

Kant's Theory of Imagination: From Immaturity to Enlightenment

Nobutoshi Nagamori

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.