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## Kant's Understanding of the Imagination in *Critique of Pure Reason*

Milos Rastovic



## Abstract

The imagination (*Einbildung*) in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (B edition) has an important role in the transcendental synthesis. In this context, Kant says: "Synthesis in general is, as we shall subsequently see, the mere effect of the imagination, of a blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious" (B 103). How can we gain knowledge of the unknowable external object? This is the crucial question in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and the imagination is the vague root of all transcendental synthesis. In other words, we are not aware of how the imagination functions in cognition of the external world, and, in this sense, position of the imagination in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is anything but clear. On the one hand, Kant argues that all intuition is sensible, and the imagination belongs to sensibility (B 152). On the other hand, the imagination is part of the understanding of sensibility. Kant states: "Its synthesis of intuitions, in accordance with the categories, must be transcendental synthesis of the imagination, which is an effect of the understanding on sensibility" (B152).

Also, Kant considers the imagination in the chapter "On the schematism of the pure concept of the understanding" as a cause of the scheme. In fact, a very important question for Kant is: How is the application of the category to appearance possible since the category could not be intuited through the senses? (B177). According to Kant, this question makes a transcendental doctrine of the power of judgment necessary. The schematism is the "third thing" this makes the connection between the category and the appearance. My intention is to interpret the transcendental schema in order to show how the imagination creates the scheme and the image. Based upon this consideration, my aim is to clarify two things:

- How does the imagination create the synthesis?
- How does the imagination make the schema and the image in the chapter "On the schematism of the pure concept of understanding"? (pp. 271-277)

**Keywords:** Kant, imagination, Critique of Pure Reason.

## The Imagination and The Synthesis

As we adduced Kant argues that synthesis is "the effect of the imagination" (B103). Before we elucidate Kant's notion, it is necessary to explain how we can create cognition of the external world. Or, how can we get knowledge about the external world? We will see that Kant tries to develop the constructionalist approach in B edition more than the representationalism. In the history of epistemological theory, Kant made a Copernican revolution. Philosophers, through the history of knowledge, thought that the subject is passive, i.e., that the subject only receive all sensations from the external world. However, Kant argues that the subject is active, not passive, in the epistemological theory, in the sense that the subject with his powers of knowledge makes the condition of cognition of the external object. Kant makes difference between two sources of cognition or two powers of knowledge:

- Sensibility - reception of representation (*Vorstellung*) - the receptivity of impressions
- Faculty of cognition the object "by means of these representations through the object is given to us" (rational, spontaneity of concept, i.e., the imagination) (B175).

According to Kant, we can know the mind - independent external world<sup>1</sup> only through the representation of it, through the relation to representation.

Unlike Kant, Plato thinks that we can know the mind - independent world directly as it is. In Book VII (514a - 520a) of his *Republic*, Plato describes the myth of the cave, which shows two worlds:

- a) the world of shadows (the sensible, visible world - deception (grc. *doxa*)), and
- b) the world of ideas (the invisible world, the world of reason).

Plato uses two methods to grasp the metaphysical world of ideas:

1. Dialectic method, grc. *dialogos* (grasp the mind - independent external world through the reason's argument, which is consist of two moments: the assumption (*hypothesis*) and the classification (*diareza*).

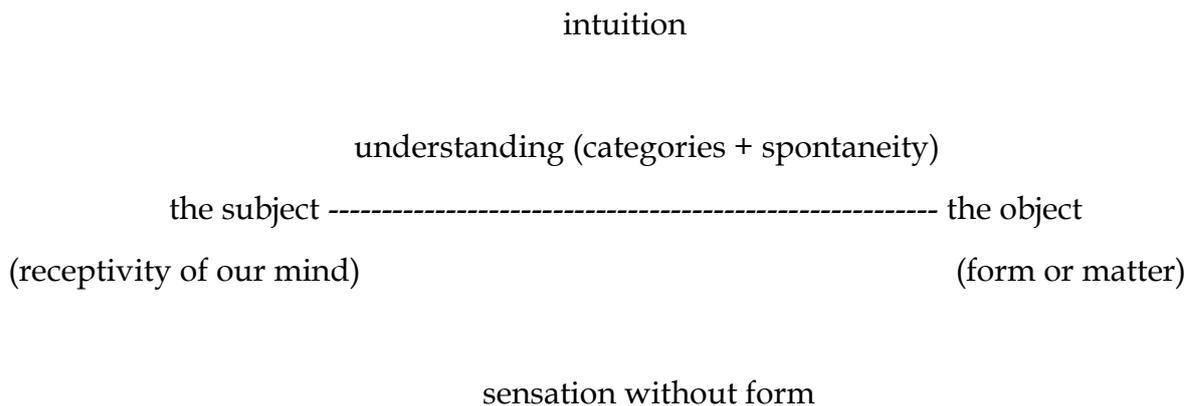
2. Anamnesis (a soul remember a preegzistential state in which soul was with gods. A soul in a preegzistential state watched the ideas, but when a soul tried to come in the body, a soul forgot it. When a soul remember its home, a soul become enlighten by reason.)

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<sup>1</sup> The term mind - independent external world in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is something that we cannot know (thing in itself - *noumenon*). In Kant's epistemological theory we cannot be affected by an object, but only by representation of an object. The term "object" (*Gegenstand*) in this sense has the same meaning as the term the mind - independent external world in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

On the contrary, the representational approach such as Descartes and Locke refute Platonic claims that we can know directly the mind – independent external world. For Descartes and Locke, the mind – independent external world is mediated only through the ideas of it. For Descartes, the idea is an “image of things,” and we can know the mind – independent external world indirectly. Locke makes distinction between simple ideas which they know directly the external world and complex ideas which they know indirectly the external world. Complex ideas represent the external world in indirectly way (ideas = things). For Locke, knowledge makes relation to ideas. According to Descartes and Locke, we can know directly only ideas, but not the mind – independent external world.

Kant’s constructionalist approach implies that we can know the mind - independent external world indirectly. In fact, we can construct or create the mind - independent object (*Gegenstand*) in our consciousness only through the representation (*Vorstellung*). As a result of this point of view, the mind - independent external object is dependent on the subject. Cognition of a mind – independent object is grounded on relations between the subject and the cognitive object. Kant says that all our cognition begins with experience (B2), but it does not mean that all cognition is empirical (*a posteriori*). There is *a priori* cognition, which is independent of experience. A priori cognition is a product of our minds, such as mathematics<sup>2</sup> (B15). According to Kant, we are affected by a represented object, i.e., objects are given to us by means of sensibility and thought through the concept of understanding (B34). Our cognition consists of intuition and concept. Pure intuition is the form (manifold of appearance) of an object, and pure concept is the form of thinking of an object (B75). We will show by the schema the relation between the subject and the object, i.e., how we make cognition of an object:




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<sup>2</sup> Can we find Pythagorean numbers in reality and nature? From my standpoint, we cannot find numbers in reality because numbers are product of our mind or the imagination.

Consequently, we can know only the form of a mind – independent object (manifold of appearance), i.e., representation of appearance or representation of relation between the subject and the object of appearance. In other words, we cannot make a cognition of things in themselves, but only as they appear to us. Kant's epistemological theory is grounded in investigation of representation of a mind – independent object which is represented to us. On trace of this investigation, it is possible to give a new light on interpretation Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Dr Rockmore in his book *Kant and Idealism* gave original interpretations of Kant's epistemology, which opened a new field of Kant's analysis of cognition of a mind - independent object (Rockmore, Tom 36,37). He claims that Kant makes three distinctions:

1. phenomenon (representation of representation - what is immediately given in perceptual experience)
2. appearance (every appearance is phenomenon - refer beyond themselves to what appears)
3. noumenon (thing in itself, independent of us). Kant supposes, without argument, that there is the mind - independent external world through its representation.

Plato, in his myth of the cave, differentiates between reality and appearance. He thinks that reality or the world of ideas can be cognize only by reason. Prisoners who use reason can go to the exit of the cave and see the Sun as the symbol of ultimate goodness. In comparison with Plato, Kant argues that we cannot cognize the mind - independent external world, but only the representation of it (representation ≠ the mind - independent external world).

As we mentioned above the basic conditions of cognition of an object are intuition and concept. The question that is imposed is: How can we understand the representation of a mind – independent external object? Kant answers this question in the chapter "On the Transcendental Clue for the Discovery of all Pure Concept of the Understanding" in the first section "On the logical use of the understanding in general." Kant notes that we can make cognition of an object only through the concept of understanding: "Thus the cognition of every, at least human, understanding is cognition through concept, not intuitive but discursive" (B93). In this statement, Kant claims that we cannot grasp the object directly, "intuitive", but only indirectly through the representation of a mind – independent external object<sup>3</sup> In addition, Kant claims that all intuitions are grounded not only in sensibility but also in "the spontaneity of thinking", i.e., the imagination. The function of the concept of the understanding is judgment (*Urteilskraft*). Kant says, "All judgments are accordingly functions of unity among our representations are used for the cognition of the object" (B94). In other

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<sup>3</sup> The notion "discursive" in this section means through the concept of the understanding, faculty of cognition.

words, without judgment we cannot make cognition of an object because the concept is not directly related to the mind – independent external world. In that sense, judgment is the "mediate cognition of an object" which is pertain to "representation of a representation of it" (in indirectly way). Kant argues that the concept of understanding is equal faculty for judging and faculty for thinking (understanding = judging = thinking). We can understand an object only through the concept of a possibility of judgment.

Now we can return to Kant's first statement that synthesis is "the effect of the imagination" (B103). In paragraph 10 of "On the pure concept of the understanding of categories" Kant states, "Only the spontaneity of our thought requires that this manifold first be gone through, taken up, and combined in a certain way in order for a cognition to be made out of it. I call this action synthesis" (A77, B102). In this statement, Kant only supposes, without any argument, that the imagination (*Einbildung*) or act of spontaneity "requires" manifold of cognition. How can he know that the imagination "requires" a manifold of cognition? He does not explain of the origin of the imagination. Furthermore, Kant says that the imagination is a "blind though indispensable function of the soul, which we are seldom even conscious." (B103, A78). If we are not aware of something, how can we argue that the imagination is a cause of synthesis? Or, how can we apprehend a creation of synthesis from a source which is utterly unknowable in its activity? There is no clear explanation of the imagination in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* because it is difficult for him, perhaps impossible, to explain synthesis by something that is as "irrational" as the imagination.

According to Kant, synthesis is "the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition. Such a synthesis is pure if the manifold is given not empirically but a priori" (B103). However, before representations can be analyzed, they must be given to as "raw and confused," and then, synthesis unifies representations into a certain content. In other words, every synthesis is threefold: first, representations must be given in our experience; second, synthesis combines manifoldness of representations in one cognition by means of imagination, and third, understanding brings synthesis to the pure concept and gives this synthesis unity (B104). In this context, the imagination is the root of synthesis which creates the unity of "different representations under a common one" (B93). From Kant's standpoint, only through the imagination can we make synthesis, or we can say, without the imagination we cannot make synthesis<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Kant makes distinction among three sources of faculties of the soul: sense, imagination and apperception (B127). Kant says that synthesis is "the effect of the imagination." Thus, Kant explicitly says that without imagination as original source of the soul there is no synthesis.

## The Imagination: Sensibility and "I am"

From Kant's perspective, analyzing the process of cognition of an object is necessary to establish the distinction between the twofold synthesis:

1. Intellectual synthesis (*synthesis intellectualis*) is "the manifold of an intuition in general" (B151)
2. Figurative synthesis (*synthesis speciosa*) is synthesis of the manifold of sensible intuition, which is possible and necessary a priori.

Kant's approach tries to show us the condition of possibility of knowledge an object of appearance, which can be combined with sensibility (figurative synthesis) or without it (intellectual synthesis). The first part of Transcendental Deduction is dedicated to the intellectual synthesis, and the second part to figurative synthesis.

### 1. The Intellectual Synthesis

In paragraph 24 "On the application of the categories to objects of the senses in general", Kant determines the imagination as "the faculty of representing an object even without its presence in intuition" (B151). Thus, the faculty of representing creates an object as a pure image in our conscious. For instance, we can draw a line in our thought only if we think about a line, or we can describe a circle only if we think a circle in our thought (B154). This kind of synthesis which is abstract from the sense Kant calls intellectual synthesis (*synthesis intellectualis*). Therefore, intellectual combination<sup>5</sup> of a manifold of an intuition through the categories is related to the unity of the apperception (B150). In paragraph 16 "On the original - synthetic unity of apperception" Kant says: "The I think must be able to accompany all my representations" (B132). According to Kant, representation of "I think" is an act of spontaneity, i.e., a product of self - consciousness which cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility. In this case, if "I think" does not pertain to sensibility; it is a pure apperception as a result of the productive imagination<sup>6</sup>. From Kant's perspective, I cannot have cognition about myself as I am because I only have representation of myself. In this context, Kant says that this representation is "a thinking" (B157). In fact, my own existence is a *noumenon*, it is not appearance, but the cognition of my own existence occurs always in correspondence with the inner sense (time) (B158). The representation of myself is an act of spontaneity of my thought, i.e., a product of my

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<sup>5</sup> Kant says that a "combination is the representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold" (B131).

<sup>6</sup> In paragraph 24 Kant makes distinction between productive imagination which explains the possibility of cognition of a priori, and the reproductive imagination which explains the synthesis of empirical laws. For this reason, the reproductive imagination does not pertain to transcendental philosophy, but psychology (B152).

imagination, which creates "illusion" or appearance of my own existence. In this case, intellectual synthesis which creates synthetic unity of apperception is not characteristic of human beings, but intellectual synthesis rather corresponds to "undetermined epistemological subject" who presupposes their possibility of a priori cognition of an object. Unfortunately, we have not met this kind of epistemological subject yet.

From my perspective, if we cannot have a real knowledge about our own existence, Hegel's theory of knowledge is more acceptable than Kant's theory of knowledge. Hegel claims that we can get knowledge about ourselves through other subjects. In fact, other people know us better than we know ourselves.

## 2. The Figurative Synthesis

Kant later relates conscious of our existence to time. He says, "I am conscious of my existence as determined in time" (B276). Time, as the form of inner sense, presupposes "something persistent in perception" (B276). According to Kant, "something persistent" can be only the mind - independent external world. In other words, I am self - consciousness only by means of "the existence of the external things that I perceive outside myself (self - consciousness = consciousness of the external world). Dr Rockmore contends that consciousness can simultaneously follow self - consciousness as Kant thought. For Dr Rockmore, self - consciousness is never immediate, but always mediated by consciousness (Rockmore, Tom. *Kant and Idealism*. 147).

In paragraph "Refutation of Idealism" (B275) Kant argues that we have "experience and not merely imagination of outer things." For Kant, we know ourselves through sensible experience<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, experience shows us that the mind - independent external world exists. In that context, Kant says: "But this persisting element cannot be an intuition in me. For all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations, and as such they themselves need something persisting distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change can be determined" (BXXXIX). Kant considers the condition of the possibility of cognition of myself in relation to the object. He argues that I am self - conscious through inner experience of my existence in time which is identical with empirical consciousness of my existence (self - consciousness of existence of time = empirical consciousness of my existence). For Kant, I can know myself only through the relation to the object. Or, how much I know myself, I will

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<sup>7</sup> In comparison with Kant "I think", Cartesian Cogito is based on the subject's experience of itself (See Rockmore, Tom. *Kant and Idealism*. 149). Cartesian Cogito as self - consciousness is not related to the external world. If Cogito is independent on the external world, how we can prove the existence of the external world. Descartes solves this crucial problem in scholastic way. For Descartes, God is eternal and infinite substance, which can make intuition of the external world.

know the external world as well. However, in the context of Kant's philosophy, it is unclear can we know either ourselves or the external world. In addition, Kant refutes the intellectual intuition in the representation of I am which accompanies all my judgments because we know ourselves only if we are affected of something outside of us. Also, it is unclear why Kant insists on distinction between the inner sense and the imagination in introduction (BXL). He claims that we can make cognition of the mind-independent external world only through the rules, experience without imagination. How can we know when the imagination starts to participate in the synthesis? Kant does not give any argument for his claim.

By contrast, Kant in paragraph 24 demonstrates figurative synthesis as a result of the transcendental synthesis of the imagination (B151). Kant says that the imagination belongs to sensibility because all intuition is sensible (B152). According to Kant, the imagination as "subjunctive condition" gives "a corresponding intuition to the concept of the understanding" (B152). The contradiction in Kant's notions about the role of imagination in the creation of synthesis is a result of uncertain Kant's claim about what is the real origin of our cognition of an object.

### **The Imagination and the Schematism**

In Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the chapter "On the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding" is "the central core of the whole voluminous work" (Heidegger, Martin 63). Kant considers the schematism as part of the "Transcendental Doctrine of the Power of Judgment", which shows "the possibility of applying pure concepts of understanding to appearances" (B177). The transcendental schema stands as the "third thing" between the category and the appearance, and makes possible the application of the category to appearance<sup>8</sup>. For Kant, the schema as the concept of understanding is "formal and pure condition of the sensibility" (B179). The question what is imposed is why Kant needs the transcendental schema as "formal and pure condition of the sensibility"? For Kant's perspective, the function of the transcendental schema is applying the category to appearances. In the Transcendental Deduction, Kant shows that we can apply the category a priori solely to appearances, but not things in themselves. As a result, the only way in which objects are given to us is "the modification of our sensibility" (B178). According to Kant, the subject makes "modification of our sensibility" only through the schema. The origin of schema is the imagination. Kant says, "The schema is in itself always only a product of the imagination" (B179). As a product of imagination, the schema is "distinguished

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<sup>8</sup> The schematism, an application of the category to the appearance, is possible only in accordance with conditions of time (B178). Eva Schaper in her interpretation of Kant's schematism claims that the basic Kantian insight in the schematism is that "we construct not as minds, or intellects, not by being mind, by being in time" (281). For my standpoint, why Kant insists that the transcendental schema in time is unclear.

from an image" (B179) (the schema  $\neq$  the image). Making the difference between the schema and the image (*Bild*) Kant gives an example with five points in a row. For Kant, when we see five points in the row that represents an image of the number five. This image can have only empirical character. Kant says, "The image is a product of the empirical faculty of productive imagination" (B181). How can we see an image, e.g., of 1 billion? Kant does not provide an answer on that kind of question.

On the contrary, if I think number five in general in my thought, this thinking is more the representation of a method for representing a multiplicity in an image than the image itself (B179). According to Kant, number five in general is not an image of an object because it does not have an empirical character. In other words, number five in general is the schema which is possible only as a pure condition of the sensibility, i.e., we can have numbers in general only in our thoughts. Kant says: "Now this representation of a general procedure of the imagination for providing a concept with its image is what I call the schema for this concept" (B180). Kant's point is that the schema as a product of imagination is a pure and necessary condition of an image. This Kant's point we can represent in this way:

the imagination-----the schema (categories + appearance)-----image (look)

Also, Kant claims that we cannot have an "adequate" image of a triangle because when we think about a triangle, we always think a triangle which belongs to the generality of the concept. By contrast, the possible image can be a drawn triangle, but the drawn triangle is not "adequate to the concept of it." Thus, a triangle can exist only in our thought as the schema, which "signifies a rule of the synthesis of the imagination with regard to pure shapes in space" (B180). In this way, Kant insists that the schema is the rule for subsuming a triangle under the concept of it.

Therefore, Kant gives an example of a dog with which he stresses a relation between an object of experience or an image and the schema of the imagination. Kant says: "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 shape that experience offers me or any possible image that I can exhibit *in concreto*" (§ 141, B180). The essence of Kant's example of "dog" is his immediate relation to the schema of the imagination, as a rule for the determination of our intuition in accordance with a certain general concept" (B180). From my standpoint, it is not quite clear how Kant thinks that it is possible to imagine a "dog in general" without thinking of one shape or image of "dog". Heidegger thinks that Kant tries to explain "the positive structural relationship of the schema - image to the schema" (Heidegger, Martin 69). In Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, it means that empirical image does

not necessary attain its empirical concept. In fact, the concept can exist only in accordance with a rule. In sum, Kant argues that every sensible concept is a product of pure a priori imagination. If we make intuition of an object, the image of that object is possible only through the schema as a product a priori imagination.

### **The Role of Imagination in Cognition**

To sum up, the imagination in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is the origin of transcendental schematism and the synthesis. In this sense, the imagination has the main role in the cognition of an object. The imagination, for Kant, is a "hidden art in the depths of the human soul" or "a blind though indispensable function of the soul", which we are "seldom even conscious." Kant's constructionalist approach shows how we can create an object, i.e., representation of an object. Since we cannot know the mind - independent external world, we can only construct it. In Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's philosophy, the power of imagination has meaning as a faculty of forming (*Vermagen des Bildens*). As a faculty of forming, the imagination creates forms and provides the image (Heidegger, Martin 91). For Kant, the power of imagination, which creates the world of appearance, gives us knowledge about the mind -independent world. However, how can we have knowledge about the mind - independent world if we construct only appearances of that world? In this sense, Kant shows inconsistency in his opinion about cognition of an object (See Rockmore, Tom. *Kant and Idealism*. 155).

Kant's main contribution to the theory of knowledge lies in producing an object as a necessary condition of knowledge. The first time in the history of epistemology, the object became dependent on the subject. What we can know about relation between the subject and the object? According to Kant, we can only know what we construct. In conclusion, we can say that we live in the world of illusion because we cannot know *noumenon*. From my standpoint, all life is an illusion. Philosophers try to unmask the illusion of life, but they are always captured in the net of the illusion of life. Kant's apprehension of the power of imagination is one example of this kind of illusion of knowledge.

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nám. W. Churchilla 4

Czech Republic

130 67 Praha 3

IČ: 61384399

Web: <http://e-logos.vse.cz>

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vacuram@vse.cz

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