

Jesus, P. (2023). *The Varieties of Imagination: Between Cognitive Spontaneity and Mental Disorder* (pp. 39-76). In F. Silva, & B. Dörflinger (Eds.), *KANT ON POETRY / KANT ÜBER POESIE*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.

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Title:

The Varieties of Modern Imagination: Between Cognitive Spontaneity and Mental Disorder¹

1. The Fall of Imagination in Early Modern Philosophy

In early Modern western philosophy, there seems to be a large connivance against the fundamental cognitive value of imagination that was asserted by the Aristotelian tradition which placed *Phantasia*, the power of producing, storing, and recalling images, at the heart of cognition; for every act of thinking was considered to be dynamically and materially entangled with images (see, for instance, *De Anima* III 3, 429a 4-7; *De Anima* III 8, 432a 8-9, 431a 16-17; *De Memoria* 1, 449b 31). The early Modern conspiracy against imagination has surprisingly united the two strongest rival metaphysical parties of the time, Rationalists and Empiricists, Cartesians and anti-Cartesians, whose highest representatives may be found in Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715) and David Hume (1711-1776).² Imagination undergoes an inexorable suspicion, acquiring the reputation of being the key source of false belief and violent passions, perversely accompanied by the illusory feeling of truth. Judged unable of fulfilling any truth-making function, imagination is accused of producing error and, what is more, of deceiving the mind in its effort to discriminate truth and fiction. In sum, the essence of imagination would reside in an ontological decalage, opening up a field of representational

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² There are many comprehensive studies on philosophy of imagination which help examine and assess lines of continuity and innovative moments in the history of this mental activity. The broad argument of the present chapter relies partly on the following works: Brann, Eva T. H., *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance: 25th Anniversary Edition* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017); Geniusas, S., & Nikulin, D. (Eds.), *Productive Imagination: Its History, Meaning, and Significance* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018); Kearney, Richard, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998); Kearney, Richard, *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999); Schlutz, Alexander M., *Mind’s World: Imagination and Subjectivity from Descartes to Romanticism* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2009); and Sepper, Dennis L., *Understanding Imagination: The Reason of Images* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013).

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instability and unreality; hence, the realm of wild mental freedom in which an unbounded power of fabrication brings about alternate constellations of fictive beings. Now, this freedom would unleash an automatically erring movement of thoughts and appetites which shows a regular pattern that can be studied and neutralized. Therefore, the philosophy of imagination becomes, to a great extent, the assessment of the possible assistance and hindrance of imagination so as to find a way of controlling the disordered imaginative actions. A philosophical antidote against this powerful source of falsehood should be carefully produced and diligently applied. Such antidote is announced as a skeptical methodology, whose efficacy is reinforced by a rigorous intellectual and moral self-discipline, entailing a philosophical form of life. With regard to imagination, both Malebranche and Hume proceed by adopting particular skeptical attitudes; thus, Malebranche moves towards a very strict rational self-discipline, safeguarding the intellectual purity of truth, whereas, conversely, Hume finds himself on the brink of cognitive and epistemic nihilism.

1.1. Malebranche's Diagnosis and Therapy of Imagination Disorders

In his *Search after Truth* (1712, 6th ed.),³ Malebranche, the most Cartesian of all Cartesians, perhaps even more consistently Cartesian than Descartes himself, examines sequentially the functioning of the senses (Book One), imagination (Book Two), understanding (Book Three), inclinations (Book Four), passions (Book Five), and method (Book Six, by far the longest one). Nevertheless, this sequence does not convert imagination into a conjunctive power, mediating between the senses and the understanding, as earlier admitted by Descartes in the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (*Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, 1628) and later proposed by I. Kant in the *Critique of pure Reason*. Quite the opposite, this rather ascetic sequence distinguishes and opposes the essential, proper activity of the soul, thinking, carried out by the understanding, human's pure and finite mind, from two different, though intimately related and almost fused, modifications of the soul (i.e., sensing or feeling and imagining) that denote two prominent ways in which the body affects the soul, among an unknown infinitude of other

³ See Malebranche, Nicolas, *The Search after Truth*, transl. Th. Lennon and P. Olscamp (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and the French original version in a very authoritative edition: Malebranche, Nicolas, *De la recherche de la vérité*, in *Oeuvres*, vol. I, éd. établie par G. Rodis-Lewis et G. Malbreil (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1979). Further references to this work will use the English and French acronym (SAT / RV) followed by the numbers indicating the book, part, chapter, section, and pages.

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possible modifications (SAT / RV, III, 1st, I, 1, p. 198-199 / p. 293-295).⁴ In a Neoplatonic and Neo-Augustinian scenario, the bodily affection of the soul is deemed the ultimate reason that explains the inevitability of error in one's knowledge of external bodies through sensing; whereas truth requires the engagement of pure intelligence which deploys a pure vision of ideas, yet not a self-active sort of vision, capable of creating ideas, but rather a vision-in-God as intelligible Light containing and exhibiting all ideas. On that account, human thinking displays an intrinsic passivity or receptivity, a vision of a finite intelligence within the infinite intelligence of God which envelops the ideas of everything that exists. The intimacy of ideas demonstrates the inner presence of the Divine Master who illuminates and teaches human intelligence from within, as Augustine formulated recurrently, both in universal doctrine (especially in *De Magistro* and *De Vera Religione*)⁵ and in his own particular, biographical, spiritual experience, when he describes theologically and poetically his youth errings and late conversion: "*Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*" (*Confesiones*, 3, 6, 11).⁶ For Augustine and Malebranche, human *noesis* participates in the theological mystery of God's active interiority and reveals the gnoseological efficiency of being *imago Dei*, efficiency inherent in the "union of our soul with universal Reason" (SAT / RV III, 2nd, VII, 1, p. 236 / p. 347).

In Malebranche's occasionalist system, every action implies God's agency; and, by the same token, human spiritual thinking amounts to intimately knowing true reality through ideas, seeing-in-God within us His own perfect ideas of reality, and experiencing it as an intellectual intuition of essences. Let us take the paradigmatic idea of extension;⁷ thinking this idea in God, that is to say, thinking extension in its pure intelligibility as a primitive notion

⁴ For a rigorous analysis of Malebranche's conception of the soul and its powers, see Fabiani, P., *The Philosophy of the Imagination in Vico and Malebranche* (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2009); Jolley, N., *The Light of the Soul: Theories of Ideas in Leibniz, Malebranche, and Descartes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Jolley, N., "Malebranche on the Soul," in S. M. Nadler (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Malebranche* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 31-62; Jolley, N., *Causality and Mind: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Schmaltz, Tad M., *Malebranche's Theory of the Soul: A Cartesian Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Schmaltz, Tad M., *Radical Cartesianism: The French Reception of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵ See Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, transl. P. King (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995); and Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, transl. R.P.H. Green (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶ See Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. H. Chadwick (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷ Malebranche's position is perfectly aligned with Descartes's "Second Meditation," where the notion of 'extension' is grasped under the guise of "the nature of this piece of wax" which is "in no way revealed by my imagination, but is perceived by the mind alone" (AT VII, 31-34). See Malebranche, N., "II. The essence of matter," in SAT / RV, III, 2nd, chap. VIII, II, p. 243-247 / p. 356-363.

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generates a very perfect knowledge because of its distinctness, clarity, and richness or fruitfulness, unveiling the derivative ideas of divisibility, impenetrability, and figure. The description of a theological relationship, established and manifested while one thinks, intends to highlight the universality, objectivity, and perfection of ideas, as the realm of truth, whose metaphysical foundation requires the presence of God within every intelligence capable of seeing ideas. If thinking equates to seeing-ideas-in-God, then it means that, in a secularized rendition, ideas are not intellectual inventions (mental *ficta*) but intellectual evidences (mental *a priori data* or *producta*) discovered in the exercise of thinking. Malebranche's theological innatism of ideas provides a bold dogmatic account on the *a priori* and truth-maker character of concepts and ideas, diametrically opposed to images and sensations. The relationship with God not only plunges anthropology into theology, but also transforms gnoseology into a spiritual adventure involving anamnesis as the royal cognitive way to truth. It differs significantly from the Kantian epigenesis of reason, since Kant rejects both rationalist innatism and empiricist genealogy of ideas, devising an organicist, systemic model of intellectual self-formation of concepts (KrV, §. 27, B 166-168).⁸ Thus, the origin of concepts or categories is not explained by a direct appeal to God's intellect, like in Malebranche or Leibniz, testifying instead to the logical self-formation or self-development of a system of intelligent actions "on the occasion of experience" (*bei Gelegenheit der Erfahrung*), entailing that concepts of understanding are "*self-thought* [*selbst-gedachte*] first principles *a priori* of our knowledge" (KrV, B 167) which derive their validity from the logical identity and unity of a qualitatively spontaneous and continuous selfhood, the pure "*I think*."⁹

The logical spontaneity that Kant attributes to the understanding as the producer of concepts and rules, and the logical law-giver, stands in sharp contrast with the radical passivity of human's understanding portrayed by Malebranche who maintains that volition alone encloses a real degree of activity among human mental powers. Yet, the finitude of human's intellectual sight renders that passive seeing-in-God, proportionately imperfect and limited. For seeing-in-God, or holding an *intellectus ectypus*, does not compare to seeing-as-God who

⁸ Such logical or cognitive organicism was carefully analyzed by, among others, Dörflinger, B., *Das Leben theoretischer Vernunft: Teleologische und praktische Aspekte der Erfahrungstheorie Kants* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000); and Mensch, J., *Kant's Organicism: Epigenesis and the Development of Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013).

⁹ A detailed account on the interpretation of logical and cognitive spontaneity is offered in Jesus, P., *La poétique de l'ipse: Étude sur le 'je pense' kantien* (Bern: P. Lang, 2008).

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enjoys an *intellectus archetypus*.¹⁰ However, more than just imperfect, as the finite understanding, other modes of perceiving, that is, sensing or feeling, and imagining are also false, and the very source of falsehood itself, since the knowledge they claim to acquire about the bodies in the world relies on the necessarily “confused sentiment” of what happens in our own body. The only true knowledge obtained through “sentiment” or “sense,” despite its imperfection and incompleteness, is—exceptionally—knowledge concerning our own soul, produced by an *inner sense* or *consciousness* (“*conscience ou sentiment intérieur*”) because of the singular indiscernibility, immediacy, and union between the knowing subject and the known object (SAT / RV, III, 2nd, vii, 4, p. 237-239 / p. 349-352).¹¹ This *inner sense* sustains a self-perception of “what happens in our soul” (e.g., feelings of pain or pleasure), an empirical and experiential knowledge that cannot supply any idea of the soul, and yet it cannot deceive at all, given its direct and absolute distinctness. This is why the existence of the soul is more certain than the existence of bodies, even if, thanks to knowledge through ideas, the essence of the bodies is clearer than the essence of the soul. Here, we are at the gates of “the *problematic* Idealism of Descartes, who declares only one empirical assertion (*assertio*), namely *I am*, to be indubitable” (KrV, B 274), while remaining permanently doubtful whether sensations provide any reliable material for knowledge.¹² If, for Malebranche, the intellection

¹⁰ Although the Kantian distinction between *intellectus ectypus* (discursive understanding) and *intellectus archetypus* (intuitive understanding) specifies two different modes of relationship between intuition (*data*) and understanding (*concepts/ideas*), it necessarily implies an acknowledgment of the opposition between finitude and infinity regarding the perfection and power of intelligence. For God sees and thinks and creates at once His ideas, while human intelligence develops and applies concepts while thinking, without being their absolute author. The decisive distinction between Malebranche’s Theo-logic and Kant’s transcendental logic lies in the notion of truth. For Kant, the concepts of the human understanding provide only the empty form of truth that must be applied to empirical matter supplied by the senses and the imagination (see Kant’s letter to Herz, AA 10: 130; KU, AA 05: 408; KrV, B 138-139), whilst Malebranche asserts the self-sufficiency of ideas as vehicles of truth, and the necessary separation of true ideas from false sensations and illusory imaginings.

¹¹ “Although our knowledge of our soul is not complete [*entière connaissance*], what we do know of it through consciousness or inner sensation [*conscience ou sentiment intérieur*] is enough to demonstrate its immortality, spirituality, freedom, and several other attributes we need to know. And this seems to be why God does not cause us to know the soul, as He causes us to know bodies, through its idea. The knowledge that we have of our soul through consciousness is imperfect, granted; but it is not false. On the other hand, that knowledge we have of bodies through sensation or consciousness, if the confused sensation [*sentiment confus*] we have of what takes place in our body can be called consciousness, is not only imperfect, but also false. We therefore needed an idea of the body [*une idée des corps*] to correct our sensations [*sentiments*] of it—but we need no idea of our soul, since our consciousness of it does not involve us in error, and since to avoid being mistaken in our knowledge of it, it is enough not to confuse it with the body [...].” (Malebranche, SAT / RV, III, 2nd, vii, 4, p. 239 / p. 351.)

¹² Malebranche’s knowledge of essence through pure ideas alone constitutes a form of transcendental realism; while perfect knowledge of existence through pure ideas as well as, partly and confusedly, through sensation amounts to a moderated empirical skepticism: “It is true that we often see things that in fact are not, and never were, and that we should not conclude that a thing is outside us from the sole

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of ideas provides the only valid access to being, and true knowledge of being, or things-in-themselves, then it follows necessarily that the full being of soul in itself shall remain absolutely unknown and unknowable from a human standpoint.

Malebranche very coherently adopts a mode of psychological phenomenalism, which *prima facie* might be reconcilable with the Kantian notion of inner sense or empirical apperception, and his critical destruction of Rational Psychology. Indeed, both Malebranche and Kant, though on different grounds, seem to carefully distinguish self-knowledge from self-consciousness. Thus, epistemic humility in Rational Psychology becomes the hallmark of self-truthfulness because the realm of essential and complete self-knowledge seems to be entirely inaccessible from the only empirical window available to sense the soul, i.e., self-consciousness. Malebranche humbly acknowledges:

what we know of it [our soul] might be almost nothing compared to what it is in itself. [...] To know the soul perfectly, then, it is not enough to know only what we know through inner sensation—since the consciousness we have of ourselves perhaps shows us only the least part of our being. (SAT / RV III, 2nd, VII, 4, p. 238 / p. 350.)

However incomplete the knowledge offered by self-consciousness may be in order for us to fully grasp the essence of the soul, it appears nevertheless that the pure quality of interiority, insofar as it supplies an inner experience partly liberated from extension, suffices for Malebranche to attain and proclaim the most solid assurance concerning the knowledge of the essential attributes of the soul: its spirituality, immortality, and freedom. In the constitution of this metaphysical knowledge through self-consciousness, there is no trace of Paralogism, because there is no reasoning that would launch a logical bridge between self-experience and self-knowledge, putting apparently in jeopardy the methodological structure of Kant's critique of Rational Psychology (KrV, A 341 sq / B 399 sq). In a distinctly Cartesian way, Malebranche presupposes an experience of sheer self-evidence, with a kind of transparency and immediacy that would entirely dismiss the need for any syllogism or rational chain of truths in order to reach the essential attributes of the soul. Yet, such self-apperceptive inner sentiment is converted into a vehicle of metaphysical self-evidence whose supposed cognitive value encounters a fully unconditional consent. The empirical sensitivity that seemed to guide

fact that we see it as outside us. There is no necessary connection between the presence of an idea to a man's mind and the existence of the thing the idea represents, and experiences in sleep or delirium sufficiently prove this. But even so, we can be assured that ordinarily extension, figure, and motion are external to us when we see them. These things are not merely imaginary; they are real, and we are not mistaken in believing that they have a real existence, independent of our mind, though this is very difficult to prove conclusively." (Malebranche, SAT / RV I, X, p. 48 / p. 89)

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the initial description of inner sentiment is now overridden by a metaphysical hallucination, carrying with itself an overflow of belief, assurance, and enthusiasm. In a critical sense, provided one's unquestionable will to believe, the minimal evidence becomes a self-sufficient, optimal evidence to support an extraordinary occasion for a metaphysical somersault. Malebranche praises God's wisdom that devised inner sentiment for the human knowledge of the soul because, despite its imperfection, it reveals sufficiently the soul's essence, and avoids the more harmful imperfections of knowing the soul directly through its idea, which would diminish the understanding and feeling of the union between body and soul¹³, resulting in error and misery.

Owing to the union of body and soul, sensing and imagining are considered as inexhaustible sources of confusions and illusions, epistemological errors and moral miseries, not because sensing and imagining are corrupt in themselves (their being perfectly apt to the natural function of conserving the physical and social human bodies), but rather because human freedom is easily corrupted and gives its consent to sensations and imaginations without proper examination of their degree of evidence and their true meaning, i.e., relationship to the body, not to things themselves. On rephrasing Descartes's "Fourth Meditation" (AT VII, 58-61), Malebranche identifies the essence of error with the misuse of freedom: "Our senses, then, are not as corrupt as might be imagined; rather, it is the most inward part of our soul, our freedom, that has been corrupted. We are deceived not by our senses but by our will, through precipitous judgments." (SAT / RV I, V, 2, p. 23 / p. 53) It is a radical error of freedom and judgment to mistake what the soul senses or imagines for anything real outside sensation or imagination. This means that, for instance, any vision of light or darkness as well as any feeling of pleasure or pain belong solely to the soul, and have no reality nor truth outside the soul; thence they cannot be considered as something happening in any part of the body or anywhere in the world. A general phenomenalism then ensues with an epistemic, self-disciplinary, rule:

Never judge by means of the senses as to what things are in themselves, but only as to the relation they have to the body because, in fact, the senses were given to us, not to know the truth of things in themselves, but only for the preservation of our body. (SAT / RV I, V, 3, p. 24 / p. 53)

¹³ "Finally, if we had an idea of the soul as clear as that which we have of the body, that idea would have inclined us too much to view the soul as separated from the body. It would have thus diminished the union between our soul and body by preventing us from regarding it as dispersed through all our members [...]" (Malebranche, SAT / RV III, 2nd, VII, 4, p. 239 / p. 352)

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The vulnerable primacy of intellectual reflexive consent over sensation and imagination resonates partly in Kant's defense of senses, and consequent accusation of understanding, when he maintains that "The senses do not confuse," "The senses do not have command over understanding," and "The senses do not deceive," thereby holding the understanding entirely accountable for truth and error (*Anthropology*, §§. 9-11, AA 07: 144-146). Malebranche's system develops its encompassing vision of truth by conjugating two Cartesian levels, the substantialist doctrine of the *Metaphysical Meditations* and the psychophysiological hypotheses conveyed by *The Passions of the Soul* and especially by the *Treatise on Man*. Accordingly, he attempts at laying out a perfect correspondence between the ideational life of the soul and the geometrical mechanics of the body, reconciling substantial dualism with anthropological unionism in his own occasionalist view:

Each substance remains what it is, and as the soul is incapable of extension and movement, so the body is incapable of sensation and inclinations. The only alliance of mind [*esprit*] and body known to us consists in a natural and mutual correspondence of the soul's thoughts with the brain traces, and of the soul's emotions with the movements of the animal spirits. (SAT / RV II, 1st, V, 1, p. 102 / p. 159)

The body is *res extensa* whose properties include solely "(a) motion and rest, and (b) an infinity of different figures;" whereas the soul is *res cogitans*: "That I who thinks, who senses, who wills—it is the substance in which are found all the modifications of which I have an inner sensation [*sentiment intérieur*]," diverse thoughts being its only properties (SAT / RV I, Chap. X, 1, p. 49 / p. 90). Therefore, the psychosomatic or psychophysical explanation, endorsed by Malebranche, elucidating the manner in which error emerges from the senses and from the (inherently sensible) imagination is of paramount metaphysical and anthropological significance. In keeping with the Cartesian anatomical model, the sense organs are "composed of tiny filaments originating in the middle of the brain," and "spreading out into all our members in which there is feeling," then "leading without interruption to the exterior portions of the body" (SAT / RV I, Chap. X, 1, p. 49 / p. 91). Although Malebranche dismisses the specific anatomical details as irrelevant, he states as fundamentally true and crucial for the solidity of the Cartesian philosophy that the soul is connected to the "*principal part* [*partie principale*] of the brain," the place from which all nerve fibers of the body depart and to which they converge.¹⁴ The soul is assumed to be *joined* or *united* to that *principal* brain

¹⁴ The existence and function of the so-called "*partie principale*" is deemed well-established by Malebranche, whilst its anatomical determination remains uncertain and unimportant for metaphysical purposes. Competitive hypotheses abound: the function might be fulfilled by *corpora striata*, *corpus*

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part; in other words, the soul is conceived of as being immediately aware of the changes of the body, insofar as the soul *responds* immediately with its own series of inner changes, whose modes and degrees are strictly qualitative, as modes and degrees of *perceiving* in the soul's realm of ideas which encompasses *sensing* and *imagining*.

Within the scope of early Modern substantial dualism, this *correspondence* thesis seems to design an original position, somewhere between the Cartesian interactive unionism and the Leibnizian inter-expressive harmony. Subsequently, in proper metaphysical terms, the body does not and cannot affect the soul; bodily changes do not and cannot cause psychical changes; for the two substances are functionally autonomous and essentially heterogeneous; hence, their respective continuous series of changes can only *respond* and *correspond* to each other. Strictly speaking, the "soul can only *reside* immediately in the ideas," though, rather metaphorically, Malebranche claims also that the "soul *resides* immediately in the principal part of the brain, as it were," meaning that the soul holds an immediate awareness of all bodily changes communicated to that principal part (SAT / RV I, X, 3, p. 50 / p. 92). The Scholastic hypothesis according to which the *sensorium commune* is best explained by a total and real copresence of the soul in all parts of the living body is decried by Malebranche, but it is somehow rescued and reformulated by Kant who, in accord with the heterogeneity principle, denounces the contradictory metaphysical task of searching for the "seat of the soul," confined to a "*local presence*," and thus proposes the alternative notion of "*a virtual presence*" (KANT, "From Soemmerring's *On the organ of the soul*," AA 12: 31-32),¹⁵ because it would refer only to the understanding and would surpass the problematic spatial character defining and constraining a merely physiological, reductionist inquiry. Kant embraces then a chemical model supporting a "*dynamical organization*" compatible with both the "immeasurable manifoldness of representations" and the "unity of the consciousness of oneself (which belongs to the understanding)" (KANT, *Ibid.*, AA 12: 33-34).

Sensing and imagining, for Malebranche, are nothing but inner modifications of the soul that respond immediately to different bodily movements. On the one hand, sensing produces in the soul the perception and the judgment of an object as present, outside us, corresponding to the nerve agitation that begins by the force of impressions acting on the

callosum, *pia mater*, pineal gland or any other structure (Malebranche, SAT / RV, II, 1st, I, 2, p. 89 / p. 145).

¹⁵ See Kant I., "From Soemmerring's *On the organ of the soul*," *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 219-226.

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external surface of the body, moving afterwards to the brain. On the other hand, imagining (including dreaming or feeling pain in amputated, ergo imaginary, parts of our bodies) engenders the perception and judgment of an object as absent, existing only as a mental object, corresponding to movements produced inside the brain, when only internal nerve fibers are agitated by animal spirits.¹⁶ The embodied character of sensing and imagining converts them into so intimately related powers “that one must separate them” and recognize a simple difference of more and less. Indeed, as Malebranche explains, although sensing and imagining are qualitatively different from the standpoint of the soul’s experiencing something present or absent, their difference remains nonetheless merely accidental from a metaphysical standpoint, or merely quantitative from a physical or bodily perspective, entailing simply a difference of degree within a continuum of quantifiable bodily intensities.¹⁷ Sensing is usually more intense and vivid than imagining, but sometimes one can also imagine with high intensity, and then one’s imaginations may be mistaken for sensations.¹⁸ The qualitative changes of sensing and imagining respond to (or are maybe translatable into) quantitative changes in the body. This is why they have no truth content regarding *things in themselves*, which are only accessible through *pure intellections*, absolutely detached from the body. Malebranche follows again Descartes (*Fifth Replies*, AT VII: 358) who coherently defends that, contrarily to the embodied nature of sensation and imagination, the actions of pure intellection and intellectual memory are strictly spiritual, therefore performed without employing the brain.¹⁹

¹⁶ “If the agitation originates through the impressions made by objects on the exterior surface of our nerve fibers and is communicated to the brain, then the soul senses, and it judges that what it senses is outside, i.e., it perceives an object as present. But if the internal fibers alone are lightly disturbed by the flow of animal spirits, or in some other way, then the soul imagines, and judges that what it imagines is not outside, but inside the brain, i.e., it perceives an object as absent. This is the difference between sensing and imagining.” (Malebranche, SAT / RV II, 1st, I, 1, p. 88 / p. 143)

¹⁷ “In this second book we shall discuss the imagination, as the natural progression of things obliges us to do, for there is such a close relationship between the senses and the imagination that they should not be separated. We shall even see that the difference between these two faculties is but one of degree.” (Malebranche, SAT / RV II, Part 1, Chap. 1, p. 87 / p. 142)

¹⁸ “But it should be noted that the fibers of the brain are agitated much more by the impressions of objects than by the flow of spirits. And this is why the soul is much more influenced by external objects that it judges as present and capable of making it feel pleasure and pain than it is by the flow of animal spirits. However, it sometimes happens that persons whose animal spirits are highly agitated by fasting, vigils, a high fever, or some other violent passion have the internal fibers of their brains set in motion as forcefully as by external objects. Because of this such people *sense* what they should only *imagine*, and they think they see objects before their eyes, which are only in their imaginations. This shows that with regard to what occurs in the body, the senses and the imagination differ only in degree, as I have just suggested.” (Malebranche, SAT / RV II, 1st, I, 1, p. 88 / p. 143-144)

¹⁹ Concerning the contrast between the dependence of imagination on the soul/body union and the independence of understanding, self-consciousness, and freedom, see also: Ott, Walter, *Descartes*,

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If only pure ideas carry truth in themselves, then a dogmatic or problematic idealism becomes unavoidable. Besides, it also implies a sort of skeptical and solipsistic empiricism, because sensations and imaginations remain entirely embedded and enclosed in an individual soul responding to the movements of the singular body to which that soul is united. The universal nature of ideas and their truth value contrasts with the contingent particularity of the psychosomatic union, made apparent in the processes of sensing and imagining. Consequently, these envelop and exhibit an *analogia hominis*, instead of an *analogia universi*,²⁰ which inexorably implies that sensing and imagining only allow us to judge about particular bodily relationships, be it external relationships to objects through sensations, or internal relationships among brain traces through imaginations. Sensing and imagining reveal the constituency of an individual body, their content and expression tend to be biographical and idiolectal. Disembodied and strictly eidetic, true knowledge of essence depends on a theologoseology granting the clarity and distinctness of evidence, provided by intellectual intuition of ideas, qualified as *seeing-in-God*.

The psychosomatic-centered perspective that Malebranche favors on sensation and imagination is instrumental first and foremost to distinguish the realm of ideas as spiritual things, perceivable by the pure understanding, from the realm of material beings, conveyed by sensory and imaginary perceptions corresponding to brain traces whose concomitant awareness entails always a certain degree of confusion. Secondly, a psychosomatic-centered view is extremely enlightening in order to help us not only diagnose human cognitive and volitive disorders but also, and above all, devise a kind of efficient psycho-therapeutic method. Now, this philosophical therapy of the mind would comprise, as it were, a two-fold mental training, consisting of cognitive self-discipline as well as of volitive self-liberation. In short, one should learn how to establish and protect the monarchy of reason in one's own soul, and thereby vehemently resist to all forms of cognitive and volitive slavery; this effort being tantamount to (a) withholding one's free consent except in face of self-evident truths,²¹ (b)

Malebranche, and the Crisis of Perception (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Peppers-Bates, Susan, *Nicholas Malebranche: Freedom in an Occasionalist World* (London: Continuum, 2009).

²⁰ We refer here to Malebranche's quotation of Bacon about the subjectivity of perceptions (see Malebranche, SAT /RV II, 2nd, II, p. 136 / p. 210).

²¹ This refers to the well-known rules to avoid errors in the sciences and in morals, presented in longer or shorter formulas recurrently, but solemnly stated in SAT / RV I, II, 4, p. 10 / p. 34-35: "*We should never give complete consent except to propositions which seem so evidently true that we cannot refuse it of them without feeling an inward pain and the secret reproaches of reason. [...] We should never absolutely love some good if we can without remorse refuse to love it.*" (See also Malebranche SAT /RV I, V, 3, p. 24 / p. 53; STA / RV I, XX, 2, p. 86 / p. 140.)

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carefully and judiciously doubting “*par sagesse et par pénétration*”²² while sensing and imagining, and (c) safeguarding one’s mastery over the senses and the imagination, for, otherwise, one nurtures a “visionary mind,” undergoing full madness (as a *visionary of the senses*) or half madness (as a *visionary of the imagination*).²³ On this slave-master relationship, Malebranche clarifies the sense of a desirable, though unstable, monarchical organization:

It is not a defect to have a brain that can imagine things strongly, and that receives very distinct and vivid images from the least important objects, provided that the soul always remains the master of the imagination and that these images are imprinted at the direction of the soul and erased when it wishes. On the contrary, this is the origin of subtlety and strength of mind. (SAT / RV II, 3rd, I, 4, p. 163 / p. 246-247.)

Under his psychosomatic perspective, Malebranche assumes that the “faculty of imagining, or the imagination, consists only in the soul’s power of forming images of objects by producing changes in the fibers of that part of the brain which can be called the *principal* part, because it responds to all the parts of the body, and is the place where the soul immediately resides, if one may so speak” (SAT / RV II, 1st, I, 1, p. 88 / p. 144). More specifically, Malebranche stresses that imagination constitutes simply “the soul’s power to form images of objects by imprinting them, so to speak, in the fibers of its brain; the greater and more distinct the traces of the animal spirits, which are the strokes of these images, the more strongly and distinctly the soul will imagine these objects” (SAT / RV II, 1st, I, 3, p. 89 / p. 145). The idea that soul and body have a union of *correspondence* while enjoying substantial autonomy is complicated by the introduction of two different powers in imagination, the power of the soul and the power of the body, each of them appearing to secure a certain self-determining efficacy, yet entangled with a bi-directional inter-determination (SAT / RV II, 1st, I, 2, p. 88 / p. 144-145). For imagination can be active when it operates under the command of our free, intellectual will, but it can also be passive when it mirrors the mechanism of brain traces and their fixed relations, rigidified through habits, because:

we imagine objects only by forming images of them, and these images are nothing other than the traces the animal spirits make in the brain; [...] we imagine things more strongly in proportion as these traces are deeper and better engraved, and as the animal spirits have passed through them more often and more violently; [...] when the spirits have passed through these traces many times, they enter there more easily than

²² “There are doubts springing from passion and stupidity, from blindness and malice, or simply from caprice and the will to doubt. But one may also doubt from caution and distrust, from wisdom and intellectual insight. The Academic and atheists’ doubt is of the former kind, true philosophers’ of the latter. The former is a doubt of darkness, never leading toward, but always away from, light. The latter is generated by light and in turn helps to some extent in producing light.” (Malebranche SAT / RV I, XX, 3, p. 86 / p. 140-141.)

²³ See Malebranche, SAT / RV II, 3rd, I, 5, p. 164-165 / p. 248-249.

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other places nearby, through which they have never passed, or have not passed as often. (SAT / RV II, 2nd, II, p. 134 / p. 207.)

The way in which one uses imagination, in a more sensory, passive, or in a rather intellectual, active manner, would affect the brain structure and function. Similarly, the way in which the brain fibers differ in consistency, being for instance more malleable in infants and women, and harder in aged and learned people, would induce different patterns in imaginative processes. Ideally, to assist one's search for truth, imagination should be flexible and docile to the command of the soul: its "facility" in forming images should not follow repeated sensory habits, it should instead enable one's soul to compose difficult, novel, abstract objects, that is, "to imagine what one wishes with great ease, promptness, and even clarity" (SAT / RV II, 2nd, I, 2, p. 132 / p. 204). In this regard, Malebranche's neuropsychology contains an outline of the optimal education of imagination to enhance the best level of neuroplasticity that guarantees the most efficient cognitive activities. Indeed, if in order to learn new difficult matters one needs intently to focus one's attention, and if attention presupposes active imagination representing and retaining vividly the object of attention, then the quality of learning depends on the plasticity of the brain fibers to enact new movements and so form new images. Conversely, the disorders of imagination, deeply disturbing in "learned people," proceed mostly from "moral causes," i.e., one's own cognitive-behavioral patterns, namely the heavy predominance of memory and reading, reinforced by the idolatry of authority and erudition, in detriment of the mind's freedom (SAT / RV II, 2nd, Chaps. II-VII, p. 134-154 / p. 206-233). It is worth noting that memory as well as habits are placed within the scope of imagination, signaling the lasting efficacy of something absent, transformed into brain traces corresponding to ideas. The essence of memory and habit is essentially reducible to the easiness or facility (*facilité*) displayed by animal spirits when repeating certain trajectories throughout the brain fibers and the body nerves.²⁴

The educational and moral therapy of the soul requires chiefly the use of reason through meditation. Here "meditation" means the active method of building the realm of "spiritual sciences" through "pure intellections," instead of forging mere pseudo-sciences based on the capacity of memorizing, repeating and assembling confusedly enmeshed ideas

²⁴ Malebranche's neuropsychology portrays a double connectionist or synaptic system in which the links between brain traces are mirrored by the links between ideas *latu sensu* or emotions. Moreover, the brain traces are connected either accidentally by experience (when they are impressed at the same time, fading gradually if not repeated) or essentially by nature (when they are necessary for the conservation of life). See Malebranche, SAT / RV II, 1st, V, p. 101-109 / p. 158-171.

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through the power of passive imagination. By meditating on abstract truths, ideally since childhood and throughout all life, the soul liberates itself and deploys its native freedom of thinking, and loving the novelty of truth, which supposes the facility or flexibility of active imagination driven by the intellect: “the best means for acquiring this facility that makes the principal difference between a man of intelligence and any other is to be trained from youth to seek the truth of even the most difficult things, because at that age the brain fibers are capable of all kinds of inflections” (SAT / RV II, 2nd, I, 2, p. 132 / p. 204). The psycho-pedagogy and psycho-therapy that unlocks the purely rational dynamic of truth aims at disciplining sensation, imagination, and attention. Now, the most challenging disorder of passive imagination occurs when it is disrupted by “strong and vigorous imaginations,” that enslave the soul and paralyze one’s power of reasoning due to “that constitution of the brain which renders it capable of having very deep vestiges and traces that so occupy the soul’s capacity that they prevent it from focusing its attention on things other than those represented by these images” (SAT / RV II, 3rd, I, 3, p. 162 / p. 245). This oppressive intensity of strong imaginations fully occupies the finite capacity of the soul, thereby impairing the sound functioning of judgment and annulling the freedom of thinking. People suffering from strong imaginations approach madness, displaying therefore epistemic and moral flaws. For “They are vehement in their passions, biased in their opinions, and always conceited and very self-satisfied” (SAT / RV p. 165 / p. 249). Or otherwise put, they have “small minds” (misjudging with pride the value of their beliefs), they are “visionaries” (establishing a regime of excess in their perceptions and passions), and they only grasp the merely sensory surface of truth, i.e., hyperbolic illusions, and the external layer of virtue, i.e., Pharisaic rituals.

Besides the disturbing effects of imagination on knowledge and morality, Malebranche admits also that the finitude of the understanding constitutes *per se* a source of error, but such error derives from a cognitive *hybris*, consisting in self-ignorance and self-confusion, whenever one attempts at “penetrating infinity” with a finite mind (SAT / RV, III, 1st, ii, 2, p. 204-205 / p. 301-302). One could daresay that imagination is still in play here, because if one ignores the limitation of the mind and applies it to the impossible elucidation of absolute magnitudes (e.g., speed, duration, and extension) or to the impossible comprehension of theological mysteries (e.g., Trinity and Incarnation), then one is being misled by the alluring force of imagination, and the compelling false beliefs grounded in imagination.

1.2. On Hume's Mind: The General Mechanics of Fictional Connections

The embodied continuity between sensation and imagination, so deeply engraved within Cartesianism, persists in Humean empiricism, even though it does not entail the same epistemological consequences. Just as Locke immerses into Descartes's argument in order to efficiently dismantle the metaphysics of innate ideas, so too David Hume seems to plunge into Malebranche's system, acknowledging a great extent of empirical truth on a phenomenological level, as it were, while rejecting the metaphysical interpretation that supports the dogmatic belief in the strictly intellectual nature of truth. In a seemingly paradoxical scenario, Hume and Malebranche share the same bulk of basic evidence; and yet they reach some diametrically opposed conclusions. Unsurprisingly enough, Humean scholarship has been attentive to important similarities that both in *The Search after Truth* and *A Treatise of Human Nature* comprehend what one might designate as the self-observational strata of analysis, the skeptical method of research, and the nuclear philosophical lexicon.²⁵

Concerning imagination, the most significant feature resides in its power of separation and union of simple ideas "guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself" because it operates automatically and mechanically, through a "kind of attraction" (and repulsion),²⁶ deploying an autonomous system of communication of forces, as though ideas in the mind moved lawfully like bodies in the space. The gravitational forces, embodied by imagination's acts of connecting ideas, are resemblance, contiguity, and cause-effect. These associating qualities determine the connective power of imagination, whose orderly functioning constrain us to accept the validity of ideas as if they were impressions. Now, adopting an architectural trait of Malebranche's system, Hume accepts that between impressions and ideas there is nothing but a difference in the "degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or

²⁵ As for the impregnation of Hume with Malebranche's thought, I agree with C. W. Doxsee (1916, p. 692) when he defends that: "These thinkers have in common (a) a very similar analysis of causation; (b) a negative account of the knowability of the self; and (c) a doctrine of 'natural judgment.' In many instances, as we shall see, the correspondence on these points is so exact as to exhibit almost identical phraseology." More recently, Kail (2008) and Ryan (2020), among many others, have pursued the same comparative pathway with enlightening results.

²⁶ Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978, 2nd ed.), Book I, Part I, Sect. IV, p. 10, 12.

Jesus, P. (2023). *The Varieties of Imagination: Between Cognitive Spontaneity and Mental Disorder* (pp. 39-76). In F. Silva, & B. Dörflinger (Eds.), *KANT ON POETRY / KANT ÜBER POESIE*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.

consciousness.”²⁷ Thus, sensation, memory and imagination display a natural continuum of fading intensity, which affects the development of belief, and thereby impacts on epistemic and moral attitudes, that is, on the way we make judgments and on the way we drive (or are driven by) our passions. Belief is not grounded in any conceptual basis; it consists in the feeling of “superior *force, or vivacity, or solidity, or firmness, or steadiness*” that immediately accompanies original impressions, but that also mediately invests ideas by an “act of the mind which renders realities more present to us than fictions,” in proportion to their relative closeness to impressions.²⁸ The analysis of belief proves that a full circle with bi-directional movement emerges here between impressions and ideas: impressions become ideas through representation and, in their turn, some ideas may imitate or even produce new impressions. “The effect, then, of belief is to raise up a simple idea to an equality with our impressions, and bestow on it a like influence on the passions. This effect it can only have by making an idea approach an impression in force and vivacity.”²⁹ This is why imagination may increase the feeling of vivacity accompanying fictional ideas by connecting them to significant, present impressions or to imagistic memories, especially when nature wants us to learn and avoid harmful past impressions.

Human nature, not reason, determines how belief grows, spreads, and actuates through the mere communication of force and vivacity among impressions and ideas, that is, through mere custom and “customary transitions” that impel the imagination to compose relationships, regardless of both reasoning and reflection (whose enlightenment occurs *ex post facto*), and regardless of the fact that reason cannot discover any real connections among the mind’s perceptions.³⁰ For nature cares less about formal truth than about material life. The endorsement of the efficacy of automatic custom and belief in safeguarding the conditions of life constitutes the Humean version of the primacy of praxis over theory. In general, however, one may easily distinguish between feeling impressions and imagining or thinking ideas, because impressions “comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul,”³¹ whereas reproduced ideas convey mere copies or images that reflect, represent, resemble impressions. As for “perfect ideas,” they attain a higher level of abstraction, in that they qualitatively change and transpose impressions. Now, those

²⁷ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part I, Sect. I, p. 1.

²⁸ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Appendix, p. 628-629.

²⁹ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part III, Sect. X, p. 119.

³⁰ See the section on the cause of belief: Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part III, Sect. VIII, p. 98-107.

³¹ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part I, Sect. I, p. 1.

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degrees of intensity can become indiscernible, and then ideas and impressions merge together, as it regularly occurs “in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent emotions of the soul.”³² These possible occasions of confusion reveal the constitutive frailty of human nature that easily may lose the referential anchoring points of reality when imaginations reach or even surpass the intensity of sensations and memories. Let us stress that, according to Hume, one’s attachment to *reality* remains ultimately void and undeterminable and mysterious, insofar as it is a matter of believing in any fact, i.e., feeling a higher degree of vivacity, and achieving a vaster field of coherence among perceptions always dependent on the mind. Metaphysically speaking, and as part of the destruction of the metaphysics of causation, Hume denies access to any groundwork of absolute truth, while preserving a “critical realism.”³³ the primordial character of impressions supplies the anchoring point of reality, but it does not signify that the *fundamentum inconcussum veritatis* lies in sensation. It is absolutely uncertain and undecidable whether sense impressions originate from external objects, from internal processes, or from a Superior Author acting as an immanent transcendence (like the Augustinian divine *Magister* within one’s mind or Malebranche’s vision-in-God).³⁴

As stated by Hume, there is no other source of ideas beyond sensation, memory, and imagination. At the antipodes of Malebranche’s intellectual intuition, Hume’s reason would constitute solely the power of analysis of thinking and feeling as well as the rightful determination and justification of all inferential operations. More specifically, reason denotes the procedural power of establishing chains of valid reasons, which amounts to the capacity to judge and perform “demonstrative and probable reasonings.”³⁵ As such, the Humean model of reason or intellect does not supply any peculiar ideas that would form a proper, sovereign realm of knowledge. Upon depriving reason of an intuitive capacity, Hume displaces the center of gravity of truth, from “pure intellect” or “mind alone” to sensory impressions duly analyzed by reason. As a result, the fundamental evidence will disclose the fragmentary diversity of perceptions as self-standing or self-supported internal existences, that is to say, as fully-

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ See the compelling in-depth interpretation elaborated by Wilson, Fred, *The External World and our Knowledge of it: Hume’s Critical Realism: An Exposition and a Defence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

³⁴ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part III, Sect. V, p. 84.

³⁵ “When I oppose the imagination to memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason, I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings.” (Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part 3, Sect. 9, p. 117n)

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fledged, separated substances flowing unceasingly in the stream of one's mind, a stream without any underlying streambed. The climactic point of the dissolution of imaginary concepts is reached in the final pages of "Book I: Of the Understanding" devoted to the fiction of personal identity, depicting an anti-substantialist interpretation quite consonant with the emptiness of the idea of "self" in Malebranche's inner feeling and Kant's transcendental apperception.³⁶ Under the scrutiny of what is given by the senses and determined by reason, the ideas of selfhood, identity and substantiality turn out to be the supreme fictions and, whenever they are applied to any stream or bundle or collection of perceptions, new fictions coalesce in the mental world. The stream of ideas is not a really undivided current, or a perfectly continuous process; it is rather a seeming chain whose links are actually broken, yet feeling unified as a virtually infinite whole, because of the continuous operations of imagination. In truth, nothing is continuous nor infinite, nothing endures, and nothing is connected. If one feels vivid connections and believes in enduring infinite unities of stable substances, selves, or souls, such feeling and such belief only demonstrate that an uninterrupted system of transitions was laboriously created. Imagination synthesizes permanently the supra-empirical phantasms of unity, continuity, and infinity, designing a well-ordered, entirely fancied, ideal world, forged as though by "a magical faculty in the soul" whose "customary conjunctions" transcend one's explanatory ability, volitional control and distinct self-awareness.³⁷

Time and space cannot be conceived as proper *quanta infinita continua*, unless one already presupposes a unifying and unified ground or function for all possible operations of imagination and thought. However, the Humean rational analysis of succession and extension seems to require the existence of indivisible moments and discrete points, assign to imagination the fictional production of continuity in succession and duration, and dismiss the possibility of real mathematical divisibility *in infinitum*.³⁸ In Kant's *Transcendental Aesthetics* the notion of "*a priori* form of sensibility" (A 36 sq / B 53 sq) signifies nonetheless the "formal unity and totality" of space and time, as—subjectively real, not fictional—forms of outer and inner sense, the latter containing all possible representations, and bestowing comprehensive connectiveness on their whole succession. Undoubtedly, for Hume, all connective unity is fancied and its enduring design mirrors the substantial model. By breaking the spell of

³⁶ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Sect. VI, p. 251-263.

³⁷ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part I, Sect. VII, p. 23-24.

³⁸ See Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part II, Sect. II, p. 30-32.

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imagination, reason teaches that perceptions are not accidents nor predicates enjoying inhesion to any substantial support. The metaphysics of substance collapses immediately, when one understands that it is built by imagination. The proper, minimalist sense of substance refers to atomic perceptions. For every perception would be plainly capable of existing by itself, like a mathematical point,³⁹ despite its dependence on the mind as pure form of interiority, a kind of immaterial inner theatre, republic or commonwealth of ideas governed by a relational dynamic process.⁴⁰ This socio-political metaphor combines the ontological assumption of mental atomism or mental monadism with the artifactuality and artificiality of mental wholes. Imagination performs the enduring common power capable of instituting the commonwealth of the mind. The ties, which transform the actual atoms of perceptions into artificial molecules, are produced in agreement with certain aesthetic or sensorial, associating qualities. Absolutely indifferent to logical principles, imagination follows the sympathetic *aesthesis* of impressions and ideas that are jointly awoken, conforming to the naturally and mutually excitatory movements of animal spirits. The Humean mental ontology postulates, in a neo-Scholastic tone, that oneness and beingness are reciprocal—*ens et unum convertuntur*. The mind's real elements are the indivisible units of impressions; these individual beings are the only real existing beings. It hence follows that all bonds and ties and connections depart from reality, inducing a subtle counterfactual mode of perceiving, feeling, reasoning. As implied in

³⁹ Let us invoke again the critique of “infinite divisibility of space and time” (leading to the admission of indivisible moments in time and mathematical points in space; Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part II, Sect. II, p. 31-32) as well as the very recurrent critique of substantial complexes disguised as simple ideas: “I have already proved that we have no perfect idea of substance; but that taking it *for something, that can exist by itself*, it's evident every perception is a substance, and every distinct part of a perception a distinct substance [...]” (Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Sect. V, p. 244.)

⁴⁰ One must recall the well-known passages on the being of mind or the thinking self: “a *mind* is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and supposed, though falsely, to be endowed with a perfect simplicity and identity. Now as every perception is distinguishable from another, and may be considered as separately existent; it evidently follows, that there is no absurdity in separating any particular perception from the mind; that is, in breaking off all its relations [...]” (Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Sect. II, p. 207) “[...] [N]othing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. [...] The mind is a kind of theater, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different [...]” (Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Sect. VI, p. 252-253) “[...] [T]he true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are linked together by the relation of cause and effect, and mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other. [...] In this respect, I cannot compare the soul more properly to anything than to a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant change of its parts.” (Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Sect. VI, p. 261.)

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the Leibnizian formula on monadic reality, “*ce qui n’est pas véritablement un être n’est pas non plus véritablement un être*,”⁴¹ the truth and substantiality of mental units constitutes the first principle of mental ontology. All numbers and multitudes, as well as all compositions, are untrue, unreal, unsubstantial, predicated and dependent on something else. Just as in a liberal social ontology, namely in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*,⁴² where the pact of union among individuals generates the artificial body of the commonwealth, the unsubstantial composite called *civitas*, so too the fluid architecture of the thinking self is an artificial plural unity, continuously created by the connective power of imagination. The mind is an imagined or fictional community of originally fragmented and free singularities whose dynamic associations display an endogenous agency, designing stable self-generative patterns, contingently sustained. In human polities as well as in human minds only individual beings are truly beings, while transindividual structures are nothing but factitious phenomena. The commonwealth of the mind is reiteratively instituted by the unifying labors of imagination, as if by an unceasingly renewed and hallucinatory covenant. Imagination holds a sovereign power that generates collective units against the very nature of the fundamentally atomic and independent elements of being.

Given their higher degree of force and liveliness, original impressions enjoy an ontological and epistemic primacy over all other perceptions. In other words, original impressions produce the strongest belief. Consequently, the most significant boundary in the territory of human mind is located between the domain of original impressions and the domain of perfect ideas. In terms of mental powers, this boundary makes evident the qualitative heterogeneity which opposes sensation, extended over the surrounding area of memory, to imagination. If sensation presents a broken flux of separable impressions; then, memory maintains the “first vivacity” of impressions, exercising the power of reproduction under the form of a representational, broken, flux of separable ideas that remain faithful to the matter, order, and position of original impressions. A truly healthy and proficient memory does not possess any spontaneity unfolding a “power of variation” and a “power of connection” whose sole

⁴¹ “Pour trancher court, je tiens pour un axiome cette proposition identique qui n’est diversifiée que par l’accent, savoir *que ce qui n’est pas véritablement un être, n’est pas non plus véritablement un être*. On a toujours cru que l’un et l’être sont des choses réciproques.” (Leibniz, G. W., „XVI. Leibniz an Arnauld,” in *Die philosophischen Schriften 2*, hrsg. von C. I. Gerhardt, Hildesheim: Olms, 1978, p. 97.)

⁴² Hobbes, T., “Chap. XVII Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Commonwealth,” *Leviathan: with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668*, ed., with Introduction and Notes by E. Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 106-109.

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proprietor is imagination.⁴³ This means that imagination not only transforms impressions into images and even “perfect ideas” but also feigns relationships, and thereby generates new ideational complexes that are essentially false, though with varying degrees of vivacity and belief. The creative spiral of imaginary connections is galvanized by belief: the impressions and ideas loaded with the heaviest charges of belief are connected by imagination which then spreads that force over higher levels of feigned ideas through new feigned bonds. This occurs not only automatically through the spontaneous operations of unreflective imagination, but also consciously and strategically when poets or rhetors combine the truth of past impressions with the falsehood of new ideas to promote the acceptance of their fictional systems and possibly of their moral projects:

Poets themselves, though liars by profession, always endeavour to give an air of truth to their fictions [...]. It is evident, that poets make use of this artifice of borrowing the names of their persons, and the chief events of their poems, from history, in order to procure a more easy reception for the whole [...]. The several incidents of the piece acquire a kind of relation by being united into one poem or representation; and if any of these incidents be an object of belief, it bestows a force and vivacity on the others, which are related to it.⁴⁴

A smooth working continuum ties together all operations of human’s imagination and fancy: the same general principles are in process, from the imaginary connections of ideas nurturing all human pseudo-sciences (namely the chief ideas of substance and cause-effect) until the imaginary connections fabricating metaphors, fables and dreams. In a structural sense, all connections between ideas are fictional connections, but eminently regular, not chaotic nor random. Approaching the Malebranchean notion of “strong imaginations,” Hume highlights the efficacy of “poetical enthusiasm” and “lively imagination” on the brink of madness:

[...] as a lively imagination very often degenerates into madness or folly, and bears it a great resemblance in its operations; so they influence the judgment after the same manner, and produce belief from the very same principles. When the imagination, from any extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits, acquires such a vivacity as disorders all its powers and faculties, there is no means of distinguishing betwixt truth and falsehood; but every loose fiction or idea, having the same influence as the impressions of the memory, or the conclusions of the judgment, is receiv’d on the same footing, and operates with equal force on the passions.⁴⁵

The Humean imagination exhibits the inventive liberty of fancy which crosses the confines of original impressions and their simple copies, opening up the infinite horizon of fictional

⁴³ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part I, Sect. III, p. 8-10.

⁴⁴ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part III, Sect. X, p. 121 and 122.

⁴⁵ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part III, Sect. X, p. 123.

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wholeness, the creativity of mental worlds, be it prominently mimetic, skillfully poetic, or degenerately mad. All those possible worlds are dynamically or genetically analogous, considering that imaginative operations lay out the same unifying syntactic structures, and that even the semantic disorder of madness proceeds from the same power of connection and variation in accordance with general principles. For Hume, the connectedness that characterizes our way of perceiving phenomena is already intrinsically feigned, fanciful or magic. The relative truth of original impressions is falsified by the construction of imaginary connections, in which accidental conjunctions are mistaken for substantial connections. The irresistible, universal principles of union and cohesion of ideas belong to the natural constitution of imagination, and translate into naturally efficacious effects. The engendered connections in the mental world are practically useful, pragmatically felicitous in one's dealings with the inferred outside world, contributing positively to one's self-conservation in a structured organization of phenomena. Notwithstanding such vital efficacy, every relation, every conjunction, every supposed connection belongs to the regime of utter contingency, reducible to the contingent natural constitution of our brain fibers. The Cartesian associative persists here as the standard model of the brain, and renders intelligible the paradox or rational aporia that unveils the particularity and contingency of imagination's general principles. The naturally libertarian jurisdiction of imagination invites our indulgence towards indolent belief. Only the rational determination of this mental world does shed light on the pervasiveness of groundless belief and illusion, by vivisectioning the organ of imagination as the natural mechanic power to create the "contingent order" of the "mental world" based on unconsciously customary and unwillingly illusory operations.

In lived praxis, belief fulfils the role of efficacious instinct and efficacious practical reason. Apparently, reason's inquisitive zeal unsettles the enjoyment of life, reason destroys the wholeness of the lifeworld. Between pure reason and embodied life, as Hume poignantly underscores, one finds an abyss: life flourishes by trusting and adhering to an illusory flow of ideas, reason paralyzes by doubting and isolating the atomic elements of perceptions as the only ultimate truth and the only ultimate reality. In the last effort of uneasy self-analysis,⁴⁶ Hume's *confiteor* prayer offers a markedly melancholic concession: skeptical perplexity, and invincible, self-diffident ignorance leave reason deadlocked, in metaphysical solitary spleen. If perceptions are separate existences, and if all connections are feigned by our minds, then all

⁴⁶ See the Conclusion to Book I, Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Sect. VII, p. 263-274.

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knowledge revolves around this minimal self-knowledge. To build any system of ideas one needs the power of connection, which is inherently false and falsifying. In short, all complex ideas derive from and lead to self-confabulation, including the foundational ideas of person, world, and God. This destructive advancement in the science of human nature constitutes a major progressive success within the self-diagnostic and self-therapeutic logic of skepticism, that is to say, it provides the exposition of the genesis and sustenance of belief, the elucidation of the accurate anatomy and natural mechanics through which the mind produces falsehood, and life thrives on falsehood. The final corollary must assert that the marching up “directly to the capital or center” of sciences proved that the science of human nature is the first groundwork, “the only solid foundation”⁴⁷ as well as the enticing and disquieting swan song in the long accumulation of ruins that is the history of science and metaphysics. The science of human nature envelops the first principles of all possible sciences exhibiting the fall and collapse of their absurd pretensions, thus becoming the only true science and, what is more, the critical apocalypse of all sciences, at last unveiled as pseudo-sciences. For the science of human nature, especially the new science of imagination, discloses the crucial falsifying processes that underlie all so-called sciences. Oscillating between nihilism and redemption, the science of human nature makes one acutely aware of the really vain character of the ideal systems of sciences, i.e., self-deceiving fictional adventures, bodies of empty concepts connected by fake bonds.

2. Transcendental Synthesis: Re-Imagining the Cognitive Efficacy of Imagination

In keeping with Malebranche and Hume, Kant maintains that imagination deploys the power of connection. However, this power is no longer inextricably linked to the realm of falsehood, ruled by embodied sensible operations whose contingent laws are in conflict with reason, although those laws belong to the nature of human mental and physiological functioning. Within Kant’s transcendental idealism, among the varieties of imagination there is a special mode of imagining that amounts to the capacity of applying concepts to intuitions; therefore, imagination can participate in the production of knowledge where the human mind reaches universal validity, logical necessity, and objective unity. The cognitive efficacy of imagination is not only rehabilitated but also radically requalified in the *Critique of Pure Reason* insofar as Kant presents imagination as being capable of working in perfect accord with the logical

⁴⁷ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Introduction, p. XX.

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normativity of understanding, thus becoming an instrumental activity contributing to the enlargement of the well-ordered country of truth. The most impactful Kantian novelty consists in locating imagination under the double jurisdiction of the lower and the higher mental faculties. When imagination perfectly harmonizes form and matter, understanding and sensibility, it becomes the operational center of human cognition under the innovative name of “productive synthesis of imagination,” which does not denote the *genius* of “poetical imagination,” but rather signifies the *a priori* capacity of generating objective cognition. Yet, by paying dual allegiance to those foreign powers, imagination can not only reconcile them and make them collaborate, but also betray rationality, as it were, and selectively comply with sensations or with concepts. This is why the products of imagination are so diverse, ranging from chaotic compositions, like dreams and delusions, to the purity of a categorial determination, that is, the rigorous application of an *a priori* concept to an intuitive manifold (KrV, A 124). Kant explicitly points out that the ambivalence of imagination cannot be denied. Undoubtedly, its spontaneity can lead either to fiction or to truth, owing to its dual or hybrid character, its mediating function between sensations and concepts. The synthetic operations of imagination are essential to the cognition of objects because they bring together two heterogeneous realms which, although equally necessary for the generation of objects, remain disconnected and ineffective *per se* as extreme opposites: blind intuitive sensibility and empty conceptual understanding. Therefore, the cognitive efficacy of imagination depends on its equilibrium or harmonic symmetry in conjoining the determinable matter of sensibility with the determining form of understanding (KrV, B 152-153).

According to the broadest Kantian definition, in median alignment with Rationalist and Empiricist views, imagination refers to the automatic synthesis or combination of images, which presupposes the transformation of intuitions into images and the perseverance of their presence under absence. Imagination exercises par excellence the power of connective presentification or re-presentation: “Synthesis in general is [...] the mere effect of the imagination, of a blind though indispensable function of the soul [*Funktion der Seele*], without which we would have no cognition [*Erkenntnis*] at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious” (KrV, A 78/B 103); it is “the faculty [*Vermögen*] for representing an object even *without its presence* in intuition” (KrV, B 151), the “faculty of intuitions [*Vermögen der Anschauungen*] without the presence of the object” (*Anthropology*, §. 28; AA 07: 167). The richness of Kant’s conception of imagination becomes evident when he introduces new distinctions into the taxonomy of modes and degrees of normal and pathological imagination.

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In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the most significant new distinction concerns two regular or lawful ways in which the power of imagination operates, either merely reproducing empirical associations, or else producing transcendental unifications. The synthetic activity of imagination is itself either reproductive, recollective and imitative—imagination being then construed as a form of quasi-memory; or else productive, formative, and spontaneous—imagination being alternatively construed as a type of quasi-intelligence. On the one hand, the laws of reproductive imagination belong to the realm of the lower faculties, the unstable jurisdiction of sensibility, where “laws” refer to mere “psychological habits,” rather than to the legislation and enforcement of really universal logical laws. On the other hand, the laws of productive imagination partake in the spontaneity of understanding, a cognitive faculty of higher rank whose lawgiving efficacy through the application of its system of unifying rules, or concepts, may engender the objects of science.

For Kant reproductive imagination corresponds partly to the Humean imagination, the power of “association of ideas” which complies with the empirical principles of contiguity and similarity, but not with causality that Kant locates among the *a priori* rules of the understanding. In a revolutionary move, maybe inspired by J. N. Tetens⁴⁸ who does not endorse Hume’s reduction of the cause-effect connection to a contingent imaginary connection, and instead views it as the “subjective representation of objective dependence” by assigning it to the “inner subjective causation in the understanding,”⁴⁹ Kant excludes the relationship of cause-effect from the set of empirical laws of association, given that Kant also

⁴⁸ It is likely that the best study on Tetens’ “harmful influence” (p. 326) over Kant remains the one by H. J. de Vleeschauwer, *La déduction transcendantale dans l’œuvre de Kant. Tome 1 : La déduction transcendantale avant la Critique de la raison pure* (Paris : Honoré Champion, 1934, pp. 284-326). More recently H. E. Allison has endorsed Vleeschauwer’s main conclusions, in *Kant’s Transcendental Deduction: An Analytical-Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 143-163).

⁴⁹ J. N. Tetens locates the cause-effect relationship in the domain of the “conceivability” (*Begreiflichkeit*) in which the concept of cause is the *Grund* (ratio) of the concept of effect. The passage from the grounding concept to the “grounded one” (*Gegründete*) as well as the generation of this new, derived concept cannot be the work of the imagination, but rather of the activity of the understanding (*Verstand, Denkkraft*) which presents an objective relationship: “Die *Begreiflichkeit* des Einen aus dem Andern ist die *subjektivische Vorstellung*, und der Charakter im Verstande, von der *objektivischen Dependenz* der vorgestellten Sachen. [...] Wir haben keine andere Idee von der objektivischen Verursachung, als diese innere subjektivische Verursachung in dem Verstande.” (Tetens, J. N., „Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung,“ in *Neudrucke seltener philosophischer Werke*, Band IV, hrsg. von der Kantgesellschaft, Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1913, p. 318, original edition of 1777, p. 327). In his 1775 essay, *Über die allgemeine spekulative Philosophie* (in *Neudrucke seltener philosophischer Werke*, Band IV, p. 58-59), Tetens had already emphatically asked whether it was a “mere association” or “something more,” that is, “something objective,” “a kind of necessity or constraint in the understanding” that requires a “deeper origin” than the customary conjunction, a source springing “from a natural necessary mode of thinking” (*aus einer natürlichen nothwendigen Denkweise*) and revealing the inner structure of “conceivability” (*Begreiflichkeit*).

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refuses to consider causality as a mere “associating quality” and converts it into a category of the understanding whose “subjectivity” is elevated to the level of universal and necessary condition of objectivity, that is, to a transcendental element of objective cognition. Moreover, Hume does not use the term “reproduction” in his treatment of imagination, probably because he tends to conflate reproductive with productive actions in the way he entangles the imaginative power of repetition with the imaginative power of variation. Humean imagination resembles memory in the sense that it can repeat past impressions, even though this imaginative repetition is qualitatively distinguished from memory’s lively and faithful mode of recollection, for it does not possess the same degree of liveliness, nor does it preserve the original order or form of impressions, showing, instead, the “liberty to transpose and change its ideas,” the spontaneity to freely separate, assemble and rearrange ideas, thereby composing “stories full of winged horses, fiery dragons, and monstrous giants.”⁵⁰ Kant agrees with Hume that the laws of reproductive imagination only possess “subjective validity” and only generate “belief” (KrV, B 140), but he assigns the creation of “winged horses” and other synthetic fictions to a well-known subtype of imagination, the inventive freedom and exemplary originality of *Genius*, as the extraordinary holder of “creative or fictional imagination” (*facultas fingendi, Dichtungsvermögen, bildende Dichtkraft*), that is carefully examined in *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (KU, §§. 46-50; AA 05: 307-320) and in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (§. 33, AA 7: 180-181). The treatment of genius could transform Kant into the precursor of Romanticism, if not even the first Romantic. It is not the case, however, in so far as Kant subordinates imagination to understanding, genius to taste, subjective freedom to universal lawfulness (KU, §. 22; AA 05: 241).⁵¹ As for the Kantian distinction between imagination and memory, let us point out that the reproductive imagination seems to operate as an automatic memory that mechanically recollects and associates past intuitions; whilst the specific difference of memory (*Erinnerungsvermögen*) resides no longer in the higher degree of liveliness, but in the intentionality, deliberation, or consciousness that accompanies and guides the reproduction of representations (*Anthropology*, §. 34; AA 7: 182).

Regarding both reproductive and creative functions of memory and imagination, as well as the construal of their close kinship, Kant maintains to a great extent the notions,

⁵⁰ Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1, Part 1, Sect. 3, p. 10.

⁵¹ As to the complex relationship between Kant and Romanticism, see, for instance, Kneller, J., *Kant and the Power of Imagination* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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definitions and distinctions established by the renewed Aristotelian tradition of German Enlightened Scholasticism, above all by C. Wolff and A. Baumgarten. Indeed, there is a large agreement among them concerning the sequential operations in the lower part of the cognitive faculty, involving the senses, imagination and memory. For the mind firstly perceives outer present objects through the senses, then produces their images by reproducing the perceptions of outer absent objects through the imagination, and finally recognizes and apperceives the reproduced ideas (and the things they represent) through memory. Thus, at the center of sensitive cognition lies “*Facultas imaginandi*” or “*Imaginatio*” equated with the Aristotelian *Phantasia*, and defined as the “faculty of reproduction of ideas” (Wolff, *Psychologia empirica*, §§. 91-92, 107, 193)⁵² or as the “representation (*phantasma*, *Einbildung*) of a past state of the world, and hence of my past state” (Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, §§. 557-558),⁵³ whose general law discloses a regular pattern of chaining images in accordance with their nexus to previous sensations (Wolff, *Psychologia empirica*, §. 117; Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, §. 561).⁵⁴ As for memory, it denotes the “faculty of recognition” applied to

⁵² The opening sentence of the chapter on imagination reads as follows: “§.91 *The mind is capable of reproducing the ideas of sensible absent objects*” (*Objectorum sensibilibus absentium ideas mens reproducere valet...*). In his general definition of imagination Wolff uses the verb “produce” (not in the sense of *fingere*, but rather *exhibere*): “§. 92. *Facultas producendi perceptiones rerum sensibilibus absentium Facultas imaginandi seu Imaginatio appellatur.*” Imagination relies entirely on sensation (“§. 106. *Sine praevia sensatione nullum in anima phantasma oriri potest.*”), and their difference is essentially a matter of degree of clarity (“§. 96. *Phantasmata minus clara sunt ideis sensualibus.*”) (Wolffius [Wolff], Ch., *Psychologia empirica, methodo scientifica pertractata*, Francofurti & Lipsiae, Officina Libraria Rengeriana, 1738, pp. 53-54, 57.)

⁵³ Baumgarten abides to the same realistic perspective in his definition of *Phantasia*: “§. 557. *Conscious sum status mei, hinc status mundi, praeteriti, §. 369. Repraesentatio status mundi praeteriti, hinc status mei praeteriti, §. 369, est PHANTASMA [eine Einbildung] (imaginatio, visum, visio). Ergo phantasmata formo, seu imaginor, idque per vim animae repraesentativam universi pro positu corporis mei, §. 513.*” In the following paragraph Baumgarten insists on the continuity between the senses and the imagination, presence and absence: “§. 558. *Habeo facultatem imaginandi seu PHANTASIAM, §. 557, 216. Quumque imaginationes meae sint perceptiones rerum, quae olim praesentes fuerunt, §. 557, 298, sunt sensorum, dum imaginor, absentium, §. 223.*” (Baumgarten, A. G., *Metaphysica*, editio VII, Halae Magdeburgicae, Impensis Carol Herman Hemmerde, 1779, pp. 197-198.)

⁵⁴ The law of imagination states that the reproduction of images has a regular pattern of “succession of images” (*phantasmatum successio*) depending on the simultaneity, frequency and belongingness of previous perceptions; for these two qualities are the basis for the “*nexus perceptionum*” that determines the associative chaining of images: “§. 107. *Si imaginatio reproducere debet perceptiones aliarum rerum antea simul perceptarum cum ea, quam nunc percipimus; res istae vel saepius, vel diu simul percipiuntur necesse est.* [...] §. 117. *Lex imaginationis sive Phantasmatum haec est propositio: Si qua semel percipimus & unius perceptio denuo producat; imaginatio producit & perceptionem alterius.*” (Wolffius, Ch., *Psychologia empirica, op. cit.*, p. 65 and 76.) Baumgarten’s formula of the law of imagination focuses on the part/whole relationship: “§. 561. *Imaginatio & sensatio sunt singularium, §. 539, 534, hinc in universali nexu constitutorum, §. 257. Unde lex imaginationis: percepta idea partiali recurrit eius totalis, §. 306, 514. Haec propositio etiam associatio idearum dicitur.*” (Baumgarten, A. G., *Metaphysica, op. cit.*, p. 199.) It is noteworthy that, contrary to Hume, the cause-effect relationship is not included among the associating qualities, because it enjoys a higher logical and ontological status.

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reproduced ideas, and therefore recognition is grounded in reproduction and determined by its nexus and qualities, namely its degrees of clarity and obscurity.⁵⁵

Reproduction and recognition stem materially from sensation and unfold a sort of sensible mental *mimesis* that contrasts sharply with potentialities of mental *poiesis*, that is, the imaginative power of separation and combination of perceptions, "*Facultas fingendi*," whose *vana phantasmata* depart from reproduced ideas and reveal "composed" or "synthesized" images, thus introducing a significant level of discontinuity between perception and imagination. In other words, through its combinatory composition of images, this arbitrary manner of imagining, *Facultas fingendi*, produces the novelty of false wholes (never-perceived images, yet made out of perceptually true parts). Consequently, the ordered field of reproduction and recognition feeds an open inventive process, and by the same token *phantasmata* are converted into *figmenta*, *entia ficta*, *fictiones* (*Erdichtungen*).⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the art of inventing fictions may be at once logically dangerous and heuristically profitable (Wolff, *Psychologia empirica*, *op. cit.*, §. 437). As explained by Kant, valuable heuristic fictions are inventions created by the imagination "under the strict oversight of reason," inventions that are translatable into hypotheses based on "the *possibility* of the object itself;" therefore, they cannot be taken for "mere ideas" nor "arbitrary inventions" that can only cohere with "opinion" as a "subjectively and objectively insufficient" mode of "*Fürwahrhalten*" (KrV, A770/B798, A822/B850). Instead, heuristic fictions pertain to a "transcendental heuristics," a transcendental *ars inveniendi* whose well-ordered spontaneity is instrumental to the

⁵⁵ "§. 173. *Ideam reproductam recognoscere* dicimur, quando nobis conscii sumus, nos eam iam antea habuisse. [...] §. 175. *Facultatem ideas reproductas* (consequenter & res per eas repraesentatas) recognoscendi *Memoriam* dicimus. Quoniam itaque ideas reproductas recognoscere valemus; *memoriam habemus*." (Wolfius, Ch., *Psychologia empirica*, *op. cit.*, p. 123.) "§. 579. *Reproductam repraesentationem percipio eandem, quam olim produxeram*, §. 572, 559, i. e. *RECOGNOSCO* [ich erkenne etwas wieder] (recordor). Ergo habeo facultatem reproductas perceptiones recognoscendi seu *MEMORIAM* [Gedaechtniß], §. 216, eamque vel sensitivam, vel intellectualem, §. 575." (Baumgarten, A. G., *Metaphysica*, *op. cit.*, p. 207.)

⁵⁶ Wolff's and Baumgarten's definitions of *Facultas fingendi* converge and overlap: "§. 144. *Facultas phantasmatum divisione ac compositione producendi phantasma rei sensu nunquam perceptae dicitur Facultas fingendi*. [...] §. 146. *Si ea componimus, quae sibi mutuo repugnante, vel naturae vi in eodem subjecto conjungi nequeunt, phantasma ens fictum repraesentat*. [...] §. 170. *Phantasma, quod ens fictum repraesentat, dicitur Figmentum*." (Wolfius, Ch., *Psychologia empirica*, *op. cit.*, p. 97-98, 118) "§. 589. *Combinando phantasmata & PRAESCINDENDO* [durch Trennen und Absondern] i.e. attendendo ad partem alicuius perceptionis tantum, *FINGO* [dichte ich]. Ergo habeo facultatem fingendi, *POETICAM*. [...] §. 590. *Facultatis fingendi haec est regula: Phantasmatum partes percipiuntur ut unum totum*, §. 589. *Perceptiones hinc ortae FICTIONES* [etwas erdichtetes] (*figmenta*), eaeque falsae *CHIMERAEE* dicuntur, *vana phantasmata*, §. 571." (Baumgarten, A. G., *Metaphysica*, *op. cit.*, p. 211-212.)

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philosophical invention of a possible cognitive system of truth.⁵⁷ This heuristic power engages harmoniously both the rationalization of the *facultas fingendi* and the fictionalization of rational principles.

The notions of novelty, wholeness and unity characterize the ‘proper’ of every sensible *figmentum*; furthermore, they supply a useful criterion to signal the emergence of spontaneity within the lower cognitive faculties, and expose the threshold between *mimesis* and *poiesis*, i.e., reproductive or imitative imagination and recognitional memory, on the one hand, and creative or formative imagination on the other. In this respect, Tetens develops an interesting three-stage model that conjoins in a Leibnizian continuum of increasing perfection three representational actions, mutually convertible according to varying degrees of mental spontaneity: 1) perception (*Fassungskraft*), 2) imagination (*Einbildungskraft* defined as reproductive *Phantasie*) and 3) spontaneous *Phantasie* (*Dichtungsvermögen*).⁵⁸ Tetens challenges the quasi-dogma of the regularity of reproductive imagination, arguing that the predictability of the laws of association is jeopardized by an exceedingly complex system of gravitational forces that organize the mental space. It resembles the intimidating geometrical and astronomical “*problème des trois corps*.”⁵⁹ when the law of attraction involves more than two moving bodies, then their orbits are no longer computable. If all ideas in the mind have always a certain degree of similitude and contiguity among them, and if, what is more, imaginative reproduction is always to some extent entangled with imaginative spontaneity, then associative imagination is consistently unstable, singularly unpredictable, dynamically

⁵⁷ A detailed analysis of the Kantian *ars inveniendi* is proposed by Santos, Leonel, *Ideia de uma heurística transcendental: Ensaios de meta-epistemologia kantiana* (Lisboa: Esfera do Caos, 2012).

⁵⁸ For Tetens, „*Die Selbstthätigkeit ist die veränderliche Größe*,“ and hence it explains the unity and homogeneity of the “representational power.” For the inner “elasticity” or “perfectibility” of the “representational power” is a continuous magnitude whose increase or decrease provokes the passage between different intensive stages of action: the action of perceiving, if intensified, becomes an action of reproductive imagining, and vice-versa; likewise, the action of reproducing, if intensified, becomes an action of mixing and forming new images, and vice-versa. (See Tetens, J. N., *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung*, *op. cit.*, p. 103-105, 150-152.)

⁵⁹ Newton’s gravitational laws inspire both D. Hume (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part I, Sect. IV, pp. 10, 12) and J. N. Tetens in their descriptions of imagination. However, whereas Hume trusts in the analogical lawfulness between the mental and the bodily world, Tetens, on his part, highlights the chaotic effect of the multiple concurrent forces: „Soll eine von den ähnlichen Ideen auf A folgen, welche? Und nach welcher Aehnlichkeit? *Alle* Vorstellungen haben gemeinschaftliche Züge, und jede zwei derselben haben mehr als Einen Punkt, woran sie zusammenhangen. Welches ist nun der Punkt, um den herum die Phantasie, als um Mittelpunkt wirkt? [...] Wird die Regellosigkeit der Phantasie darum eine Regelmäßigkeit, weil die Ideen nach dieser Regel reproducirt werden? [...] [D]ie Ideen werden wiederum erwecket, nach ihrer Aehnlichkeit oder nach ihrer Koexistenz, wenn nichts dazwischen kommt. Aber dieses *wenn* ist ein *wenn*. [...] Das selbstthätige Dichtungsvermögen kommt dazwischen [...]“ (Tetens, *Philosophische Versuche...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-111.)

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lawless. Additionally, according to Tetens' perspective, the operations of "spontaneous imagination" depart from simple associations and approximate the efficacy of chemical phenomena, which involve first and foremost dissolving and combining elements so as to produce new substantial forms, new unified wholes, new individuals, like Pegasus.⁶⁰

With regard to the varieties of imagination, the Kantian "productive imagination" (*produktive Einbildungskraft*), protagonist of the Transcendental Deduction (KrV, A 95 sq, B 129 sq) and Schematism (KrV, A 137 / B 176 sq), is endowed with an exorbitant power, in the literal sense that it operates beyond the customary orbits of imaginative actions. Indeed, it performs an *a priori* transcendental synthesis that cannot be equated with the laws of imaginative reproduction nor with the poetic spontaneity of imaginative dissolution, combination, and fusion. Unlike the empirically contingent, psychological laws of reproductive imagination, entirely confined to the subjective validity of belief, the *productive synthesis of the imagination* enjoys objective significance because it combines representations in accord with rules or categories of the understanding which are universally valid and necessary *a priori* (KrV, A 118, A 123, B 140, B 152).⁶¹ Also, opposed to the arbitrariness of fictional inventions and the emptiness of inventive dreamful play, the synthesis of productive imagination realizes the application of the understanding to the manifold of sensible representations, thereby achieving *a priori* time-determinations according to conceptual rules, through the art of schemata (KrV, A 141-142 / B 180-181), and thus constructing an all-encompassing order, i.e., the system of experience, phenomena lawfully unified under one consciousness. Homogeneous with the sensible matter as well as with the conceptual form of all possible objects, imagination produces objective validity *a priori* by synthesizing representations in agreement with concepts, and by schematizing concepts, thus mediating all conceptual subsumptions and conceptual recognitions. Given that all possible synthesis belongs to one

⁶⁰ On examining the creation of new colors by a painter as the metaphor for the creativity of the soul's "*bildende Dichtkraft*", and on expounding the representation of Pegasus as a paradigm for "fictional" creations, Tetens criticizes the way in which A. Gerard (*An Essay on Genius*, 1774, translated into German in 1776) assigns the source of "genius" to the associating principles of reproductive imagination (see Tetens, *Philosophische Versuche...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 105, 113 and 116). A fiction, as Tetens conceives it, presupposes significantly more than just "separate and put together again" (*Zertheilen und Wiederausammensetzen*) previous sensible perceptions. Tetens abides to the basic Gestalt principle ("The whole is greater than the sum of its parts"); for Pegasus presents a "third" entity, a simple, meaningful representation where horse and wings are dissolved, mixed, fused, developed. Pegasus springs from "their unification into one whole" (*ihre Vereinigung zu Einem Ganzen*), and thus embodies the generation of a new individual (see Tetens, *Philosophische Versuche...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-116).

⁶¹ The intellectual efficacy of imagination is carefully analyzed by Gary Banham, in *Kant's Transcendental Imagination* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

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consciousness and brings a manifold under one consciousness, the transcendental unity of apperception, then the productive synthesis of imagination may be construed as a thoroughgoing and continuous process of determination, as though all experience were the generation of *quanta continua* through an unceasing flowing process, like the unified and unifying action of drawing a line (KrV, A 169-170 / B 211-212; A 163 / B 204).

The synthetic construction of geometrical figures and arithmetic magnitudes constitutes the most robust proof of the *a priori* efficacy of imagination as participating in the generation of *a priori* synthetic truths, and as deploying pure reason *in concreto*. As stated in the *Anthropology* (§. 28), *productive* imagination is “a faculty of the original presentation of the object (*exhibitio originaria*), which thus precedes experience” and concerns the “pure intuitions of space and time.” Yet, the *Anthropology’s* account of productive imagination seems to conflate the productivity of *facultas imaginandi* with the freedom of *facultas fingendi* and genius; in so doing, it neglects the type of imaginative *productivity* that, in keeping with the first Critique, bestows *a priori* conceptual value on combinations of representations as well as on their temporal succession. In the Critique, production and determination merge together. As a result, imagination is productive as long as it the mediator of transcendental determination. The productivity emanates from the participation of imagination in the spontaneity of the understanding. It provides a positive answer to the *Quid iuris?* question concerning the truth claims of mathematics and natural sciences, in the sense that the productive synthesis of imagination is meant to actualize the intellectual modes of necessitation, and by the same token to be capable of establishing a systematic and cohesive lawfulness in all possible syntheses of representations.

In Hume’s atomism, no line was ever real. Instead, only broken, separate points did really exist, and every possible connection or association of points testified to the self-deceiving falsehood of imagination. From the Kantian perspective, conversely, the connectability or associability of perceptions through imaginative actions implies always already their belongingness to one and the same consciousness. In other words, the discontinuous manifold that forms the “bundle of perceptions” is only conceivable on the condition of a continuous and spontaneous simplicity, the unity of the connective function itself, the bundling apperception,⁶² the accompaniment of all momentary consciousness of

⁶² As for this bundling continuous action, let us recall a notable Leibnizian, substantialist argument development by R. Chisholm in various works, namely *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976, p. 52), *The First Person: An Essay on Reference and Intentionality*

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every representation and every synthesis of representations by a permanent active quality of selfhood, yet non necessarily a fully clear and distinct reflexive representation of such spontaneous self-consciousness (KrV, A 118, 122-124; B 131-132, B 154). The objective significance of the *productive synthesis of imagination* rests ultimately on the necessary selfhood or ipseity of the understanding whose actions of categorial determination accomplish all unifying functions under one understanding, one transcendental cognitive self or universal rational subjectivity. Reproductive imagination presupposes productive imagination and, in turn, this *a priori* productivity reveals and enacts transcendental oneness, comprising the unity and identity of the very spontaneity of intelligence in each action. In fact, the *productivity* of the *productive synthesis of imagination* proves here the entanglement of imagination and understanding. Accordingly, productive imagination quits the confines of sensibility, and liberates itself from the chains of the body, insofar as its actions become a decisive applied moment in the process of cognition; for they display the operational mode of the understanding. In short, *productive imagination* is the performance of intelligence in progress.

It hence follows that if imagination is disentangled from intelligence and its lawful determination, then imagination plunges into the amorphous contingency of chaotic images: mere play, mere dreaming, mere madness. Under the guidance of the understanding, imagination participates in the creation of order and truth. In a fundamental way, this power of ordering and world-making constitutes the essence of the productive power of imagination. However, in the realm of poetry and genius (i.e., original invention), imagination becomes an ambivalent power, for it encompasses both order and disorder, truth and fiction, knowledge and delusion, common sense and private sense, nomothetic universality and idiographic privacy. Now, the Transcendental Deduction of the *Critique of pure Reason* enshrines the truth-making efficacy of imagination, without exposing clearly the ambivalence of imaginative acts. Only the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Standpoint* does expose Kant's description of the functioning of imagination when it operates without the logical discipline of understanding, in the sections devoted to genius (§. 30, "originality of the power of imagination when it harmonizes with concepts"), divination (§. 36, especially *Wahrsagen*, "counter-natural divination," analogous to *furor poeticus*), dreaming (§. 37, "involuntary invention in a healthy state"), mental deficiencies (§. 47, above all *absentia*, i.e., involuntary distraction or loss of flexibility in the reproductive power of imagination), and mental illnesses

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981, p. 87-88), and *A Realistic Theory of Categories: An Essay on Ontology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996, p. 103-104).

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(§§. 50-53, notably hypochondria, defined as *Einbildungskrankheit*, “disease of imagination,” and the three first types of mental derangement, i.e., *amentia*, *dementia*, and *insania*). In these passages imagination appears as a power of sensible invention that opens up a wide range of manifestations, such as artistic forms and psychopathological phenomena. For imaginative invention can unfold its creative force in a completely lawless manner, by transgressing the normative structures of possible common worlds, and erring through utterly indecipherable self-made labyrinths. In this context, the rational taming of imagination becomes an essential cognitive method and a therapeutic strategy. If and only if imagination is ordered by reason can it contribute to the production of experience—in the sense of cognition of the lawful system of nature—and partake in the realization of a healthy theoretical and practical rationality.

Conclusion: *Poiesis* under *Logos*

In early modern philosophy, imagination enters into an agonistic scenario opposing the lower and higher mental functions. On proposing a functional unity mediated by imagination, Kant redesigns the very nature of imagination as belonging at once both to sensibility and to spontaneity. The liberation or emancipation of imagination from the realm of sensibility entails a sort of rehabilitation of its cognitive efficacy. As a result, imagination is converted into a transcendental *a priori* power of synthesis. However, whenever its productivity follows the mechanism of senses and feelings, as an effect of lacking normative structure, logical freedom or cognitive agency, imagination insulates itself into an *idios kosmos* (Heraclitus, B 89, quoted by Kant, *Anthropology*, §. 37; AA 07: 190). Indeed, for Cartesian Rationalists, British Empiricists and German Scholastics, imagination may fall not only into falsehood but also into madness, although the exercise of rational reflection, cognitive self-analysis and self-control, can always function as a therapy, by taming, guiding, and enlightening the naturally wild, unbounded, inventiveness of imagination.

The possible alliance of *poiesis* and *logos*, imagination and reason, artistic creation and philosophical inquiry, may engender a special kind of enlightened poems, exhibiting the Ideas of reason that become attractive and desirable, through a collaboration between *spirit* (*Geist*), which provides ideas, and *taste* (*Geschmack*), which “limits them to the form that is appropriate to the laws of the productive power of imagination and so to *form* them (*fingendi*) in an original way (not imitatively)” (*Anthropology*, §. 71; AA 07: 246). In theory and practice

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Kant values the capacity of rational self-activity over any kind of passive and mechanical receptivity, the capacity of autonomy over sensitive heteronomy. In this sense, the logic of philosophical poetry achieves a pedagogical and ethical vocation, animated by the idea of the best human possibilities. If philosophical poetry can denote the possible merger of truth, beauty and virtue, then one may also argue that such critical poetry aims at accomplishing the infinite self-creation of mankind through the cultivation of its own original spontaneity. This universal or transcendental poetry designates the action and the Idea, moving, guiding, and gradually fulfilling the infinite process of becoming human. The infinity of *anthropo-genesis* is expressed by the inventive infinity of *anthropo-poiesis*. It concerns humanity in its self-generative adventure, and belongs properly to the realm of pragmatic anthropology, since it shows what humanity can and must do from itself and to itself. As entangled with transcendental and critical poetry, the ontological openness of humanity proves its natural potentiality, and demonstrates the absence of a determinate human nature, unless one emphasizes the dynamical self-determining *natura naturans*; humanity being the paradoxical species whose nature or character implies the self-production of its own nature. In a proto-existentialist vein, Kant's anthropology ("On the character of the species," in *Anthropology*, AA 07: 321-329) postulates the natural task and moral duty of humanization: the process of becoming human unveils the dynamic essence of humanity involving the necessity of self-production. Admittedly, the potential ground of determinability of humanity does not presuppose ontological emptiness nor indifferent freedom of self-formation. There is no poetry *ex nihilo*, neither anthropo-poiesis *ex nihilo*. A dynamic epigenetic force propels humanity as an animal species capable of *logos*, capable of *eidos*, capable of *ego/ipse*, fully capable, yet just capable, and always in need of development by engaging in self-active development. The primacy of this human systematic capability of development indicates a non-indifferent as well as non-all-powerful force of self-formation and self-enhancement. Finitude is not of the essence here, because the self-developmental history of the human species remains virtually infinite. The project of *anthropo-poiesis* comprehends some strictures, but these are dynamic strictures, recalling Leibniz's original perspective on the controversy opposing *tabula rasa* and *tabula inscripta*. This means that Kantian proto-existentialism carries with it a crypto-essentialism that envelops an organic, inner or intrinsic, principle of *Bestimmung* and *Bildung*, considered as a specifically human dynamic capability. Humanity creates itself by exercising its distinctive force of determination and formation. Broadly conceived under a Kantian light, the dynamic poetry of Humanity encloses and discloses itself as the power of a self-determining and self-forming spontaneity, infinitely

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setting and approaching the end of co-constructing a universal civil system, also recognizable as a peaceful cosmopolis, because there the ends of all and everyone are mutually and freely respected, desired, accomplished (*Anthropology*, AA 07: 330-333). This final poem of humanity could be titled the poem of fulfilment of personality and inter-personality.

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Abstract

Early Modern philosophy has devoted a special attention to the reproductive and productive cognitive operations fulfilled by imagination. For the two prominent philosophical currents, Rationalism and Empiricism, here represented by N. Malebranche (1638-1715) and David Hume (1711-1776), imagination constitutes first and foremost a mental activity that produces logical falsehood and moral misery. Against this backdrop, Kant's proposal of a transcendental synthesis performed by productive imagination provokes a significant rehabilitation of the cognitive effectiveness of imagination. Indeed, this transcendental a priori power of synthesis testifies to the entanglement of imagination with understanding, in the sense that the productive synthesis of imagination accomplishes the determination of the inner sense by the understanding. By contrast, the aesthetic, poietic or inventive dimension of imagination as *facultas fingendi* opens up the realm of genius, beyond the intellectual discipline and productivity of transcendental imagination. Also, imagination can lose in diverse modes and degrees its connection with lawfulness, and thereby gives rise to various mental disorders. Therefore, Kant carefully distinguishes different modes of imaginative productive actions whose intellectual ordering provides the conditions of possibility of science and art.

Keywords

Reproductive imagination; Productive imagination; N. Malebranche; D. Hume; I. Kant.