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Kant's Theory of Imagination: From Immaturity to Enlightenment

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This book is written with two goals in mind: (1) to clarify and develop Immanuel Kant's overall theory of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*); and (2) to better understand "the circulation of enlightenment" in Kant's critical philosophy.

Introduction: The Circulation of Enlightenment

Kant's critical philosophy is characterized by the concept of enlightenment as a process of circulation. According to Jurgen Habermas' interpretation, Kant claims that when members of the public communicate freely with one another they are enlightened by their own ability to reason. This free and open communication presupposes the individual's ability to reason and this is called "the circulation of enlightenment." Both reason and sensibility are utilized through imagination.

Since Martin Heidegger's crucial work interpreting Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, there has been a lot of ink spilled on Kant's theory of the imagination, especially concerning the theoretical role of the transcendental synthesis of imagination. However, there are surprisingly few examinations into the practical role of imagination as reflected in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of Judgment*, as well as other moral and historical works. This thesis investigates the theory of imagination as the missing link between Kant's theoretical and practical philosophies. First, I extend Kant's theory of the imagination beyond its theoretical function and shed light on other formative functions that have been ignored. Then, I reconstruct the imagination as the faculty that socially and historically cultivates morality and I explain how it contributes to Kant's "circulation of enlightenment." The theory of the imagination is the core of Kant's critical philosophy.

Part I: Imagination and Theoretical Reason

The first section considers Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which revolutionized Western philosophy, especially the theory of imagination. Kant understood the concept of imagination as the ability to "synthesize" objects rather than simply recalling or associating objects. The synthesis of imagination does not necessarily entail empirical observation in order to be performed. Theoretically, as long as the order of experience is

established, this act is a fundamental function of the mind. The theory of synthesis is at the heart of a transcendental philosophy that addresses conditions that concern the possibilities of experience.

This book interprets the *Critique of Pure Reason* in order to distinguish the overall function of imagination from "local synthesis" and "global synthesis" by posing two questions. The first question asks how the synthesis of imagination creates the order of the "world" we experience (Chapter 1). The second question explores how the subject of synthesis becomes self-aware when they experience the "world" (Chapter 2). By delving into these questions, this book develops a basic theory of imagination based on Kant's philosophy. It is a theory of productive imagination that creates the self-consciousness of "I" as well as the fundamental order of the "world." Kant's "Enlightenment Project" progressed from the concept of synthesis and the relationship between the "world" and "I."

Part II: Imagination and Practical Reason

The second section considers Kant's writings on practical philosophy to understand what it means in the context of his critical philosophy. In this book, "practical philosophy" is interpreted as a multilayered structure where morality is gradually realized. In the "grounding" stage of Kant's practical philosophy, he attempted to establish an a priori foundation of morality by abstracting empirical conditions, such as the psychology of human nature and a person's social environment. However, in the steps that follow the "grounding" stage, Kant explores how morality may be realized in accordance with real human conditions. Once the practical philosophy of "grounding" is clarified, I discuss why imagination was not the chosen subject (Chapter 3). Then, I consider imagination's role in the context of enlightenment during the developmental stage of practical philosophy (Chapter 4).

Although the relationship between Kant's practical philosophy and imagination has rarely been discussed, practical philosophy entails imagination as an intermediary force between sensibility and reason that is indispensable for enlightenment. In this sense, imagination is the engine of enlightenment that also serves to elucidate a more holistic understanding of Kant's practical philosophy.

Part III: Imagination and *Critique of Judgment*

The final section addresses the fundamental problem of the "circulation of enlightenment." Kant's later work, *Critique of Judgment*, deepened understanding of critical philosophy and the theory of imagination. In this work, imagination is no longer considered a "synthesis" operation. According to Kant, the imagination is "free," even when it exercises itself against beautiful objects. This "freedom of imagination" results in a universal "feeling of life." Kant suggests that enlightenment is based on a universal communication of feelings. He develops an emotional approach to the "Enlightenment Project" as a result. To illustrate this approach, I analyze the theory of imagination in aesthetic experiences, following the discussion of *Critique of Judgment* (Chapter 5). Then, I demonstrate that imagination enables the communication of feelings "universally" and how this is significant for enlightenment (Chapter 6).

Kant changes the conception of enlightenment by envisioning an empathetic community where feelings are shared universally through imagination. The *Critique of Judgment* is a rich, esoteric description of humanity existing as a union of perfect rational beings and imperfect sentient beings with imagination and feeling.

But Kant was also exposed to a range of German and British critics of Wolff, and there were strong doses of Aristotelianism and Pietism represented in the philosophy faculty as well. Kant's favorite teacher was Martin Knutzen (1713–1751), a Pietist who was heavily influenced by both Wolff and the English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704). Kant had a burst of publishing activity in the years after he returned from working as a private tutor. In 1754 and 1755 he published three scientific works – one of which, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), was a major book in which, among other things, he developed what later became known as the nebular hypothesis about the formation of the solar system. Kant's *Theory of the Imagination* Samantha Matherne, UC Santa Cruz Entry for the *Routledge Handbook of the Imagination*, ed. Amy Kind (forthcoming) §1. Kant and the Power of the Imagination Immanuel Kant's theory of the imagination is one of the most enduring aspects of his philosophy, inspiring philosophers ranging from Hegel to Sellars, Heidegger to Strawson. The enduring legacy of Kant's account is due, in part, to his broad conception of the imagination. Moreover, given that he explicitly distinguishes between different levels of imaginative activity, e.g., empirical and transcendental, and different types of imaginative activity, e.g., productive and reproductive, how are we to understand the underlying unity of the imagination as Kant characterizes it? According to Immanuel Kant, enlightenment was man's release from self-incurred tutelage. Enlightenment was the process by which the public could rid themselves of intellectual bondage after centuries of slumbering. After providing a careful... I am a working professional with a deep passion for writing who likes to share his thoughts using credible sources and facts. Picture of Kant. What can Kant's philosophy offer to modern people? The answer is: surprisingly much. Immanuel Kant was born in 1724 in Königsberg, Prussia. His philosophical ideas thrived during the enlightenment period. This was an intellectual and philosophical movement that swept across Europe in the 18th century. A major component of this movement was the gradual decline of religious belief, hence, the growth of secularism. Kant recognised this developing phenomenon in society and sought to remedy it. Kant's moral philosophy is a theory of deontological ethics. This sounds much more complex than it is. But in short, it is a theory that determines the morality of an action. It is based on whether the action being carried out is in itself moral, not based on the nature of the consequences of that action. In "What is Enlightenment?", Kant claims that no women are currently enlightened. Here I argue that this exclusion is due to certain legal restrictions guiding Kant's conception of enlightenment. As enlightenment is intended to take place in society, it appears that Kant has a specific legal context in mind that affects its enactment. His twofold conception of citizenship and the dimension of subordination he puts forward by restricting the private use of reason will prove useful in clarifying those legal restrictions. It thus seems unlikely that Kant intended women to take an active part in e...