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Centred worlds, personal identity and imagination

Andrea Sauchelli ⬤

Department of Philosophy, Castle Peak Road,
Tuen Mun (NT), Lingnan University,
Hong Kong

Correspondence
Andrea Sauchelli, Department of Philosophy
HSH213, Castle Peak Road, Tuen Mun (NT),
Lingnan University, Hong Kong.
Email: andreasauchelli@ln.edu.hk

Abstract

The *Centred View* offers an account of the connection between imagination and possibility that combines the centred world framework with some allegedly appealing intuitions regarding our persistence over time. In particular, Dilip Ninan suggests that the *Centred View* has the theoretical advantage of respecting our intuitions about cases of personal identity in certain imaginative scenarios while also being compatible with physicalism. Unfortunately, the *Centred View* faces a series of serious objections and should ultimately be rejected.

KEYWORDS

centred worlds, imagination, personal identity, possibility

Some philosophers believe that intuitions about what can be imagined "from the inside"—"from a first-person perspective"—have an epistemological authority superior to that of intuitions about what can be imagined "from the outside"—"from a third-person perspective". For example, it has been argued that, at least with respect to thought experiments involving the persistence of persons, imagining from the inside bears an epistemological authority that is stronger than that deriving from intuitions regarding what can be imagined from the outside.

What is a first-person perspective? On a preliminary understanding of this notion, we can say that, along with Lynne Rudder Baker, a first-person perspective is:

1. A perspective "because it is a view on reality from a particular orientation" (Baker, 2013: 128);
2. First personal "because the orientation is from the subject's point of view" (Baker, 2013: 128).

Others (e.g., Shoemaker 1994/1996; Williams, 1978) characterise this perspective as "the point of view of consciousness", that is, the point of view of conscious experience. Combining these two ideas, we can say that a first-person perspective is a conscious or experiential view on reality from the particular orientation of a subject. This point of view can be contrasted with a third-person perspective on the world (Eilan, 1995; Nagel, 1983, 1986). Applied to the case of imagination, we can distinguish, on one hand, imaginative projects in which a subject imagines experiencing and identifies with at least one imagined experiencing individual ("imagining from the inside" or "from a first-person perspective") and, on the other hand, imaginative projects

that do not involve an identification of the subject with the any specific imagined individual capable of experiencing ("imagining from the outside" or "from a third-person perspective").[1] Projects of the first kind typically deploy personal pronouns such as "I" or "you", whereas the content of the latter are usually described by using at most third-person pronouns or proper names.

On the supposition that, in general, imaginability is a guide to possibility, some philosophers also hold that imagining from the inside is a better guide than imagining from the outside—at least in the sense that in case of conflicting intuitions deriving from what imaginable from these perspectives, we should deem as more justified what imagining from the inside tells us is possible.[2] So, if first-person imaginative projects differ from those of the third-person variety in that the former, but not the latter, tell us that we can imagine being anybody else *independently of which features this other individual may have*, we should regard intuitions deriving from first-person imaginings as epistemically more authoritative. One consequence is that, for example, if I could have been anybody else independently of any psychological or physical features this other individual may have, then, after all, I do not have any substantial characterising essential property. This conclusion seems dangerously close to an endorsement of the claim that we are essentially pure featureless Cartesian Egos with a perspective, a perspective that itself does not have any characterising feature. In turn, this implies that physical and psychological facts, after all, do not entirely determine the identity of persons or selves.

Now, one recent attempt to provide some solid ground for the belief that imagining from the inside justifiably has this special role in the evaluation of theories of personal identity is Dilip Ninan's *Centred View* (CV).[3] In particular, Ninan argues that his version of the centred worlds framework of *de se* attitudes can accommodate one alleged important asymmetry in the evaluation of case studies involving personal identity without thereby violating physicalism—such a violation being one apparent consequence of accepting the epistemological authority of imagining from the inside.

In this paper, I discuss the relationship between imagination and personal identity by focusing on Ninan's view. More specifically, in the first section, I make more precise the kind of asymmetry between intuitions coming from different kinds of imaginative projects that is supposed to motivate the CV, introduce the CV in more detail, explain its alleged theoretical advantages and further clarify some of its main claims. The second section is divided into three parts, each dealing with different kinds of criticisms: (2.1) contains criticisms of the intuitions motivating the CV, whereas in (2.2), I argue against its adequacy as a theory of imaginative content, and in (2.3) I criticise some of the metaphysical consequences of accepting the CV.[4]

1 | THE CENTRED VIEW AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

The following thesis can be used to capture what constitutes the asymmetry between intuitions regarding different kinds of imaginative projects:

> **Asymmetrical Evaluations**. There can be imaginative scenarios of the kind discussed in the literature on personal identity (e.g., fission scenarios) in which we are justified in varying our intuitions about the persistence over time of the persons

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[1] The specific features of these two forms of imagining will be further discussed and slightly amended in section 1.1.

[2] See Gendler & Hawthorne (2002) and Kung (2010), (2016) on the connection between imagination and possibility.

[3] Ninan (2009, 2013, 2016) distinguishes the project of providing the identity conditions of *persons* from the project of providing *our* identity conditions. See Olson (2007) and Sauchelli (2018: 1–14) for discussion. In this paper, I will assume person essentialism, the view that we are essentially persons.

[4] I think that each line of criticism is individually sufficient to prove that the CV should be rejected; however, I regard the objections in (2.1) as the strongest, followed by those in (2.3). The objections in (2.2) are sufficiently strong but apply to a variety of other coarse-grained accounts of content as well.

involved depending on which perspective—internal or external—is adopted in imagining them, even when they describe situations *that are equivalent in certain relevant respects.*[5] In addition, it may also be justifiable *within the same scenario* to make different evaluations of the persistence of the relevant entities when this scenario is imagined from the inside, as if it were subjectively experienced. That is, imagining from the inside may justify alternative and apparently contrasting intuitions of the same scenario with respect to the persistence and identity of the relevant entities.[6]

According to this thesis, it may be justifiable to make, from within the same perspective, different evaluations of those scenarios frequently discussed in the context of the metaphysics of personal identity (e.g., cases of fission). For example, Ninan agrees with Blackburn's intuition that when he imagines from the inside undergoing fission, he can imagine waking up as Lefty (the individual receiving the left hemisphere of his brain), as Righty (the individual receiving the right hemisphere of his brain), or that he does not wake up at all (Ninan, 2009: 430). This thesis may lead to unpalatable consequences, for instance, the rejection of physicalism and the acceptance of the possibility that hidden facts may determine our identity as persons or as what we are. These two claims (rejection of physicalism and the existence of hidden facts) are constitutive of what Ninan calls "the Simple View".[7]

Now, Ninan introduces the CV to avoid a slide into the abyss of souls and immaterial substances, while retaining the idea that there is something special about imagining ourselves from the inside. In particular, Ninan presents the CV as including:

(i) An account of the connection between imagining from the inside and possibility based on the centred worlds framework, and (ii) a generous ontology of persistence in the form of a four-dimensionalist account of persistence in terms of temporal parts.[8]

Ninan also claims that it may be possible to translate statements referring to temporal stages and four-dimensional objects into a terminology favourable to different general theories of persistence and time—a point I will not dispute in what follows. In the rest of the paper, I will focus on the account of imagining from the inside in terms of centred worlds.

One of the reasons that motivated David Lewis to introduce the centred-world framework is to solve the so-called problem of the essential indexicals.[9] In short, the idea is that, on an account of propositional attitudes (e.g., beliefs) based on propositions understood as sets of possible worlds, we cannot represent important fine-grained distinctions among attitudes involving ourselves that are required to explain the structure of some of our actions. In particular, we might know all there is to know about a world *impersonally* (e.g., we may know that, in the actual world, there is an individual dressed in a certain way carrying around a torn sack of sugar, etc.) but still be ignorant of something that would explain our eventual change of behaviour in coming to know it, for instance, knowledge of which among the individuals in our world we are (e.g., that *I* am the individual with the torn sack of sugar). This framework suggests that, in addition to having beliefs about how a world is, we also have beliefs concerning our *location* in or *perspective* on the world we think we live in, that is, we have self-locating beliefs. Whether the examples given by John Perry and Lewis really posit anything specifically problematic to other accounts of propositional attitudes is controversial.[10] Assuming that some of their

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[5]The "relevant respects" here are the physical and psychological continuity facts that psychological or physical theories of personal identity or our nature regard as grounding the numerical identity of a person or our identity over time. The theories that Ninan or Simon Blackburn have in mind include Shoemaker (1984) and, especially, Parfit (1984/1987).

[6]This idea seems to emerge from Blackburn (1997). See also Nagel (1983, 1986).

[7]See Olson (2012) and Sauchelli (2019) on ways of defining the simple view.

[8]See Hawley (2001) and Sider (2001) for four-dimensionalism and the ontology of temporal parts.

[9]See Lewis (1979/1983) and Perry (1977/1993, 1979/1993). For sympathetic views on the centred world framework, see Egan (2006), Feit (2008, 2013), Moss (2012), Ninan (2012, 2013), Recanati (2007, 2009). Works critical of the special status of *de se* attitudes or of the centred worlds approach include Davis (2017), Devitt (2013), Liao (2012) and Magidor (2015).

[10]See the criticisms in Devitt (2013) and Magidor (2015).

examples constitute a problem at least for a possible worlds analysis of propositional attitudes, centred worlds, which are pairs comprising a possible world *w* and a centre *i* (<*w*, *i*>), where *i* is part of *w*, would provide the theoretical resources to capture the finer-grained features of self-locating beliefs.[11] In turn, the CV employs the centred worlds framework to provide an account of the content of imagining from the inside. In particular, the CV holds that the content of an episode of imagining from the first-person perspective can be represented by sets of centred worlds.[12] Now, the content of our imaginings is never fully determined—my imagining being Dan Bilzerian playing poker in a casino leaves many details unspecified (e.g., the number of cards left on the gambling table next to mine). According to Ninan, we can represent this indeterminacy in the centred world framework by stating that the content of the imagining is a set of centred worlds, the set of all worlds compatible with what I imagine (e.g., all those centred worlds compatible with my imagining being Dan Bilzerian playing poker in Las Vegas). Let us further define *the notional subject* of an imaginative project as the subject that the thinker identifies herself with in the context of an imaginative project.[13] For example, when a notional subject is an appropriate centre for my first-person imaginative projects, we say that a notional subject is *accessible* for me. On this view, "I imagine being Dan Bilzerian playing poker in Las Vegas" is true iff the content of my imagining is a centred proposition that can discriminate among world-mates in which the centres are all Dan Bilzerian playing poker in Las Vegas, where Dan Bilzerian is the accessible notional subject for me.

What makes it the case that a notional subject in an imaginative project is properly accessible for me (or any other thinker)? Ninan does not say much about which criteria should apply to the relation of accessibility that is supposed to hold between me and the notional subject of an imaginative project. He suggests that perhaps a necessary condition for an individual to be accessible for me is that this individual has a perspective. However, Ninan does not seem to believe that specifying any other necessary or sufficient conditions on the accessibility relation is a pressing issue for his account—rather, he claims that the intuition that "I might have been someone else", where "someone else" ranges over literally anything with a perspective (any other entity with a perspective), is sufficient to prove that there may be a divergence between imagining from the outside and imagining from the inside. Ninan's reasoning seems to be that, when we imagine from the outside, we believe that further conditions in addition to just being a perspective should generally apply to the accessibility relation, for example, some sorts of psychological continuity. This difference generates the alleged asymmetry between kinds of imaginative projects that his account is supposed to explain. I discuss some problematic consequences for this idea in section 2.3.

The reasons for adopting the CV have to do with its alleged advantages, namely, (i) *contra* the Simple View, the CV is compatible with physicalism or, at least, with one formulation of physicalism in the form of the supervenience claim discussed below—also, the CV does not seem to posit hidden facts on which our persistence would depend (another alleged disadvantage of the Simple View), and (ii) *contra* Complex Views (e.g., psychological theories of personal identity relying on the notion of psychological continuity), the CV respects or at least seems to better account for the asymmetry intuitions discussed in the previous section.

How does the CV reconcile the asymmetry intuitions with physicalism without positing hidden persistence facts? First of all, Ninan suggests that **Supervenience** is one satisfying way of

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[11]The Lewisian version is generally understood as claiming that the centres are "instantaneous slice of persisting persons" (Liao, 2012: 304). Ninan claims that the centred worlds of the CV can be centred on "things that persist over time" (Ninan, 2009: 439). See Ninan (2013, 2016) for refinements of the approach.

[12]I am following Ninan (2009, 2012) here and inherit an ambiguity of his presentation of the centred worlds framework: sometimes he claims that an imaginative content *determines* a possible world proposition or a set of centred worlds, whereas in certain other passages, he suggests that a content *is* such a set.

[13]The term "notional subject" is taken from Velleman (1996/2006).

capturing *physicalism*, which he defines as "the view that everything supervenes on the physical" (Ninan, 2009: 426).

More specifically, Ninan defines **Supervenience** as the following claim:

> For all (x, x′) that belong to the set of "human persons", and for all possible worlds (w, w′) such that x exists in w and x′ in w′, and for all the pairs of stages <y, z > in w, <y′, z′ > in w′: if y is a stage of x in w, and y′ is a stage of x′ in w′, and y and z in w and y′ and z′ in w′ are the same with respect to continuity, then z is a stage of x in w iff z′ is a stage of x′ in w′ (Ninan, 2009: 428).[14]

This claim is supposed to capture the idea that if the relation R between y and z in w and the relation R' between z′ and x′ in w′ are the same with respect to the physical and psychological facts, then z is one stage of the same individual x in w iff z′ is a stage of the same individual x′ in w′.

Assume now a view of the connection between imagination and possibility to the effect that when (i) I imagine from the inside that P, or (ii) imagine from the inside φ-ing, I thereby have conclusive or sufficient evidence for believing, respectively, (i) that P is possible, or (ii) that it is possible for the notional subject of the imaginative project to φ. Under these presuppositions and assuming an understanding of modal claims in terms of the possible world framework, it follows that 1a–c provide conclusive evidence for 2a–c below:

1a I imagine from the inside undergoing fission and surviving as Lefty.
1b I imagine from the inside undergoing fission and surviving as Righty.
1c I imagine from the inside undergoing fission and failing to survive.

2a I could undergo fission and survive as Lefty.
2b I could undergo fission and survive as Righty.
2c I could undergo fission and fail to survive.

In terms of possible worlds, 2a–c can be stated as:

3a There is a possible world in which I undergo fission and survive as Lefty.
3b There is a possible world in which I undergo fission and survive as Righty.
3c There is a possible world in which I undergo fission and fail to survive.

Ninan then claims that if (3a) is true, then there is a possible world in which I exist such that: if y is pre-fission stage of me in w, and z is a post-fission stage of the individual with the left hemisphere in w, then z is a stage of me in w. If (3b) is true, then there is a w′ in which I exist such that: if y′ is a pre-fission stage of me in w′, and z′ is post-fission stage of the individual with the left hemisphere in w′, then z′ is not a stage of mine in w′. Since y and z in w and y′ and z′ in w′ are the same with respect to continuity, this provides us with a counterexample to **Supervenience**.

Now, the CV offers a different understanding of 1a–c:

4a There is a centred world <w, x> accessible from <actual world, me> such that x undergoes fission and survives with the left hemisphere in w.
4b There is a centred world <w, x> accessible from <actual world, me> such that x undergoes fission and survives with the right hemisphere in w.

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[14]I will assume that Ninan's is an adequate characterisation of physicalism, but see Stoljar (2010) for further discussion.

4c There is a centred world <w, x> accessible from <actual world, me> such that x undergoes fission and fails to survive in w.

In turn, 4a–c are compatible with **Supervenience** because, Ninan argues, they do not determine the features of the worlds at which I exist; rather, they only determine which centred worlds are accessible for me. On the CV, an imaginative project from the inside of the above kind would not determine any specific features of the relevant possible worlds but would rather determine (among other things) the possible location of the notional subject. Ninan claims that, on the CV, the three imaginative projects (1a–c) do not determine three possible worlds that are physically just alike but differ on my post-fission spatial location. Although the imaginative projects may describe three different possibilities *for me*, they do not thereby violate **Supervenience** by requiring that the contents of such projects imply that there are worlds in which identical relevant physical facts determine worlds that differ with respect to facts allegedly depending on such physical facts.

2 | FURTHER REFINEMENTS OF THE *CENTRED VIEW*

Ninan does not distinguish between different attitudes that can be associated with the intuitions motivating his account.[15] Following Magdalena Balcerak Jackson, we can distinguish at least three attitudes relevant to our discussion: (i) imagination, (ii) supposition, and (iii) conception.[16] More specifically, *imagining* a situation S (including imagining being someone else) in the sense under discussion here has a phenomenological aspect that need not be present when we *suppose* that S occurs. Consider these two cases: (a) I imagine having my left arm cut, and (b) I suppose that my left arm is cut. There is a sense in which the former, but not the latter, seems to require a form of experiential perspective-taking. In *imagining* the above scenario, I may visualise the amputation process or imagine experiencing the world without my left arm—that is, I do not merely entertain the idea that my arm has been amputated. Rather, an imaginative project of this kind seems to be more demanding than merely supposing that something is the case. On the other hand, when I evaluate a logical or mathematical reasoning and *suppose* that, for example, the thesis I want to refute is true (e.g., in the proof that the square root of 2 is irrational), I do not have to also make a cognitive effort of the kind previously described: when I make a supposition, I only put the relevant thought(s) before the mind for consideration—most likely with a specific purpose (e.g., to infer some of its consequences). There are other conceptual differences between imagining and supposing: For example, you may *vividly* imagine giving birth, but it does not seem correct to say that you may *vividly* suppose that you are giving birth. Besides, imagination may give rise to various versions of what is called imaginative resistance, whereas a corresponding "suppositional resistance" does not seem to refer to any observed phenomenon.[17] Supposing and imagining from the inside seem to be entirely different mental activities.

What about "conceiving"? Balcerak Jackson distinguishes imagination from conception, where the latter is the attitude that some philosophers claim to have in mind when they discuss the epistemic value of their thought experiments. For example, David Chalmers has individuated an attitude whereby we can "modally imagine" situations "beyond the scale of perception" or "situations that are unperceivable in principle" (e.g., the existence of an unperceivable being that leaves no traces on perception). In his words, "[o]ne modally imagines that P if one modally imagines a world that verifies P, or a situation that verifies P". Such an attitude may go beyond the alleged content of the imagery or mental image someone may properly associate with

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[15]See Ninan (2012) for another formal account of these attitudes which still does not draw the distinctions I refer to in the main text.
[16]Balcerak Jackson (2016). See also White (1990), Kind (2001, 2013), Currie and Ravenscroft (2002), and Van Leeuwen (2013, 2014).
[17]On imaginative resistance, see Gendler (2000, 2006).

the imaginative project P. Balcerak Jackson implements these ideas into her account and maintains that imagining, in her sense, is primarily an exercise in phenomenal or experiential perspective-taking, whereas conceiving, akin to "modal imagining", primarily involves an exercise in ideal rational perspective-taking. She further adds that the rational perspective-taking that characterises conceiving is ideal because it involves an attempt to "adopt the perspective of a subject whose use of [her rational capacities] is infallible and unimpaired by limitations of memory, attention, and so on […]".[18]

Judging from this characterisation, "conception" is not what Ninan and others have in mind when they give examples of "imagining from the inside". Rather, they seem to have in mind Balcerak Jackson's sense of imagining—and this is how I will understand *imagining from the inside* in what follows.

Assuming the previous distinctions, however, may complicate the way "imagining from the outside" should be defined. In fact, if imagining involves more than merely conceiving, we may question whether instances of what we previously called "imagining from the outside" should always count as cases of imagining involving a phenomenal component, that is, as cases of imagination as defined in this section. I think that the best answer to this problem is to say that we can retain the expression "imagining from the outside'" and understand it as a term that, depending on the situation, can refer to imagining or conceiving (at least with regard to imaginative projects involving personal identity) as defined in this section. One reason is that it seems possible to engage in imaginative projects having a phenomenal aspect that are not from a first-person perspective: thought experiments in which the imagined content is imagined from a point of view that is not identical with that of any imagined individual. Also, some thought experiments in the literature on personal identity may also be properly regarded as merely exercises in ideal perspective-taking (e.g., some presentations of the spectrum argument or other thought experiments that use third-person pronouns).[19] In what follows, I will understand "imagining from the outside" as referring to both mental activities (imagining and conceiving, as defined in this section).

2.1 | Objections to the CV: The restricted diet problem

One problem of the CV is that it relies almost exclusively on only one kind of intuition related to imaginative projects involving personal identity scenarios (*the restricted diet problem*). However, there are several other intuitions that conflict with the CV-motivating intuition, that is, the intuition that, *contra* imaginative projects from the outside, we can imagine from the inside being anybody else independently of the physical and psychological features of the notional subject. Now, it seems that the contrasting intuitions are equally plausible if not stronger. For instance, suppose that we are discussing the diachronic conditions of identity of a person, and that we assume a Lockean definition of "person". On this definition, a person is at least a thinking entity, aware of its past, capable of thinking of itself as extended in time and also as being a moral agent or, at least, as having moral status. Assume that we are persons. The CV-motivating intuition seems to imply that we would be justified in believing that our identity *as persons* does not depend on psychological or physical continuity when we imagine from the inside situations involving our persistence. After all, if "we can imagine being anybody else" implies that we could have been anybody else—and Ninan himself frequently discusses these two claims as if they were interchangeable—our psychological or physical features and continuity are not essential to us. In fact, on the CV, *I* could exist without any of my current physical or psychological features or any of the derived psychological chains of my current psychological

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[18]Balcerak Jackson (2016: 56). The quotations from Chalmers are from Balcerak Jackson (2016: 55).
[19]Examples of both kinds are contained in Williams (1970).

connections. On the plausible supposition (suppo by empirical data) that our intuitions are largely guided by psychological facts (e.g., character traits), however, our intuitions about first-person imaginative projects suggest that contrary to the CV-motivating intuition, in judging whether we will wake up as, for example, Lefty or Righty, we are influenced also by the degree of psychological similarity between us and the fission products. For instance, if Lefty inherits all of my character traits, most of my memories and most of my physical features, whereas Righty inherits only a small part of my brain, has the body of a sex and age I do not identify myself with and so on, I have the strong intuition that, after fission, I would and could only be Lefty (if at all). The general point here is that, *even from the inside*, people are not neutral in evaluating their psychological connections with future individuals when it comes to their intuitions regarding their persistence through time.[20] The previous and many other examples motivating, for example, narrative and practical theories of personal identity also conflict with the CV-motivating intuition and support my claim here.[21]

Not only do we not seem to be neutral with respect to the accessibility relation, but some notional subjects are not even regarded as accessible for us. On the supposition that the extension of the accessibility relation at issue is restricted only by the property of having a perspective, the CV seems to imply that I can imagine being a dolphin, a turtle, or even the most heinous arsonist, paedophile murderer on Earth. Now, can you imagine—and not just suppose or conceive—having or experiencing from the perspective of an animal or of a murderous paedophile? I think that, regarding the accessibility to the perspective of some animals with cognitive systems different from ours, I do not even know how to begin such an imaginative project—and I think I am not the only one in this regard. If Thomas Nagel is right, we are not in the position of knowing what it is like to be a bat and thus engage in first-person imaginative projects in which the notional subject is, for example, a bat.[22]

Similarly, regarding the accessibility to the arsonist murderous paedophile's perspective, I do not know how and do not want to begin to assume such a perspective in experiential imagining. I also think that (most) people would experience at least "imaginative resistance" in pursuing this imaginative project. One of the concluding remarks of Nina Strohminger and Shaun Nichols' empirical study of the principles guiding the intuitions of persistence in scenarios of personal identity is this: "[t]he self is not so much the sum of cognitive faculties as it is an expression of moral sensibility; remove its foothold on that world, and watch the person disappear with it" (Strohminger & Nichols, 2014: 169). This point seems to better represent our intuitions about experiential imaginative projects than the CV-motivating intuition. If Ninan replies that the sense of imagining implied here is too demanding and that his view does presuppose such a thick understanding of imagining, we can reply following Rae Langton's and Marie Guillot's discussion of *de se* imagining: on a non-phenomenal, non-experiential understanding of imagining that involves merely changes in perspectives, "what is left out, it seems, is a self in 'self-ascription'—a self with a conscious perspective on the world, as a perceiver and agent" (Guillot, 2013: 1811; Langton, 2019: 96). The point is that a sort of imagining devoid of the experiential aspect and merely determining changes of perspective is too thin to count as involving the kind of self or person we take ourselves to be.

In conclusion, the plausibility of the CV-motivating intuition has been at best overstated and more likely given an unmerited epistemic weight when compared to a whole set of other contrasting intuitions. Once these other intuitions are properly taken into account, and a plausible sense of "imagining" spelled out, it does not seem to be true that any other perspective is

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[20]See Shoemaker and Tobia (2022) for a recent survey of the literature on empirical studies on our intuitions about persistence and Molouki and Bartels (2017) for evidence in support of my general claim in the main text.

[21]Relevant works include Lindemann (2014), Mackenzie (2008), Schechtman (1996) and Velleman (1996/2006).

[22]Nagel (1974). Guillot (2013) and Langton (2019) are also relevant here, although they understand "imagining" in a sense different from mine.

imaginatively accessible to us or that we are neutral with respect to the accessibility relation in imagining from the inside. One key theoretical principle of the CV is thus wrong.

2.2 | Inadequacy of the CV and the content of imagining

In this section, I will argue against the adequacy of the CV *qua* theory of imaginative content. Consider an imaginative project involving imagining being Dan Bilzerian. Such a project usually does not settle many (or most) details (e.g., whether the white T-shirt I am wearing in the casino in Las Vegas was bought on a Friday or a Tuesday). In short, our imaginative projects are, in a sense, not maximally specific. Now, although there are many different accounts of what a possible world is, for example, a property of our world—a way in which our world could have been—or a mereologically sum maximally closed under a spatio-temporal relation, possible worlds are regarded as being complete and maximal.[23] One (weak) formulation of this idea is that, for any P regarding matters of fact, P is either true or false at w. Centred worlds contain worlds and therefore, on the CV, if the content of your imagining from the inside being Dan Bilzerian were to be represented simply with one centred world, it would follow that, after all, what you are imagining is maximally specific. Ninan claims that the lack of specificity in our imagining can be "captured" in the centred world framework by saying that the content of our imagining is a set of centred worlds, namely, the set of such worlds compatible with what I imagine.

The first objection against this account regards the specification of the worlds that are to be included in the set of worlds that determine the content of our imagining.[24] In particular, we may ask: What makes it the case that, for example, when I imagine being Zhang Jiyi acting in *2046*, I would thereby also be imagining—it is part of the content of my imagining—that the Manchu once ruled over China? That the Manchu ruled over China is part of the content of my imagining is due to the fact that, on the CV, part of the content of imagining is a possible world. Since possible worlds are regarded as being complete and maximal, it is always settled at each possible world whether the Manchu once ruled China (and they did). It follows that, on the CV, your imagining from the inside being Zhang Jiyi acting in *2046* is an attitude having as its content also that the Manchu once ruled over China—after all, this fact is compatible with Zhang Jiyi's acting in *2046*. However, such a coarse-grained account of content fares poorly as an account of imaginative content. In fact, on the face of it, I do not seem to entertain such a thought, not even on reflection, when I imagine being Zhang Jiyi.

Another related problem of this account becomes more evident if we ask the following question: When is P true in a specific imaginative project from the inside (IP) having z as a centre? According to the CV, the answer is that P is true in IP iff P is true in all or some sets S ($<w_i$, $z>$). How is the membership condition for S specified—that is, what conditions should a centred world satisfy to belong to S? Ninan holds that S is the set of centred worlds compatible with what the subject imagines. So, on this view, a centred world (cw) belongs to S iff everything true in IP is true in cw. However, this would mean that P is true in IP iff P is true in every cw in which everything true in IP is true. This account is viciously circular—notice that "being true in IP" figures in both sides of the co-implication.[25] So, the CV cannot provide a non-circular account of the content of our imaginings from the inside, where this explanatory project is intended as involving at least an account of what is true in an imaginative project from the inside. In particular, for us to know what the content of an imagining is according to the CV, we should already know what the content of what an imagining is. At best, the CV is parasitic, at worst, theoretically superfluous (*the problem of circularity*).

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[23]See Divers (2002) for an excellent survey.
[24]Among the many relevant works, see King (2007: 2–3).
[25]Subsequent elaborations of the centred framework (e.g., the multicentred framework in Ninan, 2013) all seem to have this problem.

2.3 | The metaphysics of the CV

The CV is implausible also because of its idiosyncratic treatment of cases that are relevantly similar (*the problem of idiosyncrasy*).[26] For example, suppose that my physical duplicate and I have just used the teletransportation device described in Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons*, Part III. Suppose that I and my replica each undergo a non-symmetric fission, that is, in both fissions, I and my twin are significantly more psychologically connected to our respective 'Lefties'. On the CV, imagining from the inside differs from imagining from the outside—and such imaginings provide, if at all, justifications for different kinds of modal and counterfactual claims. On Ninan's view, it may be the case that it is possible-*for-me* that I could have been Righty, but my identical replica could not-*for-me*. Or, consider the case in which I imagine from the inside being my replica. Given the special epistemic status of this imaginative project, when I imagine from the inside being my replica, I am justified in claiming that it is possible-for-me that I could have been my replica but, at the same time, not the other way around. Something seems to have gone terribly wrong here as it is at best unclear what kind of possibility is determined by imagining from the inside as understood by the CV.

Ninan claims that the CV offers an interesting account of the connection between imagination and possibility *only if* "centred imaginings" and "non-centred imaginings" provide guides to two distinct types of possibility.[27] Now, what are these two distinct modal kinds? In discussions about personal identity, philosophers are generally concerned with at least metaphysical and sometimes biological possibilities—and these are likely to be the sorts of possibility of which non-centred imagining is taken to be a guide. On the other hand, centred imaginings, as understood by the CV, seem to be a guide to a subjective or private form of possibility. This modal kind can hardly be understood as biological. Unless the kind of possibility Ninan has in mind is epistemic, and his discussion does not warrant this conclusion, he might have in mind some kind of private or relativistic metaphysical possibility. I admit that I have little understanding of this kind of metaphysical modality that would make the CV interesting. Certainly metaphysics (and modalities) can be understood in many different ways, but when intended as a discipline that deals with the "ultimate nature of reality", this fairly popular characterisation of this discipline may not be compatible with the sort of metaphysical possibility that is required to make the CV interesting.[28] At the very least, this consequence should count as a theoretical cost of the CV. Besides, insofar as the CV is justified also because of its conservativeness with respect to a "traditional" metaphysical theory spelled out in a "traditional" form (i.e., physicalism as understood by Ninan), it is methodologically suspicious that at the same time it implies a radical revision to metaphysics as a whole. We may press this point and suggest that the metaphysical commitments required to make the CV interesting may be in contrast with one of its initial motivating attractions—that is, its compatibility with physicalism. At this point, the supporter of the CV would have to show that their revisionary metaphysics can be compatible with physicalism or at least with a plausible version of it. Since I have little grasp of the kind of metaphysical modality the supporter of the CV seems to be committed to, I am unable to discuss this specific point any further.

The problem of the connection between the private metaphysics or modality and the kind of metaphysics or modality generally discussed in the current literature may raise another question: Why would the criteria of accessibility to be employed in imagining from the inside not be the same as the criteria of accessibility to be employed in imagining from the outside? If the criterion of accessibility deployed in imagining from the inside is X and we establish that such a criterion is correct for evaluating thought experiments concerning personal identity, it seems

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[26]This kind of worry was first raised by Dan Waxman in conversation.

[27]Ninan (2009: 447). I understand Ninan's claim as meaning that for his account to be interesting, the two imaginings should be a guide to different kinds of modalities as well.

[28]See Lowe (2002) for a standard account of metaphysical projects.

rational to conclude that we should use X also to evaluate cases of imagining from the outside. We may also argue that our intuitions and related evaluations of what is possible given certain imaginative projects should be compatible with the application of criterion X. However, if that is the case, the differences between these educated intuitions about different kinds of imaginative projects may ultimately disappear. Still, the CV seems to require that the criteria of accessibility employed in imaginings from the inside should not be criteria of accessibility between individuals employed in imaginings from the outside—otherwise the CV would not be "interesting" (in Ninan's sense). As mentioned before, the sort of imagination from the inside relevant to the CV is compatible with, and seems to provide support for, the idea that you may imagine being, for example, Joseph Stalin or Charles Manson or some other despicable individual of your choice. If you can imagine being Stalin, then it is possible-for-you to be the same person as, say, Stalin. This possibility-for-you is not excluded because, as Ninan suggests, the plausibility of the CV-motivating intuition "does not require one to hold that there are physical differences between the three possibilities: it seems that the three situations could be physically just alike, differing only on the issue of what happens to me after fission" (Ninan, 2009: 454). The only relevant feature is, at best, having a perspective. Now, why the continuity of this latter feature should not count itself as a form of psychological continuity is a mystery—at least if having a perspective is more than being a location. If we deny that having a perspective is more than having or being a location, we may even have to admit that I could have been a rock: after all, rocks also have a location. However, many philosophers have suggested that, when the concept of a person is (properly) understood as being related to, say, moral responsibility, it is simply implausible to state that, prima facie, I can be a person that is responsible for the actions of an individual that has no or only some trivial psychological connections with me or, even worse, that is a rock. To salvage the CV from these problems, Ninan may have to impose some plausible constraints on the accessibility relation. In fairness, he gestures towards some of these constraints; for instance, he claims that "there is a possible world in which my sister is a schoolteacher, there are no possible worlds in which Barack Obama is a nonhuman robot". Presumably, the idea is that someone's job is not essential to her existence, whereas belonging to a natural or biological kind is. Other constraints may have to be imposed by what constitutes "having a perspective" or "having a human perspective".[29] For example, some have argued that having a human perspective requires some minimal form of embodiment. However, the problem we started with would come back: it is not clear why such conditions and constraints could not also be applied to restrict the accessibility relation employed in imagining from the outside. The bad news from the CV is that, if the same criteria of accessibility are applied in evaluating imaginative projects from the inside and the outside, such an application would presumably generate unwanted symmetric evaluations of imaginative projects of these two different kinds. The further consequence of this symmetry is again that the CV would not offer an interesting account of the connection between imagination and possibility because "centred imaginings" and "non-centred imaginings" may not provide guides to two distinct types of possibility since the evaluations of these different imaginative projects would be the same. If this reasoning is correct, it may turn out that the theoretical apparatus constituting the CV is not required since imagining from the inside and from the outside would turn out to satisfy the same requirements after all.

3 | CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that the CV is implausible for several reasons:

1. it places an unmerited weight on only one kind of intuitions guiding our theorising about personal identity,

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[29]See Shoemaker (1986/1996, 1994/1996), Eilan (1995), Chen (2008), Baker (2013).

2. it provides a wrong account of our imaginings, and

3. it has a series of bizarre consequences. More specifically, the CV requires the postulation of a highly revisionary (and implausible) metaphysics to be interesting or, after all, its theoretical machinery may not be required.

In light of all these problems and given that its motivating intuitions do not seem to be as widely shared as Ninan claims, the CV does not seem to offer an appealing account of the connection between imagination and the metaphysics of personal identity.

ORCID

Andrea Sauchelli https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7665-8875

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