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REVISTA DE LIBROS/BOOK REVIEWS

Imagination and the Imaginary, by KATHLEEN LENNON, ROUTLEDGE: ABINGDON 2015, pp.viii + 145.

The imaginary, as discussed in Kathleen Lennon's wide-ranging and stimulating book, is 'the shape or form in terms of which we experience the world and ourselves; a gestalt which carries significance, affect and normative force' [p. 73]. The imagination is the mental capacity which imposes such shapes and forms on the experienced world. And an image is a particular shape or form, ordering the world as we grasp it. The imaginary is thus not opposed to the real, but rather to that (if anything) in perception which is not a matter of an order we impose. And the imagination does not contrast with perception, but is rather a capacity on which much of perception depends.

Lennon uses this framework to explore a wide range of phenomena. The ordering imagination is at the heart of the 'pregnancy' which Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and many other phenomenologists find in all perception. When I see an opaque object, such as a cube, only some of its facets are strictly visible. Nonetheless, I may well see it as cubic, as bearing some shape that goes beyond what is directly given. The ordering imagination is also at work in more socially complex interactions. When confronted with a drag artist, I may experience the person before me as male, and yet as performing femininity. Each of these 'shapes' or 'images' through which I make sense of what I am presented with is laden with resonances, thoughts, expectations and pictures, of how men are and behave, and of what femininity involves. Despite the considerable difference in affective and normative freight these two examples bring, both are instances of the imagination at work in ordering the world. Each involves at least one 'image': be it of cubicness, maleness or performed femininity.

Despite the kinship in overall structure she finds between these cases, Lennon is also interested in the differences between them. Indeed, the book works its way from our ordering the world in straightforward terms such as shape and colour to our ordering it via more nuanced social and political 'images', the content and connotations of which may be in key part opaque to us.

Since the book's method is primarily phenomenological [p. 138], the first chapter sets the scene by introducing, not only the basic idea of the imaginary, but also the distinction between the world as we experience it (and which Phenomenology seeks to describe) and the 'disenchanted' world described by science. Chapter two then provides the foundations of Lennon's theory, by drawing on Kant's discussion of how imagination sustains perception. From the first *Cri-*

tique, Lennon takes the distinction between imagination in its 'productive' and 'reproductive' form. Both must be involved in constituting perception, if, as Kant insisted, sensory input is to be brought under concepts. Otherwise, sensory 'intuition' is too amorphous to be subsumed under the rules that constitute the concepts understanding imposes. This account is then both expanded and revised by appeal to the *Critique of Judgement*. The expansion reinforces the case for imagination's involvement in perception. How do we know when to apply a given rule? The regress that threatens if we appeal to a further rule at a higher-order can be avoided by granting a role to imagination. It is the 'art' by which we recognise the applicability of a concept/rule to a given case. So expanded, the picture of the first *Critique* is then revised. We should reject the earlier Kant's insistence that, wherever there is perception, the understanding is at work.

Imagination often subserves conceptual ordering, but, as Merleau-Ponty saw, it can also structure the perceived world independently of the application of concepts. Such a pre-conceptual order need not be a mere imposition, the product of a single idiosyncratic consciousness. The point of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement is to make space for a form of soft objectivity, in which the rightness of an ordering amounts to the fact that others too (ought to) recognise it as appropriate. While Kant considered only judgements of beauty (and the sublime) as exhibiting this soft objectivity, Lennon takes it as the paradigm for correctness in all imaginaries, i.e. in every ordering the imagination provides.

The third chapter opens a dialogue between two authors Lennon reads as inheritors of the Kantian tradition – Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. That dialogue runs through much of the rest of the book. Both authors offer insightful descriptions of the phenomenology of perceiving the world. They differ over what underlies that phenomenology. For Sartre, imagining and perceiving are fundamentally opposed; for Merleau-Ponty, a good deal of what perception offers us is down to the operations of the imagination. (Lennon acknowledges that in his earlier writings Merleau-Ponty does not frame things in these terms; but argues that these writings are continuous with later work in which he does.) Given his acceptance of the richness of the world we apparently perceive, Sartre must divide that terrain into that which is genuinely put before us by perception and that which has its source in the fundamentally different attitude of imagining. Imagination spontaneously posits its objects, which are given to us as 'nothing', as irreal. Nonetheless, we may cease to recognize the imagination's contributions for what they are, in the rich warp and weft of lived existence, coming to treat them as if they, too, were elements in the world.

A clear example of this conflict arises in the realm of the 'affective texture' of the experienced world, the topic of chapter four. The world of perception contains far more than shapes and colours. Prominent among its other aspects is the affective character of objects, people and events – e.g. their character as disgusting, pitiful, upsetting or exciting. For Sartre, these are prime instances of imagined features which we read back into the world, losing sight of their origins in the spontaneity of imagination and taking them instead to exhibit the receptivity

of perception. Finding no justification for this ontological divide in the phenomenology, Lennon adopts Merleau-Ponty's alternative account. On that view, the affective is just another element in the perceived world. It, like other elements of that world, is revealed to us in orderings that implicitly involve our own bodies. The shape of the cube is found in the call it makes to us to respond to it in certain ways by moving around to explore it with our eyes or hands. Similarly, the pitifulness of someone in distress is found in the call he makes on us to respond affectively, a response that is both a matter of impact on our body (e.g. shock) and a matter of the expressive or purposive action his condition renders appropriate.

The imaginary also has an important social dimension, one that goes well beyond its role in establishing the affective texture of one-on-one interactions. Chapters five and six consider various interconnections between social forces and the ordering imagination. First, many of the images through which we find order in our world are themselves social: they order it in social terms. Taking Cornelius Castoriadis as her guide and interlocutor, Lennon explores how far socially constructed imaginaries depend on, and how far they determine, the imaginaries deployed by individual subjects. Such social imaginaries, she suggests, are both 'instituted and instituting': they are our inheritance, given to us as that through which the world should be understood; but also ours to change, given as open to revision and replacement. Second, ordering the social world in certain ways is partly constitutive of certain aspects of society: a shared set of 'imaginary saliences' is what constitutes some social groups, and many social institutions are suggested, perhaps made to seem necessary, by the orderings our social imaginaries impose on the social realm. Third, these orderings are not only outward-facing: they do not merely constitute others' sense of who we are, but are also integral to our sense of ourselves (the focus of chapter six). And often they are oppressive: in conflict with our ambitions for ourselves, limiting others' willingness to take our aspirations seriously or, even worse, cramping our own sense of who we can be. (Think, for instance, of some of the problematic baggage surrounding the categories *disabled*, *woman*, *Jewish*, or *black*.) Thus it is as well that, fourth, all this is in some sense up for grabs. Social imaginaries are malleable. If such ordering images can not only change, but be changed, then we should seek to change them for the better.

But what does 'better' mean here? Not simply *truer to how things are*, since the Kantianism that underlies Lennon's entire project precisely construes imaginaries as orderings imposed on material that is not independently structured in those ways. Of course, the fact that ordering imaginaries are not to be measured against the independent presence of that very order does not show that they are not constrained by the nature of independent reality at all. In the seventh and final chapter, Lennon gives examples of such constraints, exploring how various social imaginaries (such as *woman*) might be tied to other orderings (such as those of biological sex) sufficiently tightly as to make it in effect impossible for someone to be imagined as a woman if that person has a male body. (She also considers Judith Butler's view that even the biological categories are constructed, and so open to reconstruction. Even if so, I presume, they can provide anchorage

for the more obviously social categories they constrain, since one need not, indeed cannot, reconstruct all categories at once.) But these constraints hardly suffice to determine a direction of improvement for social categorisations, if only because (as chapters six and seven also explore), there is the possibility of abandoning our old categories altogether, replacing *man/woman* with something altogether more nuanced and multivalent. The question (what counts as better, when it comes to changing imaginaries?) thus stands. I return to it below.

There is a great deal of interest in all this. *Imagination and the Imaginary* has an admirable breadth of vision, seeking to unite a wide range of superficially diverse phenomena in the terms of a single theoretical framework. That framework enables Lennon to juxtapose those varied phenomena in illuminating ways. The book brings together a catalogue of thinkers, some of whom do not often rub shoulders within the boundaries of a single work. (In addition to the guiding lights discussed above, many other figures make more fleeting appearances: Spinoza, Hume, Freud, Fanon, de Beauvoir, Lacan, Irigaray, McDowell and Gatens, to name just some.) Despite the range of material from diverse traditions that she discusses, Lennon manages throughout to maintain a consistent voice of her own, handling it all in the same terms, and with level-headed clarity. The extended discussion of some authors is particularly satisfying: for instance, the book reads Sartre in terms of a central thread running through large swathes of his complex and varied output.

However, some important questions are left unanswered. First, and most centrally, is there really a single set of terms adequate to all these varied phenomena? Despite Lennon's attempts to anchor her key notions in certain elements of Kant's thinking, one might worry that her use of those ideas becomes ever more elastic as the argument develops. Kant's concern was to understand how perceptual experience is possible. The imagination as he conceives is thus operative in constituting *perception* (along with immediate awareness of one's own mental states). Any forms the imagination imposes must be such as to show up in the world the senses (and their inner analogue) make available to us. Lennon takes these ideas into very alien environments indeed. By the time we are dealing with Anne McClintock's explorations of "the meanings attached to 'home' and 'empire' and the images [such as Ryder Haggard's map of Southern Africa, which unwittingly presents it as isomorphic to the female body] …. whereby these significances were conveyed" [pp. 72-3] or Irigary's 're-imagining' of 'the values belonging to a sex-specific genre' [p. 113], we may wonder whether the topic hasn't altered so drastically as to stretch these notions altogether out of shape. Are these 'images' really such as to order perception of the world, narrowly construed? If they are experienced as partly a product of our own activity, able to be developed in ways it is open to us to select (as is true, at least for the 'meaning' we find in our social world when we apply Castoriadis's social imaginaries [p. 79]), they seem to lack a key feature of the perceived world. (And Sartre's proposed ontological divide does find some marker in phenomenology, after all.) And if these imaginaries do not order perception, but merely structure non- perceptual graspings of how things are, can they be 'imaginaries' in the sense Lennon derived from Kant's thinking?

Second, if sensory input is ordered through the work of the imagination, is there a primitive residue, available in experience, that is the 'content' on which that 'form' is imposed? Lennon's discussion of Merleau-Ponty suggests she thinks not. She cautions against taking form as requiring content as its foil and apparently endorses Merleau-Ponty's idea that even the perception of colour involves an ordering by imagination [p. 45]. Thus it seems that for her, not only does every perception involve some imaginary, but there is no aspect to any perception that is independent of the order imaginaries provide. But is this coherent? What is an order where there is nothing that it orders, or a form for which there is nothing that exhibits it?

Third, there is the unresolved question of objectivity or correctness of imaginaries. As my exposition perhaps suggests, Lennon seeks here to tread a fine line. Imaginaries impose order on a world that otherwise lacks it; yet not all are on a par, some are superior to others. In what does this superiority consist? We might, of course, hope to prefer some on normative grounds: the less oppressive imaginaries are better than the more oppressive. But that won't do: since imaginaries structure all aspects of the world, including its normative character, appealing to oppression/liberation as the condition for their correctness simply amounts to using some imaginaries to validate others. Lennon is too clear-sighted to rest content with relocating the problem in this way. What she offers instead, however, is too undeveloped to satisfy. As noted, she attempts to model her solution on Kant's treatment of the soft objectivity of judgements of taste. Myriad imaginaries are possible for a given subject, but only some (though still many) are such that others will, or perhaps ought, to take them up and deploy them. This clearly doesn't help us to determine which, within the many meeting this condition, are to be preferred. Perhaps such pluralism about the right ways to order the world is tolerable. But has even the reduction from the myriad to the many been justified? Kant's vindication of judgements of taste, obscure as its heart may be, clearly turns on the attempt to argue that it is *a priori* that only some of those judgements are such that others ought to share them. That argument imposes conditions on the acceptable judgements. (They must be rooted in the free harmonious interplay of understanding and imagination). Lennon has no similar argument for thinking that only some of the possible imaginaries *ought* to be taken up by our fellows, and thus no conditions to distinguish the many that are candidates for (pluralistic) correctness from the many others that are not. No doubt not every way I might order the world is such that my fellow subjects *will* take it up, but that fact is merely sociological. When we ask the question relevant to correctness: which *ought* to be taken up, I can't see that Lennon has offered any answer at all.

This last question is as deep as any in contemporary philosophy. (Compare the analogous issue about what constitutes following a rule.) So, while Lennon might have been more frank about how little she does to answer it, perhaps we should not be too disappointed that she did not make more progress. Still, to some extent her failure to answer these questions is symptomatic of a more general feature of the book: that her appetite for analysis, for really working through a theory,

is rather limited. Her taste for argument is smaller still. The book proceeds by expounding many interesting ideas, and bringing some of them into dialogue. Conflict is resolved, insofar as it is, not by argument, not even of an exegetical kind, but by the exercising of certain exegetical options. ('We will follow this reading.' [p. 28].) From a certain perspective, this pick and mix approach to ideas can look like dodging the real philosophical task. It is very much to Lennon's credit, however, that in her hands the procedure yields many interesting ideas, ideas she does valuable work in combining into illuminating perspectives on her rich and varied subject matters.

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Action, Knowledge & Will, de JOHN HYMAN, OXFORD, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2015, ix + 254 pp.

Este libro constituye una extraordinaria aportación a la Filosofía de la Acción contemporánea. Ofrece, a la vez, un profundo diagnóstico de ciertas confusiones recurrentes y una alternativa original a algunos de los supuestos básicos en las discusiones actuales. Hyman argumenta convincentemente que las dimensiones ética, física, psicológica e intelectual de la noción de acción no están suficientemente distinguidas en la literatura filosófica. De esta confusión, se nos dice, se siguen muchos de los malentendidos más comunes en las controversias más habituales. Esta línea de argumentación le permite elaborar y justificar una aproximación a la Teoría del Conocimiento que rompe con muchos de los lugares comunes que, desde el célebre trabajo de Gettier, han sido compartidos por los filósofos analíticos. Básicamente, argumenta que el conocimiento es una capacidad (*ability*): la capacidad de ser guiados por los hechos. El pecado original de la epistemología contemporánea sería la idea obsesiva de que esta capacidad puede ser analizada en términos de algún tipo de justificación añadida a la verdad de nuestras creencias. Y la fuente última del error consistiría en una mala interpretación del papel que creencias y deseos juegan en la explicación de la conducta intencional.

El libro comienza con un detallado análisis de lo que su autor denomina la 'Teoría Moderna de la Voluntad', una teoría paradigmáticamente ejemplificada por Descartes y los filósofos empiristas clásicos. Cualquier lector familiarizado con la literatura filosófica contemporánea conoce los términos generales en los que, desde Ryle, este tipo de teoría ha sido criticado. Lo que es particularmente novedoso, y apreciable, en la posición de Hyman es la idea de que tanto los defensores como los críticos han confundido sistemáticamente las ideas de agencia y de voluntariedad. Se suponía que un análisis coherente de la voluntad debía explicar, a la vez, el hecho de que ciertas acciones son susceptibles de reproche, castigo o retribución y