

Imagination and Contingency: Overcoming the Problems of Kant's Transcendental Deduction

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Kant's transcendental philosophy is one of the most important philosophies of modernity. This may also be one of the reasons why it is the object of vast controversies. Among others, these controversies concern the question of whether Kant's philosophy sets the standard for every new philosophy or whether Kant is at fault for having founded a philosophy of boundless domination, as for instance Theodor W. Adorno has argued¹. But the most interesting question, it seems to me, is the question of the point at which Kant's philosophy reaches its own limits, such that we can go further by immanently criticizing it. Without doubt there are different aspects of Kant's philosophy that can be understood as places where Kant's philosophy reaches its own limits. In what follows I want to focus just on one aspect: namely, Kant's conception of the *imagination*. I will argue that Kant's conception of the imagination is one of the places where Kant's philosophy reaches its own limits. This becomes clear in one of the most famous concerns of Kant's philosophy: the transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding. Kant invokes the imagination in the course of attempting to justify the legitimacy of these concepts. This invocation is of special interest because Kant implicitly acknowledges that the imagination is an essential faculty of the human understanding.

That said, Kant is not clear about how essential the imagination actually is. In the first version of the transcendental deduction, Kant claims that human cognition has three sources: sensibility, imagination and understanding. As Kant puts it, "There are three subjective sources of cognition on which rests the possibility of an experience as such and of cognition of its objects: sense, imagination and apperception"². In the second version of the transcendental deduction, Kant changed his mind. Kant says nothing similar about the role of the imagination in the second edition in comparison with what Kant says about it in the first edition. Kant seeks in the second edition to explain imagination only as an intermediary between sensibility and understanding. On the one hand, imagination belongs to sensibility: it connects representations that stem from sensibility. On the other hand, it also belongs to understanding: Imagination connects and applies the productivity of the understanding to the *a priori* forms of sensibility (i.e., to space and time) Kant speaks of the "productive imagination" as "being spontaneous"³. The imagination performs syntheses of the understanding on the *a priori* forms of sensibility.

¹ Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. by Rodney Livingstone (Polity Press, 2001), 174ff.

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1999), A 115.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 152.

In the second edition of the transcendental deduction, then, Kant takes care to state that there are only two sources of human cognition: sensibility and understanding. Even though the imagination is somewhat downgraded by this move, Kant nevertheless still makes use of it at an important juncture in the transcendental deduction. One may wonder whether the important role that Kant still attributes to the imagination justifies the apparent downgrading of its status. In some sense Kant seems to be aware that the imagination could be troublesome for his official doctrine that the human cognition presupposes the interplay between sensibility and understanding. Imagination threatens to disturb this interplay. I want to show that Kant is right to suspect that the imagination is a troublesome faculty by disturbing the interplay between sensibility and understanding.

The relevance of the imagination is bound up with another basic philosophical concept: namely, that of contingency. What human beings do is constantly exposed to contingency. Human actions do not always succeed. They succeed on the basis of skills *and* luck. This means that contingency plays an essential role in what human beings do. So it is important to understand the sense in which human cognition makes room for contingency. The question about the nature of contingency has often been answered in the following way: When something or some state of affairs exists contingently, it is always possible that it can also not exist.⁴ In other words, the existence of what is contingent implies that its existence or, for that matter, its non-existence is possible, not necessary. How can we make sense of a state of affairs or of something that exists only contingently? How can human cognition make room for something that is contingent in this sense? These questions are essential with regard to Kant's philosophy because Kant tends to draw a very tight connection between sensibility and understanding. But if such a tight connection holds between them, the threat then arises that no room is given in this context to contingency. In this sense, I take the question of the imagination to be intrinsically linked to the question of what contingency is. The connection between the imagination and contingency may explain why the imagination is a troublesome faculty both within the framework of Kant's philosophy and beyond.

In what follows I will argue that the imagination is troublesome because it has a different time order. The time order is different in comparison with the time order that Kant has in view. According to Kant, human cognition relies on the presence and exercise of faculties. But the imagination is not a faculty that represents (cognizes) something present in intuition.⁵ It is a faculty that represents something whose presence remains inherently contingent. In what follows my aim is to show, in an admittedly sketchy way, how Kant falls short of providing a satisfying account of imagination and how it is relevant for human cognition.

My paper has five parts. In the first part I try to examine the second version of the transcendental deduction and reconstruct how the imagination is supposed to come into play in Kant's argument. In the second part I explain why Kant does not succeed in capturing how the imagination works. Then in the third part I connect his treatment of the imagination with the question of contingency. In the fourth part I propose that we distinguish two conceptions of the productivity of human cognition: one that Kant explains in terms of the understanding

⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 9.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 151.

but also one that we can just as well explain in terms of the imagination. Finally in the fifth part I elaborate the consequences that emerge from a more satisfying conception of the imagination for what Kant wants to achieve in the transcendental deduction.

I. Kant's project of a transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding

Kant's transcendental deduction aims to demonstrate that the pure concepts of the understanding are constitutive for objectivity as such. The transcendental deduction is a very challenging instance of philosophy (to say the least) that I cannot try to fully reconstruct and scrutinize here.⁶ For my purposes it is sufficient to highlight three aspects of Kant's project in the transcendental deduction. First, he argues that knowledge is only possible if representations are linked to one another on the basis of the unity of experience. Kant explains the unity in question by arguing for the necessity and role of transcendental apperception (transcendental subjectivity).⁷

Second, Kant claims that the transcendental apperception is intrinsically connected to a production of connections (as Kant says, it is based on "a synthesis of representations"⁸). The unity of experience is constituted only if representations are brought into connections. Kant holds that the connections in question originate in judgments and thereby rely on the forms that establish unities of representations in judgments. (In passing I may note that Kant justifies his account by invoking a very eccentric conception of what a judgment is: "A judgment", Kant says, "is nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the *objective* unity of apperception."⁹) Note that the forms of judgment become categories of the understanding (in Kant's sense) insofar as they apply to possible experience. It is thus Kant's claim that everything given in intuition is subject to the categories.¹⁰ If this is the case, representations are linked to one another on the basis of the unity of the perspective of a subject.

But Kant has not yet finished explaining the constitution of the unity of experience by making these points. In a third move, he reminds us that the cognition of a being that can and, indeed, must also have sensuous intuitions is always bound up with receptivity. On this view, receptive intuition and spontaneous understanding must work together if such a being aims to gain knowledge. With the second aspect, the unity of experience is only explained on the basis of the understanding. For this reason Kant asks how given intuitions are brought into the scope of this unity. As Kant puts it, "It will be shown, from the mode in which the empirical intuition is given in sensibility, that its unity is no other than that which the category ... prescribes to the manifold of a given intuition in general."¹¹ Kant tries to support this claim by

⁶ For an illuminating reconstruction of the transcendental deduction in the light of Hegel's criticism of it, cf. Sally Sedgwick: "Hegel on the Transcendental Deduction of the First *Critique*", in: *Hegel's Critique of Kant* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 98-127.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 132.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 133.

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 141, emphasis in the original German.

¹⁰ Cf. Kant's résumé in: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, § 20.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 144f.

recourse to “*productive imagination*”¹². As I interpret Kant here, he is claiming that if it is only judgments that can establish connections between representations, it remains obscure how an “I think” can receive and cognize single intuitions. Single intuitions can be accompanied by an “I think” only if they are situated within interrelated representations that form an encompassing space of interrelated representations of a subject, of a unified perspective. There has to be a way in which interrelations between intuitions are constituted – interrelations that are analogous to interrelations in judgments. As Kant would articulate this point: There has to be a faculty that enables interrelations among intuitions to come about. This faculty is the imagination.

According to Kant, the productive imagination makes an essential contribution to ensuring the objective validity of the pure concepts of the understanding. Imagination makes this contribution by relating intuitions to one another. Kant gives an explanation of what this means that resembles Husserl’s conception of appresentation.¹³ Consider an intuition of the front side of a house. Imagination relates such an intuition with intuitions of the back side, of the left and the right side, from different angles, with intuitions of rooms, floors and ceilings, and so on. Imagination forms relations like these by relating an actual intuition to intuitions that have been experienced in the past. In this sense, Wilfrid Sellars explains the products of the productive imagination as “*sense-image models of external objects*”¹⁴. Sense-image models combine sensuous and conceptual aspects of objects. As Sellars writes, “The basic idea is that what we perceive *of* the object in visual perception consists of those features which actually belong to the image-model, i.e., its proper and common-sensible qualities and relations. Also its perspectival structure.”¹⁵ If we want to elaborate this explanation with Sellars, we would have to distinguish between sense-image models of actual objects and sense-image models of types of objects.

But this is not what I want to do now. Rather, I am interested in how the productive imagination is taken to work. Kant clearly says how he takes the productive imagination to work. As he defines it, “Imagination is the faculty of representing an object even *without its presence* in intuition.”¹⁶ Imagination is the faculty that makes present what is not present. And this faculty is necessary if intuitions that are given in the present are constitutively related to intuitions that have been given in the past (and with conceptual representations). As Paul Guyer has it: Imagination achieves a “reproduction of previously given intuitions”¹⁷. What Sellars calls a “sense-image model” is a co-presence of different intuitions and determinations. Kant argues that the imagination connects intuitions in such a way that they represent objects like they are represented in judgments. The relations among intuitions

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 152, emphasis in the original German.

¹³ Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, tr. by Dorion Cairns (Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 108ff.

¹⁴ Wilfrid Sellars, “The Role of the Imagination in Kant’s Theory of Experience”, in *Kant’s Transcendental Metaphysics*, ed. by Jeffrey Sicha (Ridgeview Publishing Co., 2002), § 25.

¹⁵ Wilfrid Sellars, “The Role of the Imagination in Kant’s Theory of Experience”, § 38.

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 151, emphasis in the original German.

¹⁷ Paul Guyer, “The Deduction of the Categories: The Metaphysical and Transcendental Deductions“, in Paul Guyer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s “Critique of Pure Reason”* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 144.

thereby follow the categories by representing objects that are determinately conditioned by the categories.

II. The particular productivity of the imagination

According to Kant, the imagination has to be conceived as a faculty that is genuinely productive. Its productivity is twofold. On the one hand, imagination develops representations without the presence of the objects that have caused these representations. On the other hand, imagination connects representations with one another, e.g., the side of a house that is visible with sides that are not visible at a given moment. Imagination is productive by developing representations and by bringing about connections among representations.

But this explanation of the imagination only captures its function and significance in an overly narrow way. Imagination has a particular productivity that exceeds what Kant ascribes to it. Imagination is not restricted to intuitions that objects have been caused in the past or the present. Rather, imagination is the faculty that can develop representations of its own. With our imagination we can imagine green men on Mars or a super computer at the end of the universe. It is thus important to conceive the productivity of the imagination in ways that go beyond how Kant does this. It is a productivity that goes beyond what is given by the senses. Thus, a first attempt to capture the particular productivity of the imagination would emphasize that imagination is the faculty that brings forth representations of something that goes beyond the given. But what does it mean to say that representations of the imagination go beyond the given? This is, I take it, the most important question to answer if one wants to capture the particular productivity of the imagination. With Kant, it is right to say that imagination goes beyond what a subject has experienced. At this point, it is tempting to say: By going beyond what a subject has experienced, the imagination can be conceived as constructing objects of its own. But this thought falls short of achieving the critical aims of Kant's philosophy, for one of the most important lessons of Kant's philosophy is that we are not entitled to claim to know (cognize) objects if we cannot experience them. Objects have to be understood as objects of possible experience. If we want to abide by this Kantian lesson, it is not possible to say that the imagination constructs objects out of its own. For these objects would then be objects that could not be possibly experienced.

We need thus to give a different explanation of what the imagination does when it goes beyond what a subject has experienced. Such an explanation is available if we realize that what the imagination does has a particular temporal structure: It brings about a relation to the future. What the subject has experienced lies either in the past or the present. To go beyond what is given thus points to the future. Human beings do not relate in their imagination to something that is not present, to something that is given at another place or in the past. They relate rather to something that is situated in the future. Now, we have to answer the question of what it means that subjects relate to something situated in the future. I propose to explain what is situated in the future of a subject by saying: It is a "projection" of the subject in question. Subjects go beyond what they have experienced by relating themselves to projections. Imagination is a faculty to project something towards the future.

Consider the following illustration of how projections of the imagination may be understood. With my imagination I may develop the idea of surprising my friend Harry during his visit of Vienna, about which I know. If I carry through this idea, this opens up new possibilities, e.g., of buying a plane ticket that turns out to be very expensive; of not being able to go on holiday with my family, and so on. My idea of the surprise and the potential pleasure that I can give Harry is shown to be the projection that establishes connections among others of mine. In this way, imagination can establish connections that are based on something that is not given – in other words, on something that thereby functions as a projection. Understood in this way, imagination may be conceived as a faculty that is productive in a particular way. Kant does not consider this particular productivity of the imagination. He reduces it to a productivity that is closely circumscribed by its relation to his conception of the understanding.¹⁸

It may be obvious that Heidegger's conception of temporality and Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's philosophy provide an important background for conceiving the particular productivity of the imagination in this way. In his lecture course on Kant's *Critique of pure reason*, Heidegger argues that Kant does not realize that the essence of the imagination is temporality.¹⁹ We could reformulate Heidegger's critique of Kant by saying the following: Heidegger criticizes Kant for subordinating the imagination to the understanding. According to Heidegger, imagination is productive in a way that cannot be reduced to the understanding. Heidegger argues that although Kant has the means to understand how the imagination is genuinely productive, he doesn't use them. Consequently on Heidegger's perspective, it is necessary to investigate the imagination once again to see how Kant falls short in attempting to carry out his envisaged project in the transcendental deduction.

Such a reinvestigation of the imagination has to highlight two aspects. First, as we have already seen, the particular productivity of the imagination has a specific temporality. Imagination projects representations towards the future.²⁰ The projected representations are not completed in the present; they refer to an open future. Regarding human cognition, imagination is the faculty that goes beyond the present by referring to an open future. Second, imagination is not only a faculty that has objective purport. It has subjective purport as well. Imagination does not only connect representations of objects in intuition. Imagination connects projections of subjects of imagination in relation to objects. Imagination connects given representations to projections. In what follows I will call such a connection an *order of the imagination*.

III. Imagination and Contingency

¹⁸ In passing it is worth noting how Kant actually has the means to acknowledge this particular productivity of the imagination. He clearly implies that the imagination is the faculty of temporality. In the schematism chapter Kant speaks of transcendental determinations of time that are produced by the imagination. And the explanations that I have given thus far show a temporal structure, too. Imagination connects previously given intuitions with actual intuitions. What Kant fails to see is that temporality has a structure that does not end in the present. The structure of temporality is constitutively bound up with the future. Kant is right to claim that imagination produces determinations of time. But these determinations include the future as well.

¹⁹ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"*, tr. by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Indiana University Press, 1997), § 24.

²⁰ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. by John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (Harper & Row, 1962), § 48.

The particular productivity of the imagination has yet another characteristic. It is a productivity in the midst of which something can happen. It may not be immediately clear what I mean by this. I can explain it in the following way: Because the production of the imagination exceeds what is given in intuitions, it can be affected by what is given. What is given can turn out not to correspond to the connections that imagination produces. In its productivity imagination does not simply integrate what is given. It constitutively exceeds what is given. This is the reason why what is given can be experienced as something that goes against imagination's projections.

If I relate my ideas of what to do to the surprise of my friend Harry, which is caused by my presence in Vienna, the world may turn out not to be cooperative when I try to carry out this plan. On my way to the airport I can slip on something on the street and find myself in a hospital; in arriving at the airport I can realize that the ground staff is currently on strike, so that all flights are cancelled. Here something occurs that is not integrated by the determinations that the imagination produces; an aspect of resistance on the world's part makes itself manifest. An object or an event is contingent when it resists the productivity of human cognition by not corresponding with the order of the imagination. Such a non-correspondence may have different aspects: luck or chance may have played a decisive role in this case. It may be luck that the ground staff is on strike because (say) Harry delayed his travel plans and I wouldn't have met him in Vienna; or it may be chance that I slip on something on the street because this makes me meet an old friend again who works as a doctor in the hospital.

It is essential for the imagination that what it produces is open to resistance. So we have to criticize two widespread conceptions of the imagination. The first claims that imagination is a faculty that relates given representations of intuitions. This is the conception Kant holds. The second conception claims that imagination is the faculty of fiction.²¹ It follows that human beings are not only bound up with what is real. They also have a faculty to relate themselves to the possible. Imagination is this faculty. It is the faculty that enables us to live in worlds of fiction, in possible worlds.²² Both of these conceptions, however, reduce the potential of the imagination. This potential consists in relating what is given to something that is not given, i.e., to projections. Imagination is not a free play of representations. It is not a projection of a future independently of how the world is. Every projection relies on how the world is. It is, as Heidegger puts it, a "thrown projection" – a projection that emerges from thrownness.²³ Imagination works on the basis of our situatedness within the world. It is of great importance to give an adequate account of what this situatedness in the world means for the work of the imagination.

It has often been argued that our imagination cannot work solely on its own. It is in need of materials, and it finds such materials from the world. Thus, on this view, the work of the imagination has to be understood as a recombination of materials that it finds from the world. But this conclusion is not justified. It is a misconception of the imagination to claim

²¹ Cf. David Novitz, *Knowledge, Fiction, and Imagination* (Temple University Press, 1987).

²² Cf. Alex Byrne, "Possibility and Imagination", in *Philosophical Perspectives* 21/1 (2007), 125–144.

²³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 31.

that it only accomplishes a recombination of materials that it finds from the world.²⁴ The misconception results from a neglect of the imagination's constitutive relation to the future. Once it is realized that imagination is a faculty that produces relations to the future, this familiar explanation has a different look: Imagination produces projections that refer to an open future. In so doing, imagination is, to be sure, always related to how the world is. But it does not gain materials for possible recombinations that it produces solely on its own. Rather, what it gains are starting points for projections – the basis for references to the future.

If we correct the conception of the imagination in this way, we not only gain a new way of relating the products of the imagination to the world. We also gain an understanding of why the world matters to products of the imagination. The world matters to products of the imagination because projections are based on how the world is. If human beings act on their imaginative projections, something can happen to them – they are open for what is contingent. We may say that the imagination establishes a structural tension between how the world is and how it is projected. Out of this tension the world matters to what the imagination produces. Imagination is not just a faculty of recombination, of free play. If one conceives it in this way, one has to say that the world does not matter to the imaginative recombinations. Mere recombinations are unconstrained. One may invent green unicorns or rabbits without ears. Thus the world is irrelevant for the formation of imaginations like these. It only functions as a basis.

But it is important to understand how precisely the world matters to the imagination. The world matters as something that is able to continually intervene in the activity of the imagination. In order to understand this, it is necessary to take into account the particular temporal structure of the imagination. Imagination does not develop another present. It develops rather representations that are directed toward the future – it develops projections. And these future-oriented projections are insolubly bound up with the world.

IV. Two conceptions of productivity

In light of these reflections on the particular productivity of the imagination, it is useful to distinguish two conceptions of productivity. Kant makes the first conception intelligible in terms of the understanding. The understanding is the faculty that judges. It has its own forms of unities of representations in judgments. All representations are brought under these forms. This is the reason why the understanding cannot encounter basic aspects of intuitions that do not correspond to it. But the spontaneity of the understanding is a productivity to which nothing unanticipated can happen. It is a productivity that remains within itself. We may thus say that Kant's conception of the productivity of the understanding reflects his empiricism.²⁵ For in order to establish connections among representations, human beings need something that is given to them. Since what is given is not as such connected with something else, the production of connections is rooted in the autonomous productivity of the understanding. The productivity in question is just the flip side of Kant's empiricism.

²⁴ For a concise version of this misconception, cf. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Niddich (Oxford University Press, 1978), Part I, Section III.

²⁵ Cf. Lorne Falkenstein, "Kant's Empiricism", in *The Review of Metaphysics* 50/3 (1997), 547-589.

The second conception of productivity is based on the imagination. As we have seen, the imagination can be conceived as being productive by establishing projections that are situated in the future. Imagination develops such projections and relates given representations to them. What results from this is an order of the imagination. Such an order is based on a productivity to which something contingent and unexpected can happen, which can therefore make possible the experience of a non-correspondence.

Now, one may object that the first conception of productivity that I have attributed to Kant can also give us a satisfying account of something that is contingent. For isn't it also the case that the understanding can conceive something as contingent? We can judge that something is necessary or excluded; in the same way we can judge that something is contingent. As already mentioned, this would amount to saying that we refer to something whose existence and non-existence are equally unnecessary. In this way we may be inclined to say then that judgments also allow for contingency. But this objection makes an assumption that is problematic, one that lies at the heart of Kant's theoretical philosophy. This is that nothing can resist or exceed the forms of unities that the understanding supplies. This assumes that the forms of unities of the understanding cannot be challenged in any way.

This assumption is problematic, however, precisely with regard to contingency. Contingency is something that disturbs the self-sufficiency of human cognition. But if contingency is a form of human cognition, no disturbance can take place. So contingency has to be understood as the experience of how the world can resist the forms of human cognition. The forms of human cognition are thus challenged by experiences of contingency. Consequently, it is important to understand the productivity of human cognition such that it is compatible with experiences of contingency in this way. It is necessary, therefore, to understand the productivity of human cognition in terms of the imagination. In other words, put in the terms I have often used thus far: It is important to understand the productivity of human cognition as a productivity in the midst of which something can happen. This is an essential condition for a satisfying explanation of human cognition. And this condition is what Kant does not satisfy in his theoretical philosophy. Kant explains the productivity of human cognition such that no disturbance of this productivity is possible. In other words, he explains the productivity of human cognition in a way that excludes contingency. But it is not adequate to conceptualize contingency as a form of human cognition, for this conception fails to capture, much less take into account, contingency at all. It is a conception of the self-sufficiency of the forms of human cognition.

V. Imagination and the project of the transcendental deduction

As we have seen, Kant's aim in the transcendental deduction is to show how representations belong to the unity of experience, i.e., to the unified perspective of a subject. It is Kant's claim that such a unified perspective is based on two faculties: the understanding and the imagination. But Kant does not take the imagination as an autonomous faculty into consideration. This is the reason why Kant does not succeed in explaining the unity in question. Here one presupposition is important: Kant presupposes that such a unity of a subject must be accomplished. This presupposition is articulated by Kant's conception of the

transcendental apperception, of the “I think”. Kant tries to give an explanation for this presupposition that makes reference to how judgments work. I already mentioned this explanation above, which states that “a judgment is nothing other than the manner to bring given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception.”²⁶. But as also emphasized above, this explanation simply invokes Kant’s presupposition of the prior legitimacy of the transcendental apperception, the unity of the “I think”. A judgment is an act of a subject, an act that presupposes the subject that acts. Kant presupposes the subject as a formal unity that is always already accomplished.

This is different with the imagination. As we have seen, imagination makes references to an open future.²⁷ Imagination can in so doing explain how a subject is constituted. A subject is constituted by projections that make references to an open future. In his lecture course on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Heidegger insists that a subject is constituted by its relation to transcendence.²⁸ It is essential for what it is to be a subject that it be related to something that goes beyond (i.e., transcends) itself. For Heidegger, this amounts to saying that a subject has to be understood as a being for whom something is at stake. Something is at stake only when a subject at once has a perspective, is oriented in its practices with others, and with objects in the world. A subject has to be understood, then, as a being who remains constitutively open. Its unity has to be understood as being based in its openness. This is just what Kant fails to recognize. He wants to understand the unity of the subject as something that is always already accomplished.

It is important to note here that Kant is well aware of the difference between subjects and objects. He clearly emphasizes that the unity of subjects must not be conflated with the unity of objects. Subjects are not complete in the way objects are, e.g., by bearing a certain set of properties. According to Kant, the completeness of subjects is a formal one. It is the encompassing set of representations that the “I think” must be able to accompany. But Kant is wrong in assuming that the formal account of the subject’s constitution is a satisfying answer to the question concerning the unity of the subject. Rather, it has to be seen as indicating the necessity of explaining the unity of the subject in terms that are fundamentally different from something that is complete or accomplished. Subjects are not complete in the way that objects are. The reason for this is not that a subject’s completeness is only a formal one. Rather, the constitution of subjects cannot be conceptualized in terms of completeness. It has to be understood instead in terms of openness.

The imagination provides an essential clue in this account. Imagination establishes relations to an open future. These relations constitute something that is at stake and thereby constitute the subject. If the unity of the subject has to be explained in terms of relations that

²⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 141, emphasis in the original German.

²⁷ Interestingly, one finds a remark in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* where he points to the future as essential for human cognition. This remark is situated in the passage in which he explains the concept of a transcendental idea. According to Kant, ideas are concepts of reason that lead the use of reason – without an immediate relation to intuition – in a regulative way. Kant explains such an idea as a “focus imaginarius” parenthetically in that context (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 672). In my view, it is interesting that with this formulation Kant explains reason in terms of the imagination – even though Kant does not notice that he starts to do this. But Kant’s term “focus imaginarius” can be understood as articulating a point that is situated in the future, in the way in which I have sought to emphasize.

²⁸ Cf. Martin Heidegger: *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s “Critique of Pure Reason”*, § 23.

stem from the imagination, this unity is constitutively bound up with openness. Subjects are beings that achieve their unity by being essentially open. Kant underestimates the power of the imagination, for he thinks that the imagination only establishes connections between representations of objects that are not present. He thereby conceives the imagination as belonging to a structure of completeness or accomplishment. But as we have seen, the productivity of the imagination functions differently. The imagination relates representations with projections that are situated in the future. Subjects orient themselves in terms of projections. They are what they are as beings for whom something is at stake. To put it differently: They are beings for whom it is essential that they can succeed or fail. It is, therefore, necessary that something is at stake for them. And what is at stake is established by the imagination.

We can now get a glimpse of why Kant at once has the means of explaining the unity of experience but does not carry out such an explanation. Kant conceives the imagination as the faculty that unites sensibility and understanding. But he does not follow through sufficiently in recognizing what such a uniting faculty is and implies. Such a uniting faculty establishes relations projectively into the future. This is just what Kant fails to recognize. He subordinates imagination to both sensibility and understanding. His philosophy thereby gives us a mixed message: On the one hand, Kant clearly sees that imagination is what unites the faculties of human cognition. On the other hand, Kant accepts the empiricist and rationalist heritages, according to which there are only two faculties of human cognition, namely, sensibility and understanding. This is what becomes especially explicit in the second version of the transcendental deduction. Kant seems to have felt the pressure not to give the imagination too prominent a role. He downgrades the imagination as a secondary faculty of cognition. But this mixed message in so doing does not actually resolve the tension that it brings with itself but rather exacerbates it.

In order to resolve this tension of this mixed message, it is necessary to follow through by explaining the imagination itself as a uniting faculty. Such a faculty is not based on sensibility and understanding, but rather the very basis for the latter. I haven't had the space in this paper to elaborate how both sensibility and understanding are grounded in the imagination. Nevertheless, I can provide a tiny glimpse of how such a grounding could look like by saying that only for a being that is ahead of itself understanding becomes relevant. For such a being is a project for itself and is thereby in need of orientation. Sensibility and understanding acquire their relevance for human beings because something is at stake for human beings. Human beings do not gain knowledge solely by what is given sensuously to them. They constitutively exceed what is given to them. In this sense the understanding depends on the imagination. It depends on the projections that are constitutive for human beings.

VI. Prospect

Imagination is the faculty that opens up the future. It opens a temporal dynamic out of which the human being is a being who is not fixed. Not being fixed is not the essence of human beings. It is an aspect that emerges from practices of the imagination. Through the

practices of the imagination, human beings establish what is at stake for them. They establish thereby their autonomy. Human beings are not autonomous by being guided by reason. They are autonomous by living towards an open future. But the future is not open as such. The future is open by being opened through practices of the imagination.

Kant in his transcendental deduction claims that the objective validity of the categories presupposes the unity of the perspective of a subject. Kant holds that this presupposition has to be explained in terms of the practices of the understanding and the imagination. But one could object that Kant does not ultimately explain the unity of a perspective of a subject. Rather, he explains the unity of a practice of reason. If we want to explain how to conceive the unity of the perspective of a subject, we have to explain how we should conceive a perspective. A perspective is a way of openness towards the world. How can we understand what openness is? To be open means that something can happen. We have seen that this presupposes a productivity that we have to explain in terms of the imagination. To put it otherwise: To be open presupposes that something is at stake. And something is at stake if a projection towards the future is established. So we may say: A perspective is realized if a projection towards the future is established. This is just what the imagination accomplishes. Thus, the imagination is the clue to the deepest questions that Kant explicitly and implicitly raises in the transcendental deduction.²⁹

²⁹ I would like to thank Jo-Jo Koo for helping me with the English text and for helpful suggestions.