



# Kant's Nonconceptual View on Imagination and its Role in Cognition<sup>1</sup>

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**ENG Abstract:** This paper meticulously examines the debate about the autonomy/independence of the imagination as understood by Kant. In contrast to the prevailing intellectualist interpretation, which postulates the dependence of the imagination on understanding, this paper presents comprehensive historical and systematic objections. It claims that understanding does not provide conditions for us to represent *something as an object* in our sensibility (the traditional conceptual mainstream reading of Kant). Instead, it only provides conditions for us to recognize that we represent *something as an object* in our sensibility. The essay confidently claims that Kant's exercise of the imagination remains independent of understanding across both editions of the *Critique*. It suggests that the rules of the understanding impose constraints on the imagination only when the understanding recognizes *something as an object*. I refer to this as Kant's nonconceptual of imagination in cognition.

**Keywords:** imagination; understanding; Kant's nonconceptualism.

## ES La visión no conceptual de Kant sobre la imaginación y su papel en la cognición

**Resumen:** Este trabajo examina meticulosamente el debate sobre la autonomía/independencia de la imaginación tal como la entiende Kant. En contraste con la interpretación intelectualista predominante, que postula la dependencia de la imaginación del entendimiento, este trabajo presenta objeciones históricas y sistemáticas exhaustivas. Afirma que el entendimiento no proporciona condiciones para representar algo como un objeto en nuestra sensibilidad (la lectura conceptual tradicional de Kant). En cambio, solo proporciona condiciones para reconocer que representamos algo como un objeto en nuestra sensibilidad. El ensayo afirma con confianza que el ejercicio de la imaginación de Kant permanece independiente del entendimiento en ambas ediciones de la *Crítica*. Sugiere que las reglas del entendimiento imponen limitaciones a la imaginación solo cuando el entendimiento reconoce algo como un objeto. Me refiero a esto como el no conceptualismo de la imaginación de Kant en la cognición.

**Palabras clave:** imaginación; entendimiento; no conceptualismo de Kant.

**Summary:** 1. The rationale for the Transcendental Deduction. 2. Imagination in the A-Deduction. 3. Imagination in the Second Step of the B-Deduction. 4. Concluding Remarks. References.

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### The Question

It is beyond question that imagination plays a critical role in Kant's *Critique* (KrV). It is first introduced in the Metaphysical Deduction, § 10, as "a blind yet indispensable function of the soul, without which we would not

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have any cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even aware" (A78/B103, emphasis added). Kant describes this function (synthesis) as "the action of bringing different representations together and comprehending their manifoldness in a single cognition" (A78/B103). He clearly distinguished between the faculties of imagination and understanding when he added that the function of understanding is "combining ideas to form concepts" (A78/B103). Since Kant never altered his original statement, we must take his words at face value, which implies that he never changed his mind and, thus, his position is definitive.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, as is typical, nothing in Kant is unambiguous and can be taken for granted as fact. The role of imagination and its relationship to other faculties, particularly understanding, has remained an open question in the secondary literature ever since.<sup>3</sup> To begin with, Kant never explained what he meant when he said that imagination is a "blind" faculty. Secondly, Kant never explained the role of imagination in its constitution of what he calls "cognition" (*Erkenntnis*), particularly in Kant's Transcendental Deduction. Additionally, Kant often referenced imagination as a bridge between intuition and understanding since it is both intuitive and rational. How should we interpret this Kantian metaphor if we become ensnared?

What is known for sure is that, in his initial version of the A-Deduction, Kant emphasizes the role of the imagination in the Transcendental Deduction. Not only does he take pride in being the first to recognize that imagination is an essential component of perception, but he also regards the imagination as one of the three primary faculties of the mind, along with sense and apperception:

There are three sources (capacities or faculties of the soul), which contain the conditions of the possibility of all experience and cannot themselves be derived from any other faculty of the mind, namely, sense, imagination, and apperception (A94).

It seems that Kant lessened the relevance of imagination in the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (*KrV*). The words "a blind but indispensable function of the soul" in the initial version of the *KrV* were crossed out in his manuscript copy. Instead, the phrase "a blind but indispensable function of the understanding" was written in their place.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the activity of synthesis is specified at the beginning of the B-Deduction (in § 15) as an "action of the understanding" (B130). Whether it is the synthesis of impressions or the synthesis of concepts, what Kant calls "synthesis" is always the activity of understanding. A claim at the end of the second edition of the Transcendental Deduction substantiates this impression. Kant equates imagination and understanding as if they were the same faculty, stating, "It is the same spontaneity which, under the name of imagination and herein the name of understanding, brings unity to the manifold of intuition" (B162 n.).<sup>5</sup>

To make matters even worse, Kant distinguishes two types of sensory representations synthesis in his B-Deduction's conclusion (§§ 24 and 26). As outlined in § 24, there is a pure and a priori synthesis of sensory representations, which he terms "figurative synthesis" or "transcendental synthesis of the imagination." However, in § 26, Kant mentions an empirical synthesis of representations, constituting the successive apprehension and concurrent retention of the apprehended representations. He refers to this as the "empirical synthesis of apprehension."

In a nutshell: Kant's view on imagination in the first edition starkly contrasts with the doctrine in the second edition. Moreover, there appears to be an inconsistency between the distinction of the functions of imagination from the function of understanding in the Metaphysical Deduction and the assertions that imagination is an "action" of understanding in our sensibility.

According to mainstream scholars, there is either a shift in Kant's view on the role of imagination from the first to the second edition or a rewording of his original claims to make his point more comprehensible. I shall provide you with two examples from literature selected at random. Paton (1970) posited that the role of imagination in the Metaphysical Deduction ought not to be considered entirely independent of understanding, implying that a concept, even in the background, must still be at play in the synthesis of imagination. In contrast, Longuenesse (1998) suggests that Kant altered his views between the first and second editions of the *Critique*, even going so far as to contend that Kant should have revised the *Transcendental Aesthetic* in the B-edition. In any case, both kinds of readers are prepared to "intellectualize" the imagination to preserve the coherence of Kant's view in both editions of the *Critique*. The driving force behind the mainstream view

<sup>2</sup> See De Almeida 2015, p. 12. It is worth noticing that when one assumes that Kant defines the imagination as a faculty independent of understanding, it does not mean that there cannot be representations of the imagination that are guided and determined by the rules of understanding. On the contrary. This is clear from Kant's idea that mathematical concepts are "constructed" a priori in imagination and from the second part of the Transcendental Deduction, where Kant tries to show that the category of homogeneous applies to the synthesis of apprehension as a requirement of cognition ("Erkenntnis") of space as an object. Exemplifying: One thing is to imagine a three-sided polygon whose angles add up to 180 degrees without knowing that what you are representing is a "triangle." Quite another to represent the same polygon by imagination but guided by the rule expressed by the concept of a triangle: "Draw a three-sided polygon whose angles add up to 180 degrees." Similarly, one thing is to imagine (to represent) space as a unity without the concept of space, let alone the concept of unity or homogeneity (the synthesis of apprehension still without categories). Quite another is to represent space (by imagination) as a unity but as a requirement for physical and mathematical knowledge ("Erkenntnis").

<sup>3</sup> I am limiting myself to only mentioning the most recent works whose reading contributed to this paper. See Allison, H. 2004; Banham, G. 2016; Bates, J. 2004; De Almeida 2015; Freyberg, B. 1994; Gibbons, S. 1994; Ginsborg, H. 1997, 2006; Guyer 2005; Henrich, D. 1994; Kneller, S. 2007; Longuenesse, B. 1998; Makkreel, R. 1990; Mensch, J. 2005; Schaper, E. 1964; Sellars, W. 1978; Strawson, P.F. 1974; Thompson, M.L., ed. 2013; Thomas A. 2009; Young, J.M. 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from De Almeida 2015, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger suggests that imagination is the common root from which both sensitivity and understanding emanate. See Heidegger 1990, 1997. For a criticism of Heidegger's view, see Henrich 1994.

is the false fundamental assumption that, if the synthesis of imagination were not intellectualized, *it would be impossible to represent anything as an object*, leaving the manifoldness of sensory data devoid of objective reference. I shall now refer to this as Kant's intellectualist interpretation of imagination.<sup>6</sup>

I set forth an alternative view. Kant always kept his view between the two versions of the *Critique*. In both the A-Deduction and the B-Deduction, categories do not provide the conditions for representing something as an object; this responsibility is solely that of sensibility and imagination. Through our senses alone, we do represent what appears as objects. As I shall argue, what needs to be added is the recognition (*Erkenntnis*) that these sense appearances are indeed mind-independent objects. The categories of understanding only offer the conditions for recognizing the unity of the imagination's synthesis as an object. This claim implies that imagination remains independent of understanding in the second edition in the same way it does in the first edition; this is what I call the nonconceptualist reading of imagination in Kant's theoretical philosophy.<sup>7</sup> In my opinion, the intellectualist reading is open to overwhelming historical and systematic objections.

This paper is structured into four more sections. After this extended introduction, the subsequent section is devoted to clarifying the goal of the Transcendental Deduction. This section is crucial as my entire argument hinges on correctly understanding the purpose of the Transcendental Deduction. I will contend that the Transcendental Deduction does not seek to prove that *without the categories of understanding, we would not be able to represent objects*. Instead, it aims to illustrate that without the categories of understanding, we would not be able to recognize something as an object; that is, we would not know that we are already representing objects by our sensibility.

The second section is dedicated to analyzing the role of imagination in the A-Deduction. As anticipated, the results align with Kant's original assertion in the Metaphysical Deduction, which clearly distinguishes the function of imagination from the function of understanding. The main point is this: Kant does not suggest that the synthesis of apprehension and reproduction would be impossible without the synthesis of recognition through concepts. Instead, he argues that, without the synthesis of recognition through concepts, the apprehension and reproduction of imagination would be in vain. The question then is: in vain to what end? This claim brings us back to the outcome of the previous section; they would not contribute to the cognition of unity of imagination as an object.

The following section analyzes the role of imagination in the second step of the B-Deduction. All appearances notwithstanding, the findings align with Kant's original statement in the Metaphysical Deduction that differentiates the role of imagination from the role of understanding. Upon closer scrutiny, Kant's argument in the second step does not suggest that no objects could ever be represented in space without the assimilation of imagination into understanding. Instead, just as in the A-Deduction, Kant claims that without the subordination of the synthesis of apprehension to a transcendental synthesis of understanding according to categories, we would be unable to *recognize* the representation of the *unity* of what has been apprehended *as an object*.

In the final section, I address the questions in the introduction by formulating my concluding remarks. Firstly, in what sense is imagination "a blind function of the soul" (A78/B103)? Secondly, what does it mean to assert that imagination is almost always unconscious (A78/B103)? Thirdly, how can we comprehend Kant's distinction between "a pure synthesis of representations" and the "empirical synthesis" in a non-metaphorical sense? Fourthly, in what non-metaphorical sense is the imagination a mediator between the two extreme faculties: sensibility and understanding?

## 1. The rationale for the Transcendental Deduction

Kant's assertions at A90-1/B122-3 make it unmistakably clear that the categories of understanding are not a requirement for objects to appear to us through our senses as the objects of our sensible representations: "Objects can indeed appear to us without necessarily having to be related to functions of the understanding" (*KrV*, A89/B122). This statement suggests that the categories of understanding could be mere empty concepts, making the Transcendental Deduction unavoidable.

According to Paton (1936/1970), Kant's statement at A90-1/B122-123 does not express his view of the relation between sensible intuition and categories. Gomes (2014) recently proposed that Kant was not expressing a *real metaphysical hypothesis* but rather entertaining "a mere epistemic possibility to be eliminated later

<sup>6</sup> Allison was perhaps the first scholar to use the word "intellectualization" critically when discussing the usual readings of the role of imagination in Kant (see Allison 2004, p. 187). He argued that Kant's concept of imagination is an activity that anticipates the formation of concepts, a "proto-conceptual" activity (2004, p. 189), playing a recognitional role. However, I defend the most radical view that imagination is entirely independent of any recognitional role of concepts. In the same sense, see also Hanna (2020), De Almeida (2015), Young (1988).

<sup>7</sup> The literature on nonconceptual content in the philosophy of mind is extensive, so I limit myself to citing only the two pioneering authors: Evans (1982) and Dretske (1969). Similarly, even the literature on nonconceptual content in Kant is equally immense, but one author deserves mention for his pioneering work: Hanna (2005, 2008, 2011 and 2020).

<sup>†</sup>In contrast, Gibbons (1994), Kneller (2007), Thompson (ed. 2013), Matherne (2016), and Horstmann (2018) are the most prominent defenders of the intellectual reading of imagination in Kant.

<sup>‡</sup>Interestingly, Deleuze was the first to mention the idea of nonconceptual content in Kant in 1968, stating, "Kant was the one who best illustrated the correlation between objects having only an undefined specification and purely spatiotemporal or oppositional, nonconceptual determinations (the paradox of symmetrical objects) [incongruous counterparts]" (1968/1994, p. 13). He adds: "Kant recognized extrinsic differences not reducible to the order of concepts. These are no less 'internal' even though they cannot be regarded as 'intrinsic' by the understanding and can be represented only in their external relation to space as a whole" (1968/1994, p. 26).

as an unreal metaphysical possibility" (2014, p. 6). This interpretation seems to be supported by Kant's use of the indicative "can" (*können*), in contrast to the subjunctive "could" (*könnten*):

Objects *can* indeed appear to us without necessarily having to be related to functions of the understanding. (A89/B122. Emphasis added)

Appearances *could*, after all, be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity... [and] in the succession of appearances nothing would offer itself that would furnish a rule of synthesis and thus correspond to the concept of cause and effect, so that this concept would be entirely empty, nugatory, and without significance. Appearances would nonetheless offer objects to our intuition, for intuition by no means requires the function of thinking. (A90-1/B122-3. Emphasis added)

The former suggests that Kant is taking the possibility of objects appearing without categories as a *real metaphysical possibility*, while the latter indicates a *mere epistemic possibility* to be dismissed at the end of Kant's Deduction.

The majority of Kantian experts endorse Paton's argument. Vaihinger (1883) rejected Kant's assertion that categories do not constitute the conditions for how objects are presented in intuition. De Vleeschauer's view was even more straightforward: "it is necessary to logically come to the conclusion that categories are also the a priori conditions of intuition, and that intuition is also subject to intellectual functions" (1934, p. 191). Furthermore, he added that: "the intellectual function must be involved in the simplest intuition, such that every empirical element is already encompassed by one of the modes of spontaneity" (1934, p. 244).

Numerous scholars tacitly denied Kant's statement. For example, Waxman (1991) maintained that space, time, and the diversity they contain are not sourced from intuition but are products of the imagination in conformity to the categories of understanding (1991, p. 33). Longuenesse (1998) concurred, claiming that logical functions are necessary for the presentation of appearances in sensitive intuition (1998, p. 28), and Van Cleve (1999) further repudiated the Kantian statement, contending that the representation of even the smallest temporal or spatial extension is the result of synthesis in conformity to the categories of understanding (1999, p. 85). Ginsborg (2006) furthered this view, noting that Kant is apparent in his *Transcendental Aesthetics* that the pure intuitions of space and time are tied to the imaginative synthesis in conformity to the categories of understanding, which is responsible for their coherence (2006, p. 66).

Indeed, Kant's Transcendental Deduction has been seen as a refutation of some unqualified form of global skepticism—a "straw figure." Kant's proof should be understood as an argument in favor of the idea that we can cognize and experience public and objective particulars and a refutation of this "straw figure" which questions such a commonsensical view. Strawson (1966) was the first to connect Kant's statement to a skeptical hypothesis and to posit that the purpose of the Transcendental Deduction was to refute such an unqualified global skepticism. He argued:

If appearances were not such as to allow knowledge expressible in objective judgments, they would be "for us as good as nothing" (*KrV*, A111) they would be merely "a blind play of representations, less even than a dream" (*KrV*, A112). Or again, in an awkwardly expressed passage, Kant says that if it were accidental that appearances should fit into a connected whole of human knowledge, then it might be that they did not so fit together, were not "associable" in the required way; and "should they not be associable, there might exist a multitude of perceptions, and indeed an entire sensibility, in which much empirical consciousness would arise in my mind, but in a state of separation, and without belonging to a consciousness of myself. This however is impossible." (1966, pp. 99-100)

In this section, I limit myself to making the following observations. To begin with, in the A-Deduction, Kant reiterates the autonomy of appearances from categories of understanding in several passages. Examples of these include:

Appearances are the objects that can be given to us immediately, and that in them which is immediately related to the object is called **intuition**. (*KrV*, A108-109. Original emphasis in bold.)

[I]n experience they (intuition) must stand under conditions of the necessary unity of apperception just as in mere intuition they must stand under the formal conditions of space and time. (*KrV*, A110)

Now I assert that categories that have just been adduced are nothing other than conditions of thinking in a possible experience, just as space and time contain conditions of the intuition for the very same thing. (*KrV*, A111)

That representation that can be given *prior* to all thinking is called intuition. (B131/B132, original emphasis)

It is difficult to accept Paton and Gomes's suggestion that in those passages, Kant is merely entertaining "an epistemic possibility" to be later discarded in the conclusion of the Transcendental Deduction. Kant's doctrine is that the categories of understanding are not necessary or sufficient conditions for representing objects as such; rather, they are conditions for the *cognition* (*Erkenntnis*) of objects (*KrV*, A129). But what is the big difference? Consider this of a pre-critical opusculum:

I would go still further and say: it is one thing to differentiate [unterscheiden] things from each other, and quite another thing to recognize the difference between them [den Unterschied der Dinge zu erkennen]. The latter is only possible by means of judgments and cannot occur in the case of animals, who are not endowed with reason. The following division may be of great use. Logically differentiating

means recognizing that [erkennen *daß*] a thing A is not B; it is always a negative judgment. Physically differentiating [physisch unterscheiden] means being driven to different actions by different representations. The dog differentiates the roast from the loaf, and it does so because the way in which it is affected by the roast is different from the way in which it is affected by the loaf (for different things cause different sensations), and the sensations caused by the roast are a ground of desire in the dog which differs from the desire caused by the loaf, according to the natural connection which exists between its drives and its representations. (FSS., § 6, Ak, 2: 60; p. 104)

The dog can easily discriminate various objects of its acquaintance, such as the loaf from the roast. However, without correspondent empirical concepts and the category of substance involved in categorical judgments, he is unable to “recognize that” (“erkennen *daß*”) loaves are not roast (negative categorical judgment).<sup>8</sup>

Mutatis mutandis, an animal or an infant can represent various objects (i.e., mind-dependent entities) of its environment, such as bones, chairs, parents, and so on. However, without empirical concepts and categories, they are not able to “recognize that” what they represent are what we call “objects,” i.e., entities that exist independently of the mind. The point is that it is possible to represent mind-independent things without recognizing that (“erkennen *daß*”) what one is representing are mind-independent things. Therefore, representing objectively mind-independent things is not the same as “recognizing that” (“erkennen *daß*”) one is representing mind-independent things.

In the progression (“Stufenleiter”) of *Jäsche Logic*, we explain what he means by “erkennen” in opposition to “kennen:”

The first degree of cognition is: to represent something.

The second: to represent something with consciousness, or to perceive (*percipere*).

The third is to be acquainted with something (*kennen; noscere*) or to represent something in comparison with other things, both as to sameness (*Einerleiheit*) and as to difference.

The fourth is to be acquainted with (*kennen*) something with consciousness, i.e., to cognize it (*erkennen; cognoscere*). Animals are acquainted with (*kennen*) objects, too, but they do not cognize (*erkennen*) them. (*JL.*, VIII, Ak., 9: 65; p. 569)

When I have sensible representation, I possess a non-conceptual, non-propositional “de re awareness” of whatever my sensory intuition represents—this is what Kant refers to as “kennen” or “noscere.” The claim is that I am “de re aware of” something *essentially conceptually indeterminate*. If, on the other hand, I have a conceptual representation, I am conceptually, propositionally conscious (“de dicto conscious”) that A is not B—this is what Kant calls “erkennen” or “cognoscere.”

According to the intellectualist interpretation of imagination in Kant, it is assumed that, were synthesis completely determined by categories, we could represent something as an object. However, as I have argued in this section, the purpose of the Transcendental Deduction is not to show that categories are necessary for the representation of objects in sensibility but rather to demonstrate that categories are essential for *recognizing* that, with our senses, we do indeed represent what appears to our senses objectively. Thus, the intellectualist reading of imagination in Kant does not stand.

## 2. Imagination in the A-Deduction

If the goal of the Transcendental Deduction is not to refute an unqualified skeptic, this does not mean that the Deduction is not engaging some global skepticism. The question is, which kind of skepticism would this be? After thoroughly examining critical passages of the Transcendental Deduction, it can be determined that Kant was concerned with nature's uniformity (*Gleichförmigkeit*), that is, *the necessary lawlike connection between appearances*. This statement can be seen in these sections.

There is only one experience, in which all perceptions are represented as in a thoroughgoing and *lawlike connection*, just as there is only one space and time, in which all forms of appearance and all relation of being or non-being take place. If one speaks of different experiences, there are so many perceptions insofar as they belong to one and the same universal experience. The thoroughgoing and synthetic unity of perceptions is precisely what constitutes the form of experience, and it is nothing other than the synthetic unity of appearances in me in accordance with concepts. (KrV, A111, emphasis added)

Now, however, representation of a universal condition in accordance with which a certain manifold (of whatever kind) **can** be posited is called a **rule**, and, if it **must** be so posited, a **law**. All appearances therefore stand in a thoroughgoing connection according to necessary laws, and hence in a transcendental affinity, empirical affinity is mere consequence. (KrV, A113-114, original emphasis in bold.)

Thus, we ourselves bring into the appearances that order and regularity in them that we call **nature**, and moreover we would not be able to find it there if we, or the nature of our mind, had not originally put it there. For *this unity of nature should be a necessary, i.e., a certain unity of the connection of appearances*. (KrV, A125, original emphasis in bold, and additional emphasis in italic)

<sup>8</sup> To my knowledge, Tyler Burge was the first to call attention to this crucial concept of “cognition” (*Erkenntnis*). See Burge 2010, pp. 155-156.

Thus, as exaggerated and contradictory as it may sound to say that the understanding is itself *the source of the laws of nature, and thus of the formal unity of nature*, such an assertion is nevertheless correct and appropriate to the object, namely experience. (KrV, A127, emphasis added)

Kant's concept of a "formal unity of nature" (a necessary correlation between appearances) is equivalent to what David Hume referred to as the assumption that "the course of nature continues always uniformly the same." In his *Enquiries*, Hume asserted that inductive inferences are based on transitions of the following form: "I have found that such an object has always been accompanied by such an effect and I foresee that other objects, which appear to be similar, will be accompanied by similar effects" (E.4.2: 16). In his *Treatise*, Hume stated: "if Reason determin'd us, it would proceed upon that principle that instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same" (T. 1.3.6: 4). Drawing on the literature, this claim of resemblance between observed and unobserved regularities is termed "the Principle of Uniformity of Nature," also known as "the Resemblance Principle" or "the Principle of Uniformity." If I am correct in my reading, the primary purpose of demonstrating that we can only *recognize* objects as such through categories is to show *that we can only recognize that nature follows a lawlike course*, as required by Newtonian physics, by means of categories.

Hume's so-called "skeptical solution" to the uniformity problem relies heavily on the faculty of imagination, which performs a different task from the faculty of reason. He wrote, "When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determin'd by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination" (T.1.3.6.12). The imagination is responsible for supporting inductive inference instead of reason. The concept is that when one has constantly observed similar objects or connected events, the mind instinctively tends to anticipate a similar consistency in the future. This is what Hume named habit or custom.

That explains the fact that Kant starts his A-Deduction by examining the cognitive role of our faculty of imagination. Consider what Kant has to say:

Every intuition contains a manifold in itself, which however would not be represented as such if the mind did not distinguish in the succession of impressions on one another; for **as contained in one moment** no representation can ever be anything other than absolute unity. Now in order for unity of intuition to come from this manifold (as, say, in the representation of space), it is necessary first to run through and then to take together this manifoldness, which action I call the **synthesis of apprehension**, since it is aimed directly at the intuition, which to be sure provides a manifold but can never effect this as such, and indeed as contained in one representation, without the occurrence of such a synthesis. (KrV, A100, original emphasis in bold.)

Kant reiterates the same idea expressed by Hume in the preceding passage, namely that the mind must "pass from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another" (the mind "must run through" the ideas) and "then unite them in the imagination" ("take together this manifoldness"). Imagination here is not guided or constrained by the rules dictated by categories. This finding is consistent with Kant's view laid out in the Metaphysical Deduction of the *Critique*.<sup>9</sup>

Kant's synthesis of reproduction of imagination is equivalent to Hume's empiricist principle of association of ideas/impressions:

It is, to be sure, a merely empirical law in accordance with which representations that have often followed or accompanied one another are finally associated with each other and thereby placed in a connection in accordance with which, even without the presence of the object, one of these representations brings about a transition of the mind to the other in accordance with a constant rule. (KrV, 100)

It is with the synthesis of recognition that Kant distances himself from Hume:

Without consciousness that that which we think is the very same as what we thought a moment before, *all reproductions in the series of representations would be in vain*. For it would be a new representation in our current state, would not belong at all to the act through which it had been gradually generated, and its manifold would never constitute a whole since it lacks unity only consciousness can obtain for it. (KrV, A103, emphasis added)

The crux of this section is this: Kant is not asserting that reproduction *would be impossible* without conceptual determinations; rather, he is stating that, without them, reproduction *would be in vain*, meaning that we would not be able to *recognize that* we are representing some object through our senses, nor would we be able to *recognize the a priori validity of the principle of uniformity of nature*. This disagreement between Hume and Kant lies in the fact that Hume believes that only imagination can empirically ensure this principle. In contrast, Kant believes that this principle has an *a priori validity* in so far as the rules of understanding constrain the<sup>10</sup> faculty of empirical imagination.

Now, that is all that is needed to challenge the intellectualist interpretation of imagination in Kant. In the A-Deduction, Kant does not maintain that the function of imagination is the same as the function of understanding. Instead, the faculty of imagination remains free from the conceptual constraints of understanding.

<sup>9</sup> And with Kant's primary claim of his *Third Critique* about the representation of the beautiful: "The powers of cognition [imagination and understanding] that are set into play by this representation [of the beautiful] are hereby in a free play, *since no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition*" (KU AA 5:217, emphasis added).

<sup>10</sup> I am not here to settle the dispute between Kant and Hume.

Kant's claim is that imagination must be affected by understanding only when that is necessary for the recognition that we represent objects through the senses.

### 3. Imagination in the Second Step of the B-Deduction

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Kant is suggesting a mere epistemic possibility in his statements at A89/B122 and A90–1/B122–123 just to be ruled out. This conceptualist reading posits that understanding is responsible for transforming the chaotic manifold of sensations devoid of reference into the representation of objects. When Kant states that “categories are conditions of the possibility of experience and are thus also valid a priori of all objects of experience” (B161), he is implying that without categories, we could never represent something *as an object*, i.e., *recognizing that* (“erkennen daß”) what we are representing is in fact an object, i.e., a mind-independent entity.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, in the second step of the B-Deduction, Kant must demonstrate that categories of understanding are indeed conditions for representing something as an object.

According to Longuenesse (1998), the second step of the B-Deduction is simple. She argues that Kant's aim is not to limit the scope of his demonstration but rather to radicalize his deductive process by revising his previous thoughts about how objects are given to us through the *Transcendental Aesthetic*. Kant contends that without understanding, we cannot represent any object, and Longuenesse finds support for this interpretation in the enigmatic footnote of Section 26.

Space, represented **as an object** (as is required in geometry), contains more than the mere form of intuition, namely the comprehension of the manifold given under the form of sensibility in an intuitive representation, so that the form of intuition merely gives the manifold, but the formal intuition gives unity of the representation. In the *Aesthetic*, I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only to note that it precedes all concepts, though to be sure it presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible. For since through it (as the understanding determines the sensibility) space or time are first given as intuitions, the unity of this a priori intuition belongs to space and time, and not to the concept of the understanding (Sect. 24). (KrV, B160n. Original emphasis in bold)

The meticulous reader should bear in mind that, in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, Kant not only states that space and time are the *forms of sensible intuition* but also contends that they are *pure intuitions*, meaning that they are not merely the form of what appears to our outer and inner sense but are also the *immediate* and *singular* representations of the very space (A25/B39) and time (A32/B47). As for space in particular, Kant explicitly claims that we can already represent what he calls an “infinite magnitude” (B40) without any concepts whatsoever, i.e., without —which obviously includes the concept of space. This notion of pure intuitions is a prime example of Kant's nonconceptualism. Without the category of quantity or any other concept, the subject can already represent an infinite magnitude without comprehending what “infinite magnitude” means.<sup>12</sup>

Kant proceeds further and ponders how such pure intuitions are possible. At this point, he brings in an essential concept: space and time are also *forms of human sensibility*. We can only immediately represent a priori space and time because they are a priori in us as formal constitutions of our sensibility (B41). Upon concluding his *Aesthetics*, Kant arrived at three interrelated yet distinct pivotal concepts: *forms of appearance*, *pure intuitions*, and *forms of human sensibility*. It is worth noting that all of them are nonconceptual representations: of what appears to the inner and outer sense and of the spatiotemporal relations.

In the enigmatic footnote, Kant emphasizes that Space and Time come before all discursive concepts, including the very ideas of SPACE and TIME as the form of what appears to the inner and outer senses and the very spatiotemporal relations. He further remarks that the unity of Space and Time requires a synthesis that the senses cannot provide. The outcome of this intellectual synthesis is what he refers to as a “formal intuition,” the sensibility being determined by the understanding. Consequently, two concepts are established: “pure intuition,” representing Space and Time *nonconceptually*, and “formal intuition,” representing Space and Time as objects but now conceptually. The question then arises as to how these notions can coalesce consistently. Does the notion of “formal intuition” replace the old notion of “pure intuition,” or is it one more notion to be added to the others? The key to understanding the note is Kant's “represented as an object.” We are returning to the goal of Kant's Transcendental Deduction, which was discussed in the second section.

Within the realm of Kantian scholarship, it is usually read that without the category of quantity, space cannot be represented *as an object*. Consequently, without representing space as an object of our outer sense, nothing that appears to us within spatial relations could be represented as an object of our intuitions either. Thus, the critical inquiry is how the Kantian can demonstrate that without a synthesis of understanding, we cannot represent space and anything within it *as objects*.

According to Longuenesse's interpretation of the troublesome footnote, the connection between categories and spatiotemporal sensory intuition is the Kantian figurative synthesis (*synthesis speciosa*) mentioned

<sup>11</sup> One may wonder what the difference is between *representing objects* and representing something *as an object*. The answer is that the representation of objects is the representation of mind-independent entities. However, representing *something as an object* means recognizing that (“erkennen daß”) what we represent are mind-independent entities.

<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the subject can represent a black hole (there are already several pictures of them) without having the faintest idea that a black hole is a region in space where the gravitational pull is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape from it once it passes a boundary called the event horizon.

in Section 24. This determination is “an act of the understanding (*Vermögen zu urteilen*),” and is prior to the actual production of any discursive judgment, thus preceding the reflection of any concept and, even more so the subsumption of intuitions under categories (1998, p. 216). This conceptualist reading requires Longuenesse to re-examine the entire *Transcendental Aesthetic*: “Space and time are given only if understanding determines sensibility” (1998, p. 216). Therefore, the new idea of formal intuition must replace the old notion of pure intuition (the nonconceptual representation of space as an infinite magnitude), meaning the pre-conceptual representation of space as an infinite magnitude.

It is said that prior to concepts and classifications, space is determined by the “non-discursive” (Longuenesse) or “pre-conceptual” (Waxman 1991) activity of a synthesis speciosa that unifies the manifold of places, forms, etc., into a single homogeneous, boundless magnitude. The question is: where is the evidence for this? Rather than an argument, we have a “story” (Strawson 1966, p. 86). The figurative or speciosa synthesis of understanding is *the tertium* that binds the two heterogeneous faculties of understanding and sensibility through its transcendental activity. But how? Well, as it is both understanding and sensibility *at the same time*, the synthesis links the categories to that which is given to sensibility. This “story” is essentially nothing more than a rhetorical solution to the problem of the B-Deduction.<sup>13</sup>

Allison (2004) denies any pre-categorical unity of space and time (115–116). He argues that the forms of space and time in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* are not synthesized wholes but rather a blind, discontinuous jumble of positions, shapes, and figures. According to Allison, the Kantian concept of pure intuition encompasses three distinct phenomena. First, one must differentiate between forms of intuition and formal intuitions, as Kant explicitly states in the footnote. The former is the indeterminate form of pure intuition, which Allison calls “pre-intuition” (2004, p. 116), while the latter is the determinate form of pure intuition. The conceptualists believe that the subject can only represent space as an object when the understanding combines what initially appears to be a chaotic and disconnected multitude of places into a homogeneous, infinite magnitude, as determined by the category of quantity (*KrV*, B40).

According to Allison’s reading, prior to assigning categories, an undetermined array of forms and locations exists, which we cannot witness as distinct forms or outlines. Nevertheless, Allison addresses the previously posed inquiry: how can the Kantian prove that, without the category of quantity, we cannot see or represent the object of our outer senses as an infinite magnitude? However, if such an argument does exist, one must consider where it is situated.

Let me take stock. Kant’s Transcendental Deduction was necessary due to the lack of an “intellectus archetypus,” which resulted in a disconnection between understanding and sensibility, between categories (or concepts in general), and sensible intuitions. Since understanding cannot create an object, concepts are empty without intuitions, and since sensibility is unsuitable for comprehending what it represents, intuitions are blind without concepts. The Transcendental Deduction strives to demonstrate that, despite their differences, categories apply to the objects of sensible intuitions. A tertium is needed to connect the categories to appearances. However, what makes the undertaking of the Deduction unavoidable is the “real metaphysical possibility” (rather than a “mere epistemic possibility” to be ruled out at the end of the Deduction) that objects can be given to the senses without any reference to the synthesis functions of the concepts—that is, we can represent objects through the senses independently of any concepts whatsoever. This is the nonconceptual content of experience in a sensory sense: the independence of intuitions from any concepts.

In the first step of the B-Deduction—let me call it the “top-down” Deduction<sup>14</sup>—this tertium initially takes the form of the transcendental apperception. If the given objects could be represented by the senses without the need of conceptualization, then “something would be represented in me that could not be thought of, meaning that the representation would be either impossible or nothing to me” (B132). In other words, the “I think must accompany my representations” for them to become something to me. Apperception is the tertium that first links the categories of understanding to sensibility, thus bridging the two disparate faculties of the soul/mind.

The goal of the first step of the B-Deduction is to prove that the objects given to our senses must also be represented as existing objectively. As Kant states in his *Prolegomena*, categories are “the condition for determining judgments as objectively valid” (*Proleg.* Sect. 39, AA 4:324). Kant illustrates this in his example, showing that my judgment that bodies are heavy can only be objectively true or false if I conceive bodies as (material) substances in space and heaviness as one of their properties (B142). The “top-down” argument is that I can only represent these objects of the senses to be objectively true or false when I think of them according to categories, for example, by judging that bodies are heavy. Thus, it has been established that the objects of sensible intuition must fall under categories whenever we think of them and make judgments

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, if we are correct and the B-Deduction poses a real metaphysical possibility, by intellectualizing the synthesis and, thus, intuition, this move renders the Transcendental Deduction superfluous.

By reusing Strawson’s term “story of a synthesis” (1966, p. 32), I am not endorsing his critique of what he also calls “Transcendental Psychology.” According to Strawson: “In pursuit of these aims, I have relegated some features of the work to a very subordinate place, notably much architectonic detail and much of the theory of ‘transcendental psychology.’ I do not think that anything can be made of the latter. The attempt to reconstruct it is a profitable exercise in the philosophy of mind. However, I have thought that some loss of balance and clarity of line would certainly result if I made such an attempt in the present book” (1966, p. 11). In contrast, I see no issue in supposing that Kant (like Hume before him) was undertaking what we now understand to be the philosophy of mind and, more generally, “cognitive science.” However, in his 1974 article on Imagination and Perception, Strawson rehabilitates Kant’s notion of synthesis as a function of imagination. Nevertheless, my criticism of Longuenesse et al. is that their solution to the second step of the B-Deduction is merely rhetorical, lacking in argument.

<sup>14</sup> I am utilizing the terms “top-down” and “bottom-up” as per Mensch (2005).



about them. The question is how this is possible, given that there is the metaphysical possibility that objects *can* (and not in the subjective “could”) appear without concepts.

To oversimplify enormously, the first step of the B-Deduction can be formulated as quite a simple argument:

1. I think that what appears sensibly to me exists objectively, for example, when I judge that bodies are heavy.
2. My judgments are only objectively true or false if what sensibly appears to me is brought under the categories of understanding, e.g., when I judge that bodies are heavy, I categorize “bodies” as substances and “heavy” as one of their properties.
3. Therefore, as I think and judge, what sensibly appears to me is under the categories of understanding.<sup>15</sup>

In the second step of the B-Deduction—let me call it the “bottom-up” B-Deduction—the tertium is referred to as a figurative synthesis or synthesis speciosa “as an effect of the understanding on the sensibility” (B154, emphasis added). The figurative synthesis of imagination is the tertium that now links sensibility to the categories of understanding, thus bridging the two disparate faculties of the soul. Can we comprehend Kant’s enigmatic metaphor? Let me outline the goal of Kant’s Deduction of the second edition regarding my nonconceptualist reading of imagination in Kant. The center of attention must be the precise statements at A89/B122 and A90–1/B122–3 as a metaphysical possibility. This implies that, apart from any concepts, we are aware of objects, even though we cannot *recognize* that what we represent exists objectively. We must remember the conclusion of the first section: what is in question *is not the possibility of representing objects through our senses without concepts* (the so-called claim of the nonconceptual content of experience in the sensory sense); rather, it is the possibility of *cognition of whatever we represent through the senses as an object*, that is, existing objectively.

In the first step of the B-Deduction, this cognition takes the intellectual form of a thought, that is, the recognition that something—initially represented nonconceptually—exists objectively. Categories are conditions for recognizing (thinking and judgment) that what is given to our senses exists objectively. In contrast, in the second step of the B-Deduction, this *cognition* takes the sensible form of the *apprehension* of something given to our senses as something that exists objectively. The categories, then, are the conditions that enable us to *apprehend* space and everything in it as existing objectively sensibly. Why was it necessary for Kant to have this second step?

The answer to this can be found in the footnote at B160n, as he had to explain natural science and geometry. Without demonstrating that categories are necessary for apprehending the objects of our senses as existing independently of the mind, natural science and geometry would have no basis. To oversimplify enormously, Kant’s primary argument of the second step of the B-Deduction can be formulated concisely yet compellingly as simple as that. The first premise states that

4. We apprehend space as objectively existing (figurative synthesis or synthesis speciosa). The second premise is a conditional one, asserting that
5. We can only apprehend space as existing objectively if we represent it as a homogeneous magnitude according to the category of quantity.
6. The category of quantity applies to space and, by extension, to all it contains.

This understanding provides a straightforward interpretation of the complex footnote. Kant had in mind when he referred to “space, represented **as an object** as is really required in geometry” (B160n, Kant’s emphasis in bold) not space as an object of our representation, but rather the *recognition* that it objectively exists outside of the mind. Likewise, “the formal intuition that gives unity of the representation” (B160n) is not a substitute for pure intuition, or the representation of the form of intuition, but rather the *recognition* that the representation of space is an entity that exists objectively (see de Pereira, 2013, 2017).

Finally, one may wonder if there is a difference between what Kant states about imagination in the Metaphysical Deduction and its role in the Transcendental Deduction. In the Metaphysical Deduction, Kant had already introduced imagination as a function that is “blind,” that is, as a function that does not require consciousness, reflection, or any concepts. In the A-Deduction, the synthesis of imagination is conceived as a “passive power” of the mind, involving the blind association between the content of sensible representation (reproductive imagination). The provisional exposition of A-Deduction aimed to demonstrate that what we represent through imagination (the synthesis of reproduction of imagination) is quite independent of any concepts (synthesis of recognition). As is well known, in the second edition of the Critique, Kant revised his stance and reconceptualized imagination as an active faculty of the mind. However, this reconceptualization does not change the original claim that imagination (passive or active) remains independent of understanding. Even though Kant acknowledges the metaphysical independence of imagination from understanding

<sup>15</sup> This is the result of what Kant calls the “objective deduction,” namely the proof of the objective validity of the categories. However, Kant also envisages a “subjective deduction” that focuses on the relationship between the faculties of understanding and sensibility in the individual subject (i.e., the human mind). What is the difference here? None! If the argument is sound, then the faculty of imagination, together with the faculty of sensibility, must be determined by the faculty of understanding, provided that cognition (“Erkenntnis”) is possible. It is worth noting, however, that in this way, I have avoided the usual rhetorical solution (*petitio principii*) by appealing to the imagination as a “tertium” (half sensibility and half understanding) that could fill the gap between sensibility and understanding.

in the B-Deduction, he endeavors to establish that the categories must determine the object apprehended actively by imagination, *provided cognition ("Erkenntnis") of something as an object is possible*.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this difference, Kant's B-Deduction aligns with his postulation in the *Metaphysical Deduction* that distinguishes the role of imagination from the role of understanding. Upon further examination, Kant's argument does not mean that without intellectualizing the synthesis of apprehension, no objects would be represented in sensibility (the so-called conceptualist reading of experience in the sensory sense). Rather, as he argued in the A-Deduction, Kant maintains that without subordinating the synthesis of apprehension to a transcendental synthesis of understanding under the rules of synthesis dictated by the categories of understanding, we would be unable to recognize that we represent space as an object.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

In this final section, I address the questions raised in the introduction. First, to what extent can imagination be considered "a blind function of the soul" (A78/B103)? The answer here is straightforward: imagination without understanding can be considered "blind" in the same sense that sensible intuition is "blind" without concepts. It is blind, not in the sense that without understanding, *we do not represent anything*; instead, it is blind in the relevant sense that *we do not know what we are representing in our outer sense*. This statement is the essence of what is referred to in the literature as the nonconceptual content of sensory experience.

An example is when a newborn baby sees a dog for the first time. The baby's imagination will likely form a mental image of a four-legged creature (likely presented and stored in his quaternary visual cortex). However, the baby does not comprehend what his conscious mental image represents in space. Can the baby recognize a canine without understanding what one is? The answer is no. This is why the infant's imagination is blind.

Let me now address the second question: How is a synthesis of imagination most often performed non-consciously? When Kant speaks of "consciousness," he does not mean what we today understand as phenomenal consciousness. Instead, Kant's use of "consciousness" signifies "self-consciousness," which he equates to apperception through concepts.<sup>17</sup> The answer is simple: imagination is not constrained by the rules dictated by understanding, except when it is under some cognitive demand, it is usually carried out *non-consciously*.<sup>18</sup>

Now, let me address the third question: How can we comprehend Kant's distinction between a "pure synthesis" and the "empirical synthesis" in a non-metaphorical sense? Kant's texts provide no answer. Strawson misses the point when he claims that the synthesis "is empirical (that is, non-necessary) in so far as it happens to consist in the application of this or that particular empirical concept (elephant or ink bottle); it is transcendental in so far as the application of such concepts represents, though in a form which is quite contingent, the utterly general requirements of a possible experience" (1974, p. 54). Bennett comes closer when she states:

[...] a transcendental synthesis is not an act at all; yet, like empirical synthesis, it underlies the awareness of states of unity. What an empirical synthesizing act has in common with the transcendental synthesis which is not an act at all is that each involves the notions of satisfaction of criteria and of intellectual capacity. The relevance of these to empirical synthesis is easy to see: arriving by an empirical synthesis at the knowledge that this book is the one I saw an hour ago involves grasping and applying criteria for the identity of physical things. (Bennett 1966, pp. 113)

I suggest that empirical synthesis is what our brains (within the visual cortex) usually perform when we contemplate anything, such as a dog. After an unconscious, one-dimensional, inverted, blurry image is projected into our visual cortex (quite like the inverted image projected onto our retina), a final picture of a four-legged animal appears in our quaternary visual cortex. This cognitive process is not, of course, self-conscious but rather computational and guided by algorithms. In contrast, "pure synthesis" is what Kant usually calls a "schema" of a concept, that is, a practical rule dictated by a concept to form a picture. Consider one of Kant's examples:

Thus, we think of a triangle as an object by being conscious of the composition of three straight lines under a rule according to such an intuition can always be exhibited. *Now this unity of the rule determines every manifold*, and limits it to conditions that make the unity of apperception possible... (KrV, A105, emphasis added)

Consider now Kant's example of the empirical concept of a dog:

The concept of a dog signifies a rule in accordance with which my imagination can specify the shape of a four-footed animal in general, without being restricted to any single particular that experience offers me or any possible image that I can exhibit in *concreto*. (KrV, B180)

<sup>16</sup> This point has been emphasized by Hanna (2020), Young (1988), and De Almeida (2015), who argue in favor of a non-intellectualist interpretation of imagination in Kant.

<sup>17</sup> This is only a terminological issue: whenever Kant talks of consciousness, he means self-consciousness. Thus, it does not mean that Kant does not recognize the existence of lower-order forms of consciousness.

<sup>18</sup> This occurs when we contemplate nature and art objects from a cognitively uninterested point of view, as explained in Kant's *Third Critique*.

In both cases, the fundamental idea is the same: the discursive concept “serves as the rule for the cognition of outer appearances by means of the unity of the manifold that is thought through it” (KrV, A106), that is, it serves as the rule to carry out the synthesis of imagination, i.e., to form a mental picture of an object even when it is not present.<sup>19</sup> Finally, this explains *non-metaphorically* how imagination can be seen as a *tertium* between the lower-level capacity of sense intuition and the higher-order faculty of understanding: “schemas” are rules derived from concepts that allow for apprehension by the senses.

However, someone might object that I am missing “the difference between the putative rules of the synthesis of imagination, which are rules for ordering spatially and temporally what is sensibly given, and the rules expressed by concepts, which are rules of recognition, i.e., rules to identify the kind of object that is sensibly given” (De Almeida 2015, p. 24).<sup>20</sup>

To begin with, I see little point in postulating a *rule* for ordering spatially and temporally what is given. The ordering spatially and temporally of what is sensibly given is independent of any rule because it is not a *deed* of imagination but something that happens entirely passively in the first place. Kant is quite clear when he states that: “I call that in appearance which corresponds to sensation its matter, *but that which allows the manifold of appearance to be intuited as ordered in certain relations I call the **form** of appearance*” (KrV, A20/B34. The emphasis in cursive is mine. The emphasis in bold is original). In other words, not a *rule* but a *form* of appearance is involved in such ordering.

Second, the primary function of concepts is to classify or characterize something rather than recognize it. Consider, for example, the so-called empty concepts, such as the concept of GOD. This concept characterizes a being as omnipresent, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. Since there is no sensible intuition of such a being, there is no recognition. In other words, concepts per se are not rules; as Kant carefully puts it, *they serve as a rule* (KrV, A106) for recognizing something (the concept of GOD provides us with no rule for recognizing anything). However, that only happens when we are about to apprehend something. Only one rule of synthesis is involved in cognition, and a concept provides this rule.

Therefore, we can imagine a four-legged animal without possessing the relevant concept of a dog. In this sense, imagination is not constrained by the schema or rule dictated by the concept of DOG. The emerging picture of a four-legged animal is nonconceptual; that is, the subject does not need to possess the relevant concept of DOG to specify canonically what they are imagining. However, we can also imagine a four-legged animal when we follow the schema that the discursive concept of a dog provides. In that case, we do know what we picture as a *dog*.

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### Abbreviations of Kant’s works

FSS—*Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit der vier syllogistischen Figuren* Ak. 2 (1762). *The False Subtlety of the Four-Syllogistic Figures*, translated by David Walford in collaboration with Ralf Meerbote. Edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

JL—*Jäsche Logik*, Ak. 9 (1800). *Logic*, edited by J. B., in *Lectures on Logic*, edited and translated by J. Michael Young. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 521-640.

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<sup>19</sup> Here my interpretation converges with the interpretation of Sellars (1978) who considers imagination as the capacity to produce mental images. For a criticism of Sellars’s view, see Young (1988).

<sup>20</sup> This is the objection that Almeida raised against Young (1988).

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