification requires what I have elsewhere described as philosophical empathy (Berman, 1997, esp. pp. 49-50), where, for example, I (as a weak or non-imager) try to understand how Berkeley's or Hume's thinking in certain areas could be done entirely in the medium of images. A lot of work might need to be done here as is clear from our parallel case of marriage counseling.

But it would be nice to think that this could be the means for getting to the truth of the matter, that finally the disputants could agree as a result of the new situation brought about by PCg. But this might not be possible; hence the disputing parties might have to separate or agree to disagree and go their separate ways.

Here we need to recall Herschel's painfully won empathetic insight whereby he came to accept mental images. What is important to realize is that Herschel could have held out, labelling any alleged rejection of his position as committing the genetic fallacy or the fallacy ad hominem. Logically he is in a powerful position. I don't think there is any way that you could prove to him philosophically that images exist. And this is the way I read Gilbert Ryle's famous or infamous rejection of mental images in chap. VIII of *The Concept of Mind*. We can admire Ryle's defence of his position as a tour de force of philosophical ingenuity. But, as we know, by positioning himself behind the barricade of linguistic analysis and argument, he was actually preventing himself from seeing the truth that some minds can form mental images. He was also adding another example to what is sometimes called the scandal of philosophy, the intractable disputes that, unlike science, populate our discipline. Not more argument, but a change in attitude or empathetic stretching assisted by PCg, is required.

In this respect the work of the PCr, as I understand him, is like that of the depth psychologist. Both are different from most other practitioners, such as dentists, who can treat their patients without ever having made their particular minds the object of a similar study. Here the PCr seems close to Socrates's concern to know himself. For the PCr must be aware of his own cognitive capacities, if he is going to help others to understand theirs. I have focussed on imaging in this essay, because it is probably the clearest area in which human minds differ in ways that are philosophical significant. But though important, it is only one basic element in human thinking. Images, I would say, are conscious objects, but thinking or some thinking can also take the form of mental acts, which would provide another area for doing PCg with philosophers.⁵

Notes

1. On Locke, Berkeley and Hume on images, see Tye, esp. pp. 5-10, and Fraser, pp. 233-47; on Berkeley on ideas and images, see Berman, 2005, pp. 9-15.

2. For recent empirical evidence, see Stromeyer and Pstotka, who describe the case of a Yale art teacher who could form photographic images of two partial stereograms and them, amazingly, composite them, thereby discovering the hidden picture.

3. See Berman, 2005, Introduction, pp. 11-14, from which some of the material in this section and also that in sections 6 and 7 above has been drawn.

4. Although something like it could be used in philosophy if idealism could be shown to be true, which I believe it is. But that lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

5. I am grateful to Prof. William Lyons for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this essay.

Abbreviations

PCg = Philosophical Counseling

PCr = Philosophical Counsellor

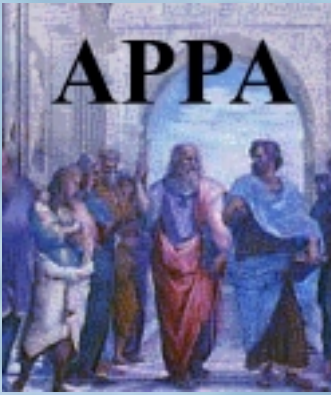
TMF = Typical Mind Fallacy

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PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Journal of the APPA

Volume 3 Number 2 July 2008

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