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Frustrating Absences

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Abstract
Experiences of absence are common in everyday life, but have received little philosophical attention until recently, when two positions regarding the nature of such experiences surfaced in the literature. According to the Perceptual View, experiences of absence are perceptual in nature. This is denied by the Surprise-Based View, according to which experiences of absence belong together with cases of surprise. In this paper, I show that there is a kind of experience of absence—which I call *frustrating absences*—that has been overlooked by the Perceptual View and by the Surprise Based-View and that cannot be adequately explained by them. I offer an alternative account to deal with frustrating absences, one according to which experiencing frustrating absences is a matter of subjects having desires for something to be present frustrated by the world. Finally, I argue that there may well be different kinds of experiences of absence.

Keywords
Absences, frustration, perception, desires, phenomenology.

1 Introduction

In Sartre's famous example from *Being and Nothingness* (1956: 9), he has an appointment with Pierre at a *café*. He is fifteen minutes late, but Pierre is always punctual, so he wonders if his friend will still be there when he arrives. As Sartre gets into the *café* and visually searches the place, Pierre is nowhere to be found.

Experiences such as these are familiar to all of us. I may walk down to my basement and open a box expecting to find my *Dark Side of the Moon* vinyl, only to discover that it is not there. A mother may go to her son's room to wish him good night only to find out that he has left home without notice.

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In such cases, it seems that *absences* are somehow experienced—the absence of Pierre, of my Pink Floyd classic and of someone's son, respectively.[1] But to state this is far from illuminating enough. What kind of experiences are experiences of absence? Do they have a distinctive phenomenology that requires philosophical treatment? These are some of the questions we should seek to answer if we are to cast some light upon such experiences.

Recently, two different positions have surfaced in the philosophical literature as an answer to these questions. According to Farennikova (2013), experiences of absence have a distinct and "striking phenomenology" (2013: 420) and should be taken as being perceptual experiences. As she puts it, "we literally see absences" (2013: 420). Martin and Dokic (2013), however, disagree. According to them, cases such as those considered above are ones in which subjects are surprised by the absence of something (an object or person), and these feelings of surprise are constitutive of the experiences. If that is so, then experiences of absence are not perceptual but affective in nature. Moreover, they do not have a distinctive phenomenology that requires a philosophical treatment distinct from that given to cases of surprise.

In this paper, I will argue that there is a kind—in fact a prototypical kind— of experience of absence—which I call *frustrating absences*—that has been overlooked and cannot be adequately accounted for either by Farennikova's view or by Martin and Dokic's. I will then present an alternative account to deal with this kind of absence experience, one according to which experiencing frustrating absences is a matter of subjects having desires for something to be present frustrated by the world.

This is how I will proceed. In sections 2 and 3 I will present Farennikova's view—what I call the *Perceptual View* of experiences

[1] Following Martin and Dokic (2013) and Farennikova (2013), under the heading 'experience of absence' I will not be considering—as does Sorensen (2008), for instance—experiences of so-called 'negative entities', such as shadows and holes, nor will I be considering experiences of occluded (from our perspective) parts of objects, such as the back of the computer I now write in. Although we may take shadows and holes as ontological absences, and occluded parts of objects as sensorial absences, they are not typically experienced as absences. Rather, they are typically experienced as *presences*, and the enigma here is precisely to explain how can it be so.

of absence—and Martin and Dokic's—here called the *Surprise-Based View*—, respectively. In section 4, I will introduce frustrating absences, and argue that neither the Surprise-Based View nor the Perceptual View can do justice to this kind of absence experience, and that it should be understood in terms of subjects having desires for something to be present frustrated by the world. In section 5, I argue that there may well be different kinds of experiences of absence.

2 The perceptual view

In addition to seeing objects, do we also happen to see their absence? In this section, I will present Farennikova's account, according to which we should answer this question in the positive.

Farennikova's strategy is to consider the psychological mechanism that underlies experiences of absence. If this mechanism operates on representations in a visual format, this would give us a reason to consider such experiences as being visual in nature. And, according to her, this is precisely the case.[2,3]

In order to bring in the details of her account, let us again consider an example presented above: I walk down to my basement and

[2] Let me stress that Farennikova does not try to provide a knock-down argument for the Perceptual View. Rather, she aims to present us with a number of non-decisive reasons favouring it.

[3] Throughout the discussion of the Perceptual View, I will follow Farennikova and focus on examples in the visual domain. However, Farennikova supposes that her story can be expanded to cover cases in which absences are perceived in different sensory modalities, such as "smelling the absence of exhaust in the air, tasting the absence of chlorine in water, or the sensation of missing a step while going down the stairs" (2013: 452). Cavedon-Taylor (2016), however, argues that Farennikova cannot make justice to certain cases of subjects touching absences, such as one in which the subject experiences the absence of a tooth that has been recently removed by running her tongue at the gap where it was located. This leads Cavedon-Taylor to introduce a version of the Perceptual View different from Farennikova's, one according to which the psychological mechanism that underlies experience of absence is not the one introduced by Farennikova, but one based on a mismatch between a represented body-schema, one that fails to update itself, and the incoming sensory information. I will not have space to cover their disagreement here, but what I have to say next is compatible with the idea that different psychological mechanisms may underlie experiences of absence.

see a box where I expect to find my *Dark Side of the Moon* vinyl. I then open the box, visually searching for it. Farennikova tells us a plausible story regarding the psychological mechanism that underlies a case such as this, of a visual search based on an expectation of presence. As I expect to find an object in the world before me, such as my Pink Floyd record, my visual system activates a template—a representation in visual format—of the record. This need not be a case of consciously picturing the object (although it can be such a case). The template may be, as put by Farennikova, "produced at the subpersonal level, projected involuntarily, and lack the vivacity of conscious imagery" (2013: 442–3).

If something like Farennikova's story is right concerning the psychological mechanism that underlies our expectations of presence, it is a small step to uncover the mechanism that underlies experiences of absence—at least for cases such as the one at hand. If the object is not where one expects it to be—if the visual search fails—there is a *mismatch* between the template of the object activated as we expect its presence and the incoming sensory information.

Now, according to Farennikova, if a psychological mechanism such as this underlies experiences of absence, then we have a reason to believe that such experiences are visual in nature. After all, the whole structure of mismatching is visual. As she puts it,

> both kinds of representations related by this matching process are within the visual domain: templates of absent objects generated in sensory memory are visual in format, and so is the incoming sensory information. Given that the matched items and the comparing process are visual, it seems plausible to regard the entire mismatch structure as visual (Farennikova 2013: 444).

Now, even though experiences of absence are, for Farennikova, visual in nature, they are unlike other types of seeing, in that seeing what is *in* the environment does not involve a mismatch between templates of objects activated in one's visual system and the incoming sensory information; seeing what is *not* in the environment involves such a mismatch. Moreover, a story regarding the phenomenology of seeing what is not in the environment should be different from a story

regarding the phenomenology of seeing what is in the environment.[4]

There is one point that is now worth stressing regarding Farennikova's Perceptual View of experiencing absences. First, all of the examples of experiences of absence we have presented so far involve subjects having expectations of presence that happen not to correspond to the world as it is perceptually revealed to them. In terms of underlying mechanisms, given the Perceptual View, all of the examples presented so far are ones in which there is a mismatch between templates of objects activated in the subjects' visual systems due to their expectations of presence and the incoming sensory information. But maybe there is such a thing as experiencing absences even though they are expected; that is, there may be cases in which subjects experience absences even though they do not expect something to be present, but in fact expect something to be absent. In an example given by Farennikova, "suppose you learn that your colleague will not be attending the faculty meeting today, and so you come to expect her absence. You walk into the meeting room, and as you expected, she is not there" (2013: 447). It seems plausible to think that you may still experience the absence of your colleague in such a scenario. How to deal with such a case? Well, given Farennikova's story, pretty much the same underlying mechanism previously considered is involved here. You confirm that your colleague is absent at the meeting by having a representation of her in visual format (a template) activated in your visual system, one that happens to be incongruent with the incoming sensory information. Thus, we have here precisely the underlying mechanism which makes for experiences of absence, and that is why you may experience your colleague as absent at the meeting, even though you expected her not to come. So, Farennikova's story is one according to which mismatches between templates of objects activated in the visual system and the incoming sensory information are constitutive of experiences of absence. This story is compatible with templates of objects being activated

[4] Although in her paper Farennikova does not wish to commit to any story regarding the phenomenology involved in one experiencing (seeing) an absence, she does consider an account based on the Perceptual View. She writes: "We can hypothesize that mismatches are not mere vehicles and sometimes surface *qua* mismatches in our phenomenology of absence. The phenomenology of absence is the experience of incongruity" (2013: 445).

in several different ways; activation due to subject's expectations of presence is only one of them. It should also be stressed, however, that there is not a commitment from Farennikova's part to the idea that expectations of presence are not necessary for experiences of absence to occur. After all, one may insist that cases such as the one just presented may involve *implicit* expectations—that is, below the level of consciousness—for an object to be present, even if they do not involve explicit ones. I may implicitly expect my colleague to be at the meeting (she is almost always there after all), even though I consciously do not. Be that as it may, as Farennikova puts it, her story is one regarding a mechanism that is constitutive of experiences of absence, and not one regarding their causes (2013: 448). So, she can remain neutral on the question of whether experiences of absence are invariantly caused by subjects' expectations of presence or whether they can have different causes.

3 The surprise-based view

Shortly after its appearance, Farennikova's Perceptual View was criticized by Martin and Dokic (2013). According to them, mismatches of the sort described by Farennikova—let us have in mind, for now, specifically those in which templates of objects are activated due to subject's expectations of presence—give rise to an affective experience: feelings of surprise. On the one hand, these feelings are metacognitive or metaperceptual: they register or monitor mismatches between the subject's expectations and how the world is perceptually revealed to her.[5] On the other hand, they constitute the experience of absence. To experience my *Dark Side of the Moon* vinyl as absent, according to their story, just is for me to be surprised by its absence.

Martin and Dokic substantiate this claim by presenting us with the following case (let us call it 'the marbles case'):

> You are presented with two series of fifteen successive boxes. In the first series, the first ten boxes contain red marbles but the eleventh box

[5] This leads Martin and Dokic to name their position a 'Metacognitive View'. Here I name it a 'Surprise-Based View'. I take it that this label also does justice to their position, and it is useful here given that the issue of how surprises are related to experiences of absence is the focus of my critical engagement with their position.

> surprisingly reveals a green marble while you implicitly expected a red marble. The second series is like the first, except that the eleventh box surprisingly reveals nothing while you expected a red marble (Martin and Dokic 2013: 119).

In both series there is a mismatch between subjects' expectations of presence and how the world is perceptually revealed to them—or, speaking in terms of underlying mechanisms, between templates of objects activated due to their expectations and the incoming sensory information. And they share, Martin and Dokic maintain, "a common experiential component, namely a FoS [Feeling of Surprise]" (2013: 119). Now, the question is: How should we take the phenomenology of such experiences into account? Well, first, we should notice that the two "series instantiate a quite different perceptual phenomenology at the eleventh step" (2013: 110), in that the experience of perceiving a green marble is of course phenomenologically distinct from perceiving the bottom of a box. But, continue Martin and Dokic,

> Try to subtract the FoS from both series; what happens? In the first series the perceptual phenomenology associated with the presence of a green marble will remain. What about the second series? Intuitively, nothing will remain except the perceptual phenomenology associated with the bottom of the box. It is hard to admit that we experience something other than the sensible background itself when the FoS is withdrawn. We want to suggest that in such cases there are no phenomenal properties over and above the FoS in a case of absence. Both series elicit similar affective phenomenological experiences, i.e., a FoS, suggesting that absence situations are not associated with a peculiar phenomenology as claimed by the Perceptual View (Martin and Dokic 2013: 119).

For our purposes this passage contains Martin and Dokic's central argument. If both series of the marbles case involve subjects being surprised and if, by subtracting surprise from both, we are left with nothing else but the perceptual phenomenology associated with perceiving a green marble, in the first series, and the bottom of a box, in the second—facts that are completely unrelated to experiences of absence—, then there is no distinctive phenomenology associated with experiencing absences, one requiring a philosophical treatment different from that given to cases of surprise. Cases involving subjects experiencing absences would in fact be phenomenologically

on a par with cases in which subjects perceive unexpected changes in the world—both would be cases in which subjects are surprised given a mismatch between how they expect the world to be and how it is perceptually revealed to them.

How is this argument supposed to affect the Perceptual View? Well, according to it, it could be predicted that, in the second series, apart from any feeling of surprise that the subject may have, there should be a perceptual phenomenology associated with perceiving an absence. This is precisely what the argument purports to deny. In the second series, all we have is the perceptual phenomenology associated with perceiving the bottom of a box and the phenomenology of one being surprised by the absence of an object. So, the case would contradict a prediction of the Perceptual View, and pave the way for a view according to which experiencing absences is just a matter of one being surprised by the absence of something, such as an object or person.

4 Introducing and understanding frustrating absences

In this section I will introduce what I call *frustrating absences*, a kind of absence experience that has been overlooked by the Surprise-Based View and the Perceptual View and that cannot be adequately explained by them. I will introduce it by means of an example, and argue, first, that it cannot be taken into account by the Surprise-Based View.

Suppose that I walk into the house where I grew up, for long empty and now on sale. In walking into the room where my father's office used to be, I do not expect to find either my father's chair by the window or himself sitting on it. Suppose that I have been in the empty house many times, almost daily, and its emptiness is in no way surprising to me. Still, I may desire for his chair to be there by the window. I may desire for himself to be sitting on it there by the

window.[6] Of course, my desires here are frustrated by the world.[7] And I recognize that they *must* be so frustrated: I recognize that my father's chair and himself, both long gone, can never be there again.[8]

Now, even though I have no expectations to find either my father's chair or himself where his office used to be—and thus I am not at all surprised not to find his chair or himself sitting on it—, I take it that this is a clear case of one experiencing absences: I experience both my father and my father's chair as absent from the room. In fact, I take this to be a *prototypical case* of one experiencing absences.

Let me immediately deal with a couple of possible objections. Martin and Dokic (2013: 122) consider a similar case, in which we come back to our family home after a couple of years away and, in entering the main room, we say 'Something is lacking here!' According

[6] What do I mean by 'desire'? In his *The Three Faces of Desire* (2004), Timothy Schroeder writes that the book is "about a single phenomenon that is more general than passionate yearning, but less general than the whole of the pro attitudes. It is a phenomenon for which everyday usage has at least three labels: 'desiring','wanting' and 'wishing'. This phenomenon is a distinct, unified entity, a natural psychological kind. Unfortunately, it has no completely natural label in everyday language or in the specialized jargon of philosophy. I have chosen 'desire' as the best approximation. When I write 'desire', then, the reader is encouraged to see whichever of 'desire', 'want', or 'wish' seems most appropriate in context, if that helps to keep things clear" (2004: 5). I agree with Schroeder here, and this is how I use 'desire' as well. It should also be stressed that I remain neutral regarding different theories of desire—theories which are discussed in detail in Schroeder's book.

[7] It can be said that a subject's desire for *p* is satisfied if and only the subject desires for *p* to be the case and *p* is the case, and frustrated if and only if the subject desires for *p* to be the case but not-*p* is the case. Put in such terms, a subject's desires may be satisfied or frustrated whether she is aware of it or not. However, the cases that are relevant for our purposes are not ones in which the subject's desires are merely frustrated, but ones in which the subject is somehow aware of this. We will, after all, be discussing the phenomenology of experiences in which certain desires of the subject happen to be frustrated. So, from now on, I will just assume that subjects are aware of the fact that their desires are frustrated by the world.

[8] It may be argued that the desires here are somehow inadequate or irrational, given that they come with the recognition that they cannot be satisfied. I have no quarrel with this, but it is no objection to the view that I put forward here, given that the appropriateness or rationality of desires is not relevant to the issue of experiencing absences. For discussion of irrational desires, see Hubin 1991.

to their story, what we have here is a case of "a set of not very specific expectations about the general look of the main room or about the general effect that it should have on yourself" (2013: 122), expectations that happen to be violated by the world, thus generating a feeling of surprise. This may be so. But it is unlike the case we are presently considering, in which I experience a *specific* object and person as absent from the room—my father's chair and my father himself—while having no expectations to find them there. Now, Martin and Dokic also consider cases of *implicit expectations* being violated by the world and also resulting in feelings of surprise (2013: 124). In fact, they need to bring implicit expectations into their story in order to deal with cases such as the one presented by Farennikova, in which we may experience the absence of a colleague at a meeting, while not expecting— explicitly at least—her to come. I have no problem with this in general terms, but while it would seem plausible to think that in seeing my family home empty for the first time I would have a set of implicit expectations of finding objects and people there, it is much less plausible to think that I would still have such implicit expectations after a number of visits, almost daily, to the empty house. In fact, if we think of implicit expectations in more specific terms, as predictions activated in the brain given previously detected regularities in the world,[9] it is reasonable to think that what I implicitly expect is precisely to find the house empty.

So, I take it that we have a clear, prototypical case of one experiencing absences in which no feelings of surprise are involved. That is, we have a prototypical case of one experiencing absences that cannot be taken into account by the Surprise-Based View.

Can the Perceptual View do justice to such a case? It may seem that it can. After all, as we have seen in section 2, Farennikova wishes to remain neutral regarding the causes of experiences of absence; her account is one regarding a constitutive underlying mechanism of such experiences. Now, in the case above, I have a desire for my father's chair to be by the window and for himself to be sitting on it there by the window. My desires are then frustrated by the world. The friend

[9] The idea of implicit expectations or anticipations has been recently explored in relation to a number of issues in cognitive science, from perception and imagery to action. For a review of the literature, see Clark 2013.

of the Perceptual View could argue that I can be said to perceive the absence of my father and of my father's chair, for the same underlying mechanism previously identified by the Perceptual View would be involved: given that the desires in question are for something to be present, and given that these desires are frustrated by the world, it may seem that here we also have a case in which templates of objects are activated in the subjects' visual system—representations in visual format of the objects whose presence is desired, my father's chair and my father himself—, templates which happen to be, in a certain sense, incongruent with the incoming sensory information (not in the sense that such information disconfirms or violates the content of the mental state in question, but that it fails to satisfy it).

I do not think, however, that this is an adequate account of the case. To see why not, consider, first, the case of a son mourning the death of his father—a case somehow similar to the one involving a visit to the now empty house where I grew up, but with one important difference. Imagine, for instance, that the father was a tireless traveler, and was present to his son by being reachable from time to time, by phone or email. The son's frustrated desire is precisely for his father to be present in such a way: somewhere in the world, reachable from time to time. It is clear, I take it, that the son experiences his father as absent.[10] But he does not experience his father as absent from a somewhat defined location in space. Rather, he experiences his father as absent *from the world*. Even though this is a peculiar example, cases of mourning frequently involve individuals experiencing absences in such a way, given a frustrated desire for the one who has passed away to be *somewhere*, *anywhere* in the world. And, as with the case presented above involving a visit to the house where I grew up, I take these to be not marginal, but prototypical cases of subjects experiencing absences.

Now, as long as the Perceptual View takes cases of experiences

[10] Notice that I am only claiming here that cases of mourning may involve experiences of absence in the sense described, not that experiences of absence are constitutive of the experience of mourning. According to Nussbaum (2001), for instance, mourning (or grief) should be understood in terms of evaluative judgments, such as the one that a person of great importance for one's flourishing is gone. But this is compatible with the idea that those in mourning may experience absences in the sense described.

of absence as being limited to ones in which something is experienced as absent from the scene perceptually presented to the subject (a laptop as absent from the table perceptually presented to us, for instance) it is unable to make justice to certain prototypical cases of experiences of absence. For there are cases in which we experience something as absent but not from the scene perceptually presented to us. Such is the case of the son in mourning. Given that he did not use to have his father around, he does not experience him as absent *from the room* perceptually presented to him every night as he goes to bed, for instance, or from any other precise location in space that happens to be perceptually presented to him. Still, he does experience his absence. As put before, he experiences the father as absent *from the world*, but not from a somewhat defined location in space, one that happens to be perceptually presented to him.

Once cases such as this are brought into the picture, it should be clear that we are before a case of experience of absence that cannot be adequately accounted for by the Perceptual View.

Now we are in position to understand why the Perceptual View also does not adequately explain the case in which I experience my father's chair and my father as absent from the empty house. The experiences of absence we have been discussing in this section seem to be a matter of subjects having their desires for something to be present (in a somewhat defined location in space or not) frustrated by the world. I *desired* for my father's chair and for my father himself to be in the room, a desire that was of course frustrated by the world. The son in morning *desired* for his father to be somewhere, anywhere in the world, a desire that was also frustrated. Let us then call these *frustrating absences*. Now, according to the Perceptual View, we should say that I perceive my father's chair and my father himself as absent given that templates of these objects are activated in my visual system, templates that happen to be, in a certain sense, incongruent with the incoming sensory information. Notice, however, that this does not seem to get things right. What we should say regarding constitutive and causal aspects of experiences of absence here is precisely the other way round. After all, it seems that we should remain neutral regarding whether a subject's desire for the presence of something activate templates of objects in her visual system or not. What is essential for the experiences of absence in case

to occur is that certain desires get to be frustrated by the world. It is by no means essential that, considering the underlying mechanisms of such experiences, the desires in question activate templates of objects in the subjects' visual system (or in systems related to other sensory modalities). The desires in question may be understood, for instance, in terms of the activation of sentences in something like a language of thought, ones having the functional role we normally attribute to desires, and that happen not to be related to the activation of representations in perceptual format.[11] What kind of representations desires for something to be present activate in our mental economy is, of course, an empirical question, one that I do not intend to address in this paper. So, when it comes to the cases in question, it seems that the right thing to say is that these experiences should be taken as a matter of subjects having their desires for something to be present (in a somewhat defined location in space or not) frustrated by the world.

But is it plausible to think that the phenomenology involved in experiencing these absences can be taken into account in such terms? I take it that it certainly is. Let us see why. In having our desires for something to be present frustrated by the world, it is not what we happen to find in the world that attracts our attention and makes itself salient in our experience. What is salient in our experience is the very frustration of those desires. Part of what I have in mind here is well illustrated by Sartre in his discussion of the failed meeting with Pierre. He writes: "...his [Pierre's] absence fixes the *café* in its evanescence; the *café* remains ground; it persists in offering itself as an undifferentiated totality to my only marginal attention; it slips into the background" (1956: 10). Sartre's point is precisely that, once he finishes his visual search for Pierre, what he happens to encounter in the world—the *café* with its tables and chairs, glasses, waiters, clients etc.—is not salient in his experience. What he happens to find in the *café* remains an object of his marginal attention. It occupies the background of his experience. What is salient in his experience is precisely Pierre's absence—in Sartre's words, what is salient in his experience is "Pierre raising himself as nothingness" (1956: 10).

[11] For discussion of mental states such as beliefs and desires in terms of a language of thought, see, for instance, Crane 1990.

In the way I would like to read Sartre's case, what is salient in his experience is not what is perceptually revealed to him—what he happens to encounter in the world—but the very frustration of his desire for Pierre to be at the *café*. This is precisely what it means for Sartre to experience Pierre's absence from the *café*.[12] Similarly, what is salient in my experience in the case in which I walk through the empty house is the very frustration of my desire for my father's chair and for my father himself to be there in the room, and what is salient in the experience of the son in morning is the frustration of the desire for his father to be somewhere, anywhere, in the world.

It is also important to notice that experiences of frustrating absences depend on the frustration of desires with contents of a specific form: a subject desiring *something to be present*. In having a desire with a content of a different form frustrated, the subject will have an experience with different phenomenal qualities. For instance, according to Smuts (2008), experiencing suspense is a matter of one having a "strong desire to affect the outcome of an imminent event" (2008: 281) frustrated. Experiences of suspense and experiences of frustrating absences of course have different phenomenal qualities, and this is at least partly accounted for in terms of differences in form between the experiences' contents.

5 Varieties of absence experiences

I have so far introduced and developed an account of frustrating absences, a kind of absence experience that has been overlooked by the Surprised-Based View and by the Perceptual View and that cannot be adequately explained by them. Notice, however, that *I am not* suggesting that all experiences of absence are frustrating ones. There are certainly cases in which absences are experienced even though no frustrated desires for something to be present need to be involved.

[12] Notice that Sartre's case may be taken as not involving surprise, for, given that Sartre is late and aware of Pierre's punctuality, he wonders if his friend will still be there as he arrives at the *café*. Thus, there may not be an expectation from Sartre's part that Pierre will in fact still be at the *café*. But this does not seem to be how Sartre himself reads the case, given that he takes cases in which we experience absences—in his terms, in which nothingness appears to us—as being directly linked to a violation of subjects' expectations (1956: 7).

Consider a few examples put forward by Farennikova:

> In a museum, you may see that an exhibit is missing a photograph, that a person in front of you is missing a finger, or that your blazer is missing a button. You will see absences of these objects without intentionally searching for them. Experiences of this type involve relatively automatic responses to a deviation in a pattern (Farennikova 2013: 441).

It seems clear that these are not frustrating absences, for we may have no particular desire for there to be no deviations in the pattern (for hands to have five fingers, for blazers to have all of their buttons). Thus, if we happen to experience absences in such cases—and I believe that we do—, the experiences cannot be accounted for in terms of frustrated desires for something to be present. So these experiences of absence seem to be of a kind different from frustrating ones. But now the question arises: of what kind are these experiences of absence?

The Perceptual View can nicely deal with these cases, ones involving subjects' expectations or anticipations, given the detection of a pattern or regularity, and reactions to a deviation. These cases are certainly good candidates to be ones in which implicit expectations, in the sense we have previously considered, are involved. And they may well be cases in which templates of the missing objects are activated in the subjects' visual system, templates that happen to be incongruent with the incoming sensory information. So, if we follow Farennikova in thinking that we perceive the absence of a photograph, of a finger or a button, we could say that these are *perceptual absences*.

But maybe this is not so. Let us consider again Martin and Dokic's marble case. Here we also have subjects expecting or anticipating a certain outcome, given the detection of a pattern or regularity, and reactions to a deviation.

According to Martin and Dokic, both series of the case are ones in which subjects are merely surprised by the absence of an object. There is thus no distinctive phenomenology in the experience involved in the second series that requires a philosophical treatment different from that given to cases of surprise. Martin and Dokic may be right about this. If they are, their story could be immediately extended to include the cases considered by Farennikova, of one reacting to a missing photograph, a missing finger or a missing button.

In all such cases, our (maybe implicit) expectations happen to be violated by the world. Thus, these may be cases in which subjects are merely surprised by absences. If this is so, then we could say that these are *surprising absences*. Now, in this paper I do not intend to answer the question of whether the cases under discussion are of perceptual absences or surprising ones. But even if we assume, for the sake of the argument, that these are cases of surprising absences, that would not mean that there are no perceptual absences. Consider once again Farennikova's missing colleague case, in which "you learn that your colleague will not be attending the faculty meeting today, and so you come to expect her absence. You walk into the meeting room, and as you expected, she is not there" (2013: 447). We have seen that this may be an example in which even though the colleague's absence is consciously expected, an *implicit expectation* for the colleague to be present may be violated by the world, in which case this could after all be a surprising absence and not a perceptual one. However, if the colleague in the example is famous for not attending meetings, it becomes less plausible to think that there are implicit expectations for her presence, and more reasonable to think that this is after all a case in which I experience her absence even though it is *fully expected*. Suppose also that I have no particular desire for the colleague to be at the meeting. If this is so, Farennikova's story would be more plausible than others on offer, for, on the one hand, no surprises or frustrations would be involved, and, on the other hand, as we have seen above, it could be said that the underlying mechanism for perceiving absences is present here: one can have a representation that is incongruent with the incoming sensory information activated in one's visual system. So, the missing colleague case may well be one of a perceptual absence.

As noted above, it is not my aim here to establish that certain experiences are of surprising absences while others are of perceptual absences. The suggestion I am making is more modest: there may well be at least three different kinds of experiences of absence: frustrating absences, surprising absences and perceptual ones.[13]

Moreover, there may well be cases in which subjects experience

[13] I am also not supposing that this listing of kinds of experiences of absence is exhaustive.

more than one kind of absence at a given moment. The *Dark Side of the Moon* case is a good example. I am certainly surprised by the record's absence. After all, I expected it to be in the box in the basement. But not only I expected it to be there, I also had a *desire* for it to be there. As I perceive the empty box, not only is my expectation violated (leading to a feeling of surprise), but this desire of mine happens to be frustrated by the world. So we seem to have a case in which I am both surprised and frustrated, and thus a case in which the subject experiences (at least) two kinds of absence, a surprising absence and a frustrating one.[14]

6 Conclusion

The main goal of this paper was to argue that frustrating absences are a kind of absence experience, one that has been overlooked by the Perceptual View and by the Surprised-Based View and that cannot be explained by them. Rather, it is a kind of absence experience that should be understood in terms of subjects having their desires for something to be present frustrated by the world. But I have not suggested that all experiences of absence are frustrating ones. There may well be other kinds of absence experience, such as surprising absences—that should be understood in terms of subjects being surprised by having their expectations of something being present violated by the world—and perceptual ones—that should be understood in terms of a mismatch between templates of objects activated in one's visual system and the incoming sensory information. If this happens to be true, then the current accounts of experiences of absence are mistaken not only in ignoring frustrating absences, but also in their aspiration to be the one account that will explain all experiences of absence with one blow.[15]

[14] As in the cases above of the missing photograph, missing finger and missing button, I leave open the possibility that rather than being a case of a surprising absence, the *Dark Side of the Moon* case should be understood as one of a perceptual absence (here accompanied by a frustrating absence).

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