

## Preparing the Particular: Kant on the Imagination's Role in Judgment

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“There are two mental operations in judgment. There is the operation of the imagination, in which one judges objects that are no longer present, that are removed from immediate sense perception and therefore no longer affect one directly, and yet, though the object is removed from one's outward senses, it now becomes an object for one's inner senses. [...]

This operation of imagination prepares the object for the operation of reflection. And this second operation—the operation of reflection—is the actual activity of judging something.”

—Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (p. 68)

**Abstract** (114 words): That Kant sees the faculties of imagination and judgment as closely related is not controversial. Yet precisely how they relate to each other, especially across his Critical philosophy, is less clear. In this paper, I consider the relationship between what Kant calls the ‘power of imagination’ [*Einbildungskraft*] and the ‘power of judgment’ [*Urteilkraft*]. I argue for the following claim: insofar as the power of judgment is the faculty of thinking particulars under universals, the power of imagination is the faculty of producing and providing particulars for judgment—either to reflect on or to subsume under universals. Such an account reveals that our capacity for imagination is intimately bound up with our capacity to judge.

**Keywords:** Kant; Imagination; Judgment; Reflection; Faculty Psychology

### 1. Introduction

That the imagination and judgment have a particularly close relationship, for Kant, is well-known. In the Schematism section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, imagination assists judgment in its efforts to subsume sensible intuitions under discursive concepts by providing a mediating representation that Kant calls a ‘schema.’ In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, imagination figures prominently in Kant's account of aesthetic judgment—in particular, the reflective activity that he calls ‘free play.’ In other words, when we see judgment at work, we often find imagination there as well.

The affinity between these two faculties has been acknowledged by commentators and is not itself a matter of much controversy (Gibbons 1994; Thomson 2013). Yet most of the secondary literature on Kant's account of imagination focuses on its epistemic significance, which is to say, its role in cognition (Horstmann 2018; Rosefeldt 2021). Accordingly, most of the discussions focus on what Kant has to say about its role in making possible the kinds of judgments that are at issue in the first *Critique*. And while there is an increased interest in Kant's third *Critique* in recent years, commentators tend to either treat its core issues in isolation or consider how his aesthetics might illuminate his account of theoretical cognition in the first *Critique* (Kukla 2006; Ginsborg 2015; Zuckert 2007). Not only does this risk instrumentalizing the text; it leaves us with a disunified account of the imagination and, by extension, its role in judgment more generally.

Those who *have* dug deeper into the role of imagination in judgment tend to focus on a particular domain (e.g., theoretical, practical, or aesthetic) without stepping back to consider what this might tell us about the relationship between imagination and judgment as such (Düsing 2013; Ferrarin 2008; Mörchen 1970).<sup>1</sup> As a result, the precise nature of this relationship has yet to be investigated. In one sense, this should not be surprising, given the rather self-evident nature of their connection. That is, one might observe that imagination and judgment are undoubtedly related and yet wonder why much more needs to be said. Indeed, there are many underexplored connections in Kant's Critical philosophy, and it may not seem that this is a particularly pressing one to zero in on.

My aim in what follows is to give an account of the relationship between what Kant calls 'the power of imagination' [*Einbildungskraft*] and 'the power of judgment' [*Urteilkraft*]. Doing so allows us to appreciate how our capacity for imagination is intimately bound up with our capacity to judge. What emerges, I contend, is a general relationship between the two faculties that holds across the theoretical, practical, and aesthetic domains. The claim I defend concerning their connection can be summarized as follows: insofar as the power of judgment is the faculty of thinking particulars under universals, the power of imagination is the faculty of producing and providing particulars for judgment. In short, imagination is instrumental in furnishing the 'stuff' of judgment.

A deeper look into their relationship thus has an advantage over existing discussions in its efforts to situate it within Kant's broader Critical project—neither taking for granted their tight connection as something obvious that merits no further investigation nor treating only one facet of their relationship without an eye towards the whole. The desirability of a holistic account such as this can be traced to Kant's ambition to unify the Critical philosophy via the third *Critique* and its account of judgment. Kant famously claims that a critique of the power of judgment promises to bridge the "incalculable gulf" between the domains of nature and freedom, which emerge from the first two critiques, respectively (*KU* 5:175-76). Yet how precisely it is supposed to do this has remained anyone's guess. While not purporting to solve this problem in its entirety here, I contend in what follows that the relationship that imagination has to the power of judgment must be part of the story.

For while the understanding is legislative in the first *Critique* and reason in the second, the power of judgment is present in both. In the first two critiques, it assists these faculties in applying their principles – yielding judgments of a theoretical and practical variety. In the third critique, of which it

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<sup>1</sup> See also Zerilli (2005). Zerilli explores the relationship between imagination and judgment in the political thought of Hannah Arendt, who is indebted to Kant on this score.

is the subject, it acts autonomously as seen in its paradigmatic product: aesthetic judgment. All of this to say: judgment is the common denominator of all three critiques. And all judgments involves thinking particulars under universals. If I am correct that imagination is the faculty that provides judgment with particulars, then imagination – itself a mediator – plays a crucial role in judgment’s broader mediating and unifying activity.

My discussion proceeds as follows. I begin by briefly discussing Kant’s definitions of both faculties (§2). I then motivate the issue of the relationship between imagination and judgment by noting both similarities and differences between them (§3). In particular, I focus on their common role as mediators to sharpen the question: namely, how does the mediating function of imagination relate to the mediating function of judgment? I then answer this question by providing a general account of their relationship across the three spheres of judgment: theoretical, practical, and aesthetic (§4). In each of these settings, imagination has a crucial role to play in preparing particulars for judgment. Put another way: imagination’s activity of mediating between sensibility and understanding enables judgment to mediate between the particular and the universal. I conclude by noting some implications of my account for the status of the imagination as a faculty (§5).

## 2. Imagination and Judgment, defined

### a. *Imagination*

If there is consensus about anything concerning Kant’s account of the imagination, it is that it is hard to pin down. Kant ascribes many different functions to the imagination through his Critical philosophy. Explaining how a single faculty could perform such disparate activities has become a task of some commentators very recently (Matherne 2024). Without attempting to give a comprehensive account of the imagination here, my goal is to examine more deeply its relationship to judgment as a necessary part of any such attempt.<sup>2</sup> In this section, I highlight Kant’s primary definitions of this faculty, along with some of its primary activities and roles.

The first thing to note, for our purposes, is the full name of the faculty in question: the ‘power of imagination’ [*Einbildungskraft*].<sup>3</sup> In the first *Critique* alone, Kant provides multiple definitions of the imagination. It is first defined as a faculty that is responsible for what Kant calls ‘synthesis’—which he, in turn, defines ‘in the most general sense’ as “the action of putting different representations

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<sup>2</sup> In this way, I follow commentators like Gibbons who take a ‘big picture’ approach, without wading into the intricacies of various arguments and debates (1994, p. 13). Controversies about the imagination itself that do not directly bear on the topic of its relationship to judgment will not be taken up here.

<sup>3</sup> Kant will also sometimes refer to it as *Bildungsvermögen*—i.e., ‘formative faculty’—and sometimes even as *bildende Kraft*—i.e., ‘formative power’ (e.g., *KU* 5:190, 5:287; *LM* 28:230-7; *LA* 25:76, 25:511-12; *RefI* 332, 15:131). The distinction between *Vermögen* and *Kraft*, for Kant, is not clear (see note 14). What is clear is that Kant employs the term ‘faculty’ in both a broad and a narrow sense, denoting, respectively, any capacity of the mind whatsoever and capacities that are distinct from powers. We see this in his definition of the two powers in question (e.g., ‘The *power* of...is the *faculty* of...’). For a discussion of the ‘formative faculty’ terminology, which is especially prevalent in the pre-critical period, see ch. 1 of Makkreel (1990); Dyck (2019). Cf. Heidegger: “The power of imagination can hence be called a faculty of forming [*Vermögen des Bildens*]” (1929, p. 91).

together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition” (*KrV* A77/B103).<sup>4</sup> ‘Synthesis in general,’ is then described as the “mere effect of the imagination...without which we would have no cognition at all” (*KrV* A78/B103). Kant famously describes the imagination’s act of synthesis as a “blind but indispensable function of the soul” (*ibid*).

Kant also famously claims that imagination is “a necessary ingredient of perception itself,” which is to say, it plays an indispensable role in bringing about cognition—something, he observes, his predecessors had failed to notice (*KrV* A120). His idea is something like the following: while a manifold of representations is given in sensibility, these must be unified into a singular representation if cognition of an object is to be possible. Since our apprehension of an object involves taking up a myriad of representations at different points in time, the imagination is responsible for the “reproduction” of these, so that we can hold them all together in a unified way (*KrV* A97). For this reason, Kant further defines the imagination as “the faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition” (*KrV* B151). A straightforward way for us to read these two definitions alongside each other is as following: the imagination is capable of being “that which connects the manifold of sensible intuition” (*KrV* B164) because it is also that which can make present that which is absent.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to taking up or combining what is given in sensibility, the imagination also makes the pure concepts of the understanding ready for application to the sensible given. It does this through an act that Kant calls ‘schematization.’ Kant defines a ‘schema’ as a temporal (and thus sensible) representation of a category (e.g., the schema of the pure concept of quantity is number). Just like synthesis, schematism produces a representation that is sensible.<sup>6</sup> While a schema is “always only a product of the imagination,” Kant is clear that it is not to be confused with an ‘image’ (*KrV* A140/B179). This is because images are always particular, whereas schemata must share with concepts a certain level of generality. A schema is instead a “rule of the synthesis of imagination” (guiding it in its production of an image), and therefore a “representation of a general procedure of the imagination” (*KrV* A140-141/B179-180). By translating, as it were, the categories into sensible

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<sup>4</sup> I refer to Kant’s writings with the following abbreviations, followed by the Academy volume and page numbers: *Anth* = Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View; *Corr* = Correspondence; *FI* = First Introduction to *KU*; *KpV* = Critique of Practical Reason; *KrV* = Critique of Pure Reason; *KU* = Critique of the Power of Judgment; *LA* = Lectures on Anthropology; *LL* = Lectures on Logic; *LM* = Lectures on Metaphysics; *Refl* = Reflexionen; *TP* = On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, but It is of No Use in Practice. Citations from the *Critique of Pure Reason* adhere to the standard A/B pagination. English translations are from the volumes in the Cambridge edition of Kant’s works unless otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> Within Kant’s concept of imagination (as well as synthesis), there are numerous distinctions—e.g., *a priori*/empirical, figurative/intellectual, productive/reproductive. In addition, there are questions about the different accounts of imagination he provides in the A- and B- Deductions of the first *Critique*. I set these aside in what follows, as they are not directly relevant to issue at hand. What is important for now is the idea that the imagination’s role in the first *Critique* is to prepare the deliverances of sensibility for the understanding and thereby make cognitive judgments possible.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to characterizing the imagination as a capacity for representing things that are not present and as a capacity for giving form to sensible material, Kant also characterizes it as a faculty for ‘presentation’ or ‘exhibition’—that is, sensibly representing a concept or idea. I do not deal with this third characterization in this essay, nor can I take up the complex issue of how these various definitions of imagination relate to each other. For a thorough of treatment of this third aspect of imagination, as well as the question of the imagination’s underlying unity, see Matherne (2024).

terms, the imagination thereby makes them ready for application to what has been given in sensibility (and given synthetic unity by the imagination). Equally famous to the aforementioned characterizations of synthesis is Kant's description of imaginative schematism as a "hidden art in the depths of the human soul" (*KrV* A141/B180-181).

While much of the literature on imagination in Kant has focused on the imagination's role in facilitating cognition, Kant does not see all the operations and activities of the imagination as directed at or resulting in cognition, as evidenced by his account of 'free play' in the third *Critique*. There, Kant contrasts the cognitive judgments of the first *Critique* with aesthetic judgments in terms of the dominant faculty; rather than relating a representation by means of the understanding and its concept of the object, we "relate it by means of the imagination" without such a concept (*KU* 5:201). In the absence of a rule instructing the imagination in its synthesis, the imagination is free to put together the manifold however it wants: "The powers of cognition that are set into play by this representation are hereby in a free play, since no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition" (*KU* 5:217). Kant characterizes the imagination's activity on numerous occasions in the third *Critique* in terms of 'apprehension'—in particular, the apprehension of the 'form' of an object (*Fl* 20:220, 20:223; 5:190).<sup>7</sup> This is the action that, in the A-Deduction, he describes as "run[ning] through" and "tak[ing] together" of a manifold of intuition, prior to its reproduction. Notably, Kant describes both apprehension and reproduction as kinds of synthesis (*KrV* A99). Though the imagination's acts of synthesis differ between the cognitive and the aesthetic context, it synthesizes in both cases. Moreover, as we will see, its products in both cases are then used in a judgment (in the first case, subsumed under a concept; in the second, reflected on).

## b. Judgment

Though the notion of judgment, for Kant, has received much attention, very little of it has focused on the 'power of judgment' [*Urteilstkraft*]<sup>7</sup>—the faculty of the mind that is responsible for producing the various kinds of judgments we make. In the first *Critique*, Kant defines the power of judgment 'in general' [*überhaupt*] as "the faculty of subsuming under rules," which is to say, "determining whether something stands under a given rule or not" (*KrV* A133/B172). Kant recognizes the need to distinguish faculties that generate rules or principles (i.e., understanding and reason) from a faculty that is concerned with applying those rules. Insofar as rules are inherently general, which is to say, can be applied to more than one case, there must be a separate faculty that is responsible for recognizing when a rule applies in a given case. For a gap always remains between the generality of a rule and the particularity of a case, one that can never be closed by rules themselves. One might grasp a rule, but fail to apply it correctly. Kant uses the example of a doctor or a lawyer who possesses relevant theoretical knowledge (say, of anatomy or a legal code), but is unable to apply it to actual cases. For example, a doctor may possess the concept 'typhoid,' but be incapable of diagnosing a patient who has it. A lawyer may grasp the difference between 'homicide' and 'manslaughter,' but be unable to discern which of these applies to the defendant before him. What's more, the task of distinguishing whether something stands under a certain rule or not cannot itself be governed by a rule, on pain of regress: this rule would require another rule (and so on to infinity). Something must put a stop to the

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *KU* 5:217, where Kant calls this the "composition" of a manifold.

regress in order to secure the possibility of making judgments whatsoever. Kant claims that the power of judgment does this.

In the third *Critique*, Kant provides a seemingly broader definition of the power of judgment: It is “the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal” (*KU* 5:179; cf. *FI* 20:211). Here, Kant also makes a distinction between two uses of this faculty, which he refers to as ‘determining’ [*bestimmend*] and ‘reflecting’ [*reflectirend*]. As it is presented, the distinction hinges on whether or not a universal is given to the power of judgment. Kant parenthetically glosses the term ‘universal’ as a rule, principle, or law; elsewhere, he mentions concepts (*FI* 20:211). We can take all these notions to be universals in the sense relevant for the definition of the power of judgment—i.e., as things under which particulars can be subsumed or thought. When a universal is given, the task of judgment is to subsume a particular under it. For example, I might say of an object in front of me that it is a couch, or of some action which has been performed that it is virtuous; I make a determining judgment insofar as I apply ‘couch’ or ‘virtuous’ to a particular. Yet sometimes there is no universal at hand that could be used for the subsumption of a particular. For example, the first time that one sees a couch, one does not yet possess the concept necessary to see it as a couch. In such an instance, only a particular is given—requiring one to ascend from the particular to the universal, searching for a concept under which it could be placed. Indeed, only after reflecting on the particular as such (and presumably, other couches) does one arrive at the empirical concept ‘couch’ (which, importantly, can then be used to make determining judgments in the future). However, not all reflecting judgment aims at concept formation, as is evidenced by what Kant sees as its paradigmatic case: aesthetic judgment. I will say more about this below, as the imagination is essentially involved in this kind of judgment (which Kant also calls ‘merely reflecting’).

Before moving on, we must note an important development in Kant’s thinking on the power of judgment from the first *Critique* to the third. In the former text, the power of judgment has no special principle governing its activity (despite being a higher cognitive faculty like understanding and reason). While being tasked with applying rules given to it by the understanding, Kant does not seem to offer an account of exactly how the power of judgment does this. Instead, Kant merely asserts that it is a “special talent,” which “cannot be taught but only practiced”—a skill that can only be acquired through experience (A133/B172).<sup>8</sup> By the time he writes the third *Critique*, however, Kant articulates a special principle for the power of judgment which he calls ‘purposiveness’ (which I will discuss more in the next two sections). Yet, even then, Kant acknowledges that the very idea of a rule for the faculty of applying rules is somewhat paradoxical, and that the search for a special principle for the power of judgment is a complex matter involving “great difficulties” (*KU* 5:169).<sup>9</sup> Its activity cannot be explained in terms of a determinate rule, but only by an “indeterminate norm” (*KU* 5:239).

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<sup>8</sup> Just as commentators have wondered whether Kant’s conception of reflecting judgment was already present in the first *Critique*, we might also wonder whether purposiveness was also implicitly there, even if Kant had not yet explicitly formulated it as the principle of the power of judgment. What is common to both the first and third *Critique* is an argument concerning the need to put an end to the regress generated by discursive rules. It is clear that, from the beginning, Kant is wrestling with the problem of how there can be a faculty that is concerned with applying rules but not itself rule-governed. Moreover, it is clear that Kant sees the power of judgment as something that operates normatively (e.g., as something that one can be better or worse at, improve at, etc.)—and therefore not ‘arbitrary’ or ‘blind’ in its operation (*FI* 20:212).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Bell, for whom the problem of the Schematism section is about how we can explain rule-following without appealing to further rules (1987, p. 230).

Accordingly, the power of judgment's operation under the guidance of the principle of purposiveness appears unique in comparison with the other two higher cognitive faculties (understanding and reason) and the way that they operate under the guidance of their principles (the categories and the moral law, respectively).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, these other faculties depend on the power of judgment for their principles to be applied at all. Indeed, the power of judgment makes an appearance in both the first and second critiques, where it plays a crucial role in connecting particulars and universals in the theoretical and practical domains, respectively. It is possible that Kant initially saw the power of judgment as a 'mere' mediator, such that it did not require a critique or a special principle. Yet, as we will now see, Kant comes to see its mediating role as consistent with its autonomy.

### 3. The Mediation of Imagination and Judgment

As noted at the outset of this discussion, the close relationship between imagination and judgment has been noticed by many commentators. For example, in the introduction to his edited volume on the imagination's varied roles and functions through Kant's Critical philosophy, Thompson observes that "imagination figures prominently in all aspects of connecting sensibility with the understanding in judgments, whether...epistemic, moral, or aesthetic" (2013, p. 6-7). Yet most of the time, such remarks are made in passing.<sup>11</sup> As also noted, the literature on the imagination's role in judgment disproportionately focuses on the first *Critique* and its relevance for Kant's account of cognition—while discussions of the third *Critique* are almost always geared towards showing how Kant's remarks there can shed light on epistemological concerns (as if this was all his aesthetic theory was good for). In addition, those who consider a possible role for imagination in the context of the second *Critique* do not attempt to situate their accounts with respect to the other two critiques. In short,

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<sup>10</sup> This distinct normativity might also be due to its special connection to feeling. I discuss the relationship between judgment and feeling in more detail elsewhere, suggesting that there is an essentially affective dimension to judgment which ends the regress created by discursive rules (Dunn 2024). Cf. Allison, who says that "feeling serves as the vehicle through which we perceive the aptness or subjective purposiveness (or lack thereof) of a given representation" (2001, p. 71).

<sup>11</sup> One of the only exceptions to this is Centi (2001). Noting that the imagination connects sensibility and understanding, while the power of judgment connects understanding and reason, she hypothesizes that there is a "functional identity" [*eine funktionelle Identität*] between imagination and judgment (p. 277). However, Centi sees this as potentially problematic because she claims that the imagination "belongs" [*angehört*] to the domain of the first *Critique* (which concerns itself with determining judgment), while the power of judgment is the subject of the third *Critique* (which concerns itself with reflecting judgment). Appealing to the problem of mediation, that is, of unifying two extremes, she claims that the third *Critique* provides a solution with "a new concept of imagination" [*einem neuen Konzept der Einbildungskraft*] (p. 280). Centi ultimately concludes that in the third *Critique* the reflecting power of judgment functions as the imagination (p. 282). Cf. Mörchen (1970), who contends that Kant's account of aesthetic judgment effectively "merges" the concepts of imagination and judgment such that their functions appear to be "identical" (p. 173). For Mörchen, *Einbildungskraft* and *Urteilstkraft* are "almost synonymous" in the third *Critique*—and he goes as far as to suggest that there may be no reason to distinguish them at all (p. 174). While there is much that I agree with in both Centi and Mörchen's accounts, I want to resist collapsing the distinction between imagination and judgment.

commentators rarely (if ever) step back to consider how imagination and judgment are related across the three critiques.

There are several reasons why this relationship may not yet have received the attention it deserves. It might be, as was suggested already, that there are no immediate reasons why we should want to dig into it. But it might also be because commentators are just not sure what to say about the matter. Gibbons notes that “the obscurity of both of these activities is a consequence of the close relation between them” (p. 60).<sup>12</sup> One virtue of stepping back to consider their relationship across the board is that it allows us to try and make sense of certain similarities between them that might, in turn, reveal something deeper about their intimate connection.

Notably, Kant sees both these faculties (and, indeed, only these two faculties) as playing an important mediating role throughout his Critical philosophy.<sup>13</sup> Commentators have described imagination as a “power (of mediation)” and “the mediating faculty *par excellence*” (Kneller 2007, p. 12-13; Hughes 2007, p. 130, 136). As Gibbons puts it: “one of the most general descriptions of the function assigned to imagination by Kant is that of mediation” (1994, p. 2). She goes on to affirm that “a bridging power such as that of imagination inevitably plays a crucial role in Kant’s theory of judgment” (1994, p. 50). More to the point, Filieri raises the question in the following way: “how [is] this gap-bridging activity [of the imagination] to be distinguished from the power of judgment and how [are] *Einbildungskraft* and *Urteilstkraft*...meant to interact”? (2020, p. 245). In other words, how does the mediating function of imagination relate to the mediating function of judgment?

As we know, Kant sees judgment as key to unifying the domains of theoretical and practical reason, and the third Critique as completing the Critical project (*FI* 20:202; *KU* 5:170). Yet while the imagination is central to the operations of theoretical reason, it is conspicuously absent from Kant’s account of practical reason (and his moral philosophy, more broadly). That is, Kant sees the imagination as necessary to yield theoretical judgment but seems to disavow it for practical judgment. Accordingly, it can be difficult to see how judgment can bring systematic unity by mediating between the two parts of philosophy if the mediation of the imagination is only salient for one of these two parts. However, the idea that Kant affords no role to the imagination in his moral philosophy has been challenged by several commentators in recent years (Ferrarin 2008; Freyberg 2005; Johnson 1985; Matherne 2024). While I find these arguments compelling (for reasons I will discuss in the penultimate section of the paper), such accounts nonetheless presuppose a distinction between the theoretical and practical case. In other words, we are left with a gap between two employments of a faculty when what we are looking for is a bridge between the two domains.

The imagination famously straddles the line between sensibility and understanding in the first *Critique*. This is seen most clearly in the well-known Schematism section, where Kant takes up the question of how the pure concepts of the understanding can be applied to appearances. The generality of the former and the singularity of the latter makes them entirely heterogenous such that they require a “third thing” in order to be brought together (*KrV* A138/B177). Kant describes the need

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Jeng (2004), who notes that Kant does not explain this relationship (p. 202).

<sup>13</sup> These are also the only two mental faculties that he calls ‘powers’ [*Kräfte*], but I do not discuss this similarity and its possible significance in what follows. Kant’s faculty psychology is notoriously difficult to parse, and the distinction between technical terms such as ‘faculty’ [*Vermögen*], ‘capacity’ [*Fähigkeit*], and ‘power’ is controversial (see note 4, above). Nothing I say in what follows hangs on this.



for a “mediating representation”: there must be something that shares features with both kinds of representations, while at the same time remaining sufficiently distinct (*ibid*). He calls this thing a ‘schema,’ and characterizes this representation as “a general procedure for providing a concept its image” (*KrV* A140/B179). Kant also stresses that a schema is not to be confused with an image; instead, the imagination turns what is given in sensibility into an image, which can then be brought under a concept via a schema.

The Schematism section appears as the first part of a section entitled ‘the Transcendental Doctrine of the Power of Judgment.’ It is this section which Kant opens (only a couple pages before) with his well-known remarks on the power of judgment as a ‘special talent’ for applying rules without itself being guided by rules—that is, an ability to mediate between particulars and universals. All of this to say: we can (and must) see Kant’s discussion of the imagination’s schematizing activity (a specific kind of mediation) in the context of his doctrine of judgment (concerned with mediation more broadly).<sup>14</sup>

Consider now the different kinds of mediation that the power of judgment performs across the Critical philosophy. Kant opens his ‘Theory & Practice’ essay by stating that there will always remain a gap between theory and practice; the former is a set of general rules, while the latter pertains to their application in concrete instances. No general representation will ever contain enough to specify how it is to be applied to a particular representation. That is, one can never move directly from the general to the particular. Thus, “a middle term is required between theory and practice, providing a link and a transition from one to the other.... [A] concept of the understanding, which contains the general rule, must be supplemented by an act of judgment whereby the practitioner distinguishes instances where the rule applies from those where it does not” (*TP* 8:275). In the first *Critique*, the power of judgment in its determining use subsumes particulars under universals. This is chiefly seen in the case of cognition, where the issue is one of bringing together, or connecting, intuitions and concepts. As we have already seen (and will return to), the power of judgment cannot perform this subsumption without the aid of imagination, which synthesizes intuitions so that they can be brought together with concepts.

In the Preface to the third *Critique*, Kant draws attention to the role that the power of judgment plays as an “intermediary” between the other two higher cognitive faculties, namely, understanding and reason (*KU* 5:168, 177). Like schemata, which must be “homogeneous” with both intuitions and concepts, the power of judgment itself can be “annexed” by either the theoretical or practical domains—all the while enjoying independence from both (*KrV* A137/B176; *KU* 5:168). That is, both understanding and reason can enlist the power of judgment to help bring about determining judgments of either a cognitive or moral variety.

Beyond mediation within both theoretical and practical reason, there remains the task of mediating between these two domains themselves—the professed aim of the third *Critique*. As Kant famously writes in the Introduction to this text: “there is an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible.... Just as if there were so many different worlds” (*KU* 5:176). In other words, a lingering

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<sup>14</sup> For an account of schematism across the three Critiques, see Filieri (2021), who draws attention to the way that the imagination’s schematizing activity is necessarily related to the activity of the power of judgment (especially p. 514-515).

problem from the first two critiques—wherein the reality of both the natural and moral worlds was established—is that these two worlds might bear no relation to each other. The power of judgment provides nothing less than the ground of the unity of the sensible and the supersensible by supplying the “mediating concept”—and, in doing so, functions as the “bridge” (*KU* 5:195-196).

The language of mediation may appear to suggest subservience, as if that which is mediating is always acting in the service of something else (e.g., another faculty and its aims) but never ‘for itself.’ One may be inclined to conclude, as Gasché does, that “however important its function may be, the power of judgment is marked by a certain self-effacement, a subservience and a lack of independence” (2003, p. 13). To be sure, in certain domains and contexts, the power of judgment plays what we might call a handmaiden role, where the extent of its activity is the help that it provides another faculty. But it cannot be reduced to a ‘mere’ mediator, for it is an autonomous and independent cognitive faculty with its own *a priori* principle (made clear by the very existence of the third *Critique*). In other words, while judgment clearly functions as a mediator in its various activities, its mediation must be understood in a way that is consistent with its autonomy; it cannot be seen as existing only for the sake of understanding and reason (and their laws)—for it has a law of its own. Whether the same can be said about the imagination will emerge below in sketching out an account of its relation to judgment.

While imagination and judgment undoubtedly share many similar features, it is also important to note the ways in which they differ. First, imagination is related to sensibility in a way that judgment is not. Recall that one of the primary ways Kant defines imagination is as “the faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition” (*KrV* B151). Immediately after this, Kant goes on to say that “since all of our intuition is sensible, the imagination, on account of the subjective condition under which alone it can give a corresponding intuition to the concepts of understanding, *belongs to sensibility*” (*ibid*; emphasis mine). One might wonder if this claim contradicts Kant’s conception of the imagination as a mediator between sensibility and understanding. To be sure, Kant describes one of the products of imagination—namely, schemata—as being homogenous with both the sensible and the intelligible. But this does not entail that the imagination must itself lie between the two. Put another way: there is no contradiction in placing the imagination as a faculty on the side of sensibility while taking some of its products to be capable of mediating between sensibility and understanding. Thus, bracketing ontological questions about the status of the imagination as a faculty (e.g., whether it is a sub-faculty of sensibility or understanding, as opposed to being an independent faculty—a question I consider briefly in the concluding section of the paper), it is certainly the case that it bears a relationship to sensibility that the power of judgment lacks. The product of the imagination’s activity is always some kind of sensible representation—whether the result of synthesizing what is given in intuition or in schematizing the pure concepts. By contrast, the power of judgment deals more generally with combinations of particulars and universals, which need not be sensible (though they often are). More to the point: the sensible content contained within them owes itself to an act of imagination without which the relevant judgments would not be possible.

Secondly, the power of judgment is a ‘higher’ cognitive faculty (along with understanding and reason)—while the imagination is not. Accordingly, the power of judgment receives a critique, and has its own law or principle. Though Kant never quite defines what a higher cognitive faculty is, it is clear that it is something that has its own *a priori* principle—indeed, one that emerges through a critique of that faculty. Thus, if something is a higher cognitive faculty, it is autonomous—giving itself

its own law and so only beholden to it in its pure activity (*KU* 5:196). As Deleuze puts it, something is a higher faculty “when it finds *in itself* the law of its own exercise’ (1984, p. 4).

This was not always the case with the power of judgment, of course (as noted above). In the first *Critique*, the power of judgment played only a strictly subservient role—carrying out the tasks of the understanding (according to its rules), but with no special principle of its own. It is only in 1787 that Kant comes to recognize the legislation of the power of judgment, the intermediate higher cognitive faculty, for the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, the intermediate fundamental faculty—just as the understanding and reason legislate for the fundamental faculties of cognition and desire, respectively (*Corr* 10:513-516). Hence, like the other two higher cognitive faculties, the power of judgment must also undergo critique. This involves, among other things, uncovering its special principle: the principle of purposiveness. In the case of aesthetic judgment—the paradigmatic act of reflecting judgment—Kant characterizes this principle in terms of the suitability of nature for our cognitive faculties. As a principle governing all the operations of the power of judgment, I suggest a broad characterization in terms of which we recognize the suitability of one thing for another, or that two things belong together (e.g., a particular under a universal).

Imagination, however, does not receive a critique. Nor does it have its own special principle.<sup>15</sup> Kant deals with the relationship between the ‘higher’ cognitive faculties and the fundamental faculties via special principles (each of which are provided by the former for the latter)—presented in the form of charts at the end of both Introductions (published and unpublished) of the third *Critique*. Notably, the imagination is nowhere to be found. This is because it is neither a ‘higher’ faculty of cognition (like the understanding, reason, and power of judgment), nor is it a fundamental faculty (like cognition, desire, or feeling). Just what is it, then? The status of the imagination within Kant’s taxonomy of the mind and its faculties is a complicated matter, which I gesture at in the final section of this paper but cannot fully address here. For now, however, we can note that despite not having its own transcendental principle (like the power of judgment), the imagination still exhibits lawfulness in all its activity. It does so not just in those instances where its synthesis is directed by a rule from the understanding, but also those where no such rule is presented. This is the ‘free lawfulness’ that Kant speaks of in the third *Critique*. However, Kant is clear here that to speak of the freedom of imagination is not to say that “it carr[ies] autonomy with it” (*KU* 5:241); its freedom does not consist in its having its own law. Rather, it is free because it is not bound by a determinate concept in producing synthetic unities—ones that nonetheless agree with the understanding’s general demand for lawfulness (as expressed by the categories). Without the lawfulness of the pure concepts, the imagination would be unable even to produce unified representations at all. Instead, what characterizes the imagination in

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<sup>15</sup> In this way, my account differs from that of both Hoerth (2020) and Ostaric (2017), though there is much in both these accounts with which I agree. Hoerth is concerned with unifying imagination across the three critiques; he characterizes the imagination in general as a ‘form-giving capacity.’ Both of these aspects accord with my own view. Similarly, Ostaric wants to provide an account of both imagination and aesthetic reflection that does not reduce it to its value for cognitive and epistemological concerns. However, both, I believe grant too much autonomy to the imagination—seeing it not just as an ‘independent’ faculty, but as having its own ‘lawfulness.’ If they are correct, it is hard to see how this could be squared with Kant’s threefold division of the higher cognitive faculties, and, correspondingly, the three critiques. In a related vein, it would seem to encroach on the power of judgment’s claim to being one of these faculties and having its own critique—even threatening to replace it with the imagination instead.

its freedom is that it is not restricted to a determinate form of an object, but rather only guided by the form of an object in general. Within this, it undoubtedly has much latitude. What, then, accounts for why it produces the particular forms that it does (as opposed to others) in a given case? To answer this, we must consider whether the imagination may also be influenced by the principle of purposiveness insofar as it is related to the activity of the power of judgment.

#### 4. The Imagination as the Faculty of Preparing the Particular for Judgment

We can now begin to answer the question of how imagination and judgment relate to each other within Kant's overall picture of the mind and its faculties. The general idea that I will put forward is that imagination provides judgment with particulars that it can then judge (by either subsuming them under universals or reflecting on them).<sup>16</sup>

The starting point for considering these matters is Kant's account of reflection, in which both imagination and judgment are central. Immediately after drawing the distinction between determining and reflecting judgment, Kant defines 'reflection' in general as the comparison or holding together of my representations with each other or up against my cognitive faculties (*FI* 20:211). The notion of reflection appears in a variety of contexts in Kant's philosophy. Commentators generally distinguish between two main species of reflection, following from Kant's own definition: logical and transcendental. The most well-known account of the first kind of reflection is in §6 of the *Jäsche* logic. Kant describes a threefold activity of comparison/reflection/abstraction by which I discover what my representations have in common and thus form a concept of an object. Kant will call concepts 'reflected representation' because their universal or general form originates in (and owes itself to) the logical act of reflection (*LL* 9:91, 94). Kant's main discussion of transcendental reflection appears in the Amphiboly chapter of the first *Critique* (A260/B316-A263/B319). In this case, we do not compare representations to each other but with their corresponding cognitive faculty (i.e., sensibility or understanding). This kind of reflection is necessary for making sure that we do not make erroneous judgments—e.g., by failing to treat an appearance as rooted in sensibility.

We should want to know, though, how these various types of reflection relate to the use of the reflecting power of judgment. Kant takes aesthetic judgment to be the paradigmatic exercise of reflecting judgment—and refers to it as 'mere reflection,' 'merely reflecting' judgment, and a 'judgment of mere reflection' (*FI* 20:220-221). This, combined with Kant's decision to define 'reflection' immediately after 'reflecting judgment,' suggests that the two terms are not mutually exclusive. Longuenesse, for example, identifies the activity that generates empirical concepts with reflecting judgment: it is "a progress from sensible representations to discursive thought: the formation of concepts through comparison/reflection/abstraction, which is just what reflective judgment is: finding the universal for the particular" (1998, 164-165). In other words, she sees logical,

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<sup>16</sup> Gibbons comes closest to articulating such a view when she says that imagination, for Kant, is "the capacity of a finite, discursive intelligence to work up the material of experience from its diverse elements into something which can be known or judged" (1994, p. 2). A similar view can be found in Aristotle: "For imagination is different from either perceiving or discursive thinking though [imagination] is not found without sensation, or judgment without [the imagination]" (*De Anima*, III.3).

transcendental, and aesthetic reflection as ultimately involving the same activity.<sup>17</sup> For the purposes of the discussion, I opt for a broad conception of reflecting judgment according to which logical, transcendental, and aesthetic reflection are nothing but different instances of its activity.

The structure of the activity of ‘mere reflection,’ which emerges from Kant’s account of aesthetic judgment, can be understood in terms of what Kant calls the “free play” of imagination and understanding. In mere reflection, we do not subsume a particular object under a concept (e.g., ‘beauty’—for it is not a concept), but instead allow the imagination to freely and in an unconstrained manner unify the sensory content and present it to the understanding. Imagination and understanding are held up to each other, and we perceive whether they agree (*KU* 5:217). If the two faculties harmonize, it is not because there is a rule governing the performance of their respective tasks. Rather, the imagination attempts to connect what it combines in intuition with the understanding’s demand for lawfulness, or conceptualization. Since the understanding is not instructing the imagination on how to synthesize what is given, the latter strives to take up the world in such a way that it could agree with the former’s desire to “advance from intuition to concepts” (*KU* 5:287).<sup>18</sup>

Kant distinguishes three activities in which the mind engages towards producing a determinate empirical cognition, only two of which are at work in mere reflection. These are: apprehension (of a manifold of intuition), comprehension (unifying this manifold in the concept of *an* object), and presentation (of the object underneath a concept of *this* object). Moreover, Kant assigns a different faculty of the mind to each of these: imagination, understanding, and the power of judgment. The latter, however, as determining, is only at work insofar as there is an empirical concept involved. Having drawn attention to the respective functions of these faculties, Kant singles out the first two as comprising merely reflecting judgment. Mere reflection is *on* a given perception—just as reflecting ‘in general’ (as he defined it a few pages earlier) is a matter of “reflecting *on* a given representation” (*FI* 20:211; my emphasis). In other words, Kant equates ‘mere reflection’ with merely reflecting judgment—as opposed to the kind of reflecting judgment that is geared towards determining judgment—and notes that “it is not a matter of a determinate concept” (*FI* 20:220). Rather, it is *only* a matter of reflecting “on the form of an object” (*KU* 5:191). More specifically, it is a matter of “reflecting on the rule concerning a perception” (*FI* 20:220). What could this rule be? Given the context of this passage, it might seem to be the rule that the imagination follows in its synthesis of the manifold. But we know that in mere reflection there is no concept of a particular object guiding the imagination. And yet: “the apprehension of [the] manifold in the imagination agrees with the presentation of a concept of the understanding (though which concept be undetermined)” (*FI* 20:221). In short, the imagination behaves *as if* it were guided by a rule, even though it is not.

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<sup>17</sup> The distinct but related senses of these notions, for Kant, is not an issue that I can take up in detail here—though it is certainly a matter worthy of further consideration. See Gorodeisky (2021) for a treatment of the varieties of reflection across Kant’s Critical philosophy in her entry for *The Cambridge Kant Lexicon*.

<sup>18</sup> I try to avoid taking a stance on a particular interpretation of free play here, since my emphasis is on the imagination’s act of apprehension in mere reflection. There are further questions about whether this apprehension stops short of conceptualization (pre-cognitivist), produces various possibilities for conceptualization without landing on a specific one (multi-cognitivist), or produces more than just what is conceptualized (meta-cognitivist). For a discussion of these various interpretations, see Guyer (2006).

We must not overlook what Kant takes to be in agreement here. It is not an agreement of the imagination's apprehension with the comprehension of the manifold via the understanding, but the presentation which would be performed by the determining power of judgment were there a concept of the object present. This might seem peculiar, insofar as the understanding is the faculty of concepts (rules), as Kant reminds us even in this passage. And, while Kant has just linked the understanding with comprehension, he now invokes it for presentation. Kant does this, I think, because he recognizes such a close relationship between the understanding and determining judgment. Even still, the understanding does not bring a manifold of intuition under a concept. For on its own, the understanding is not capable of recognizing particulars as instances of its own concepts; only the power of judgment can do this. Hence, in merely reflecting judgment, Kant claims that "the imagination and understanding are considered in the relation to each in which they must stand in the power of judgment in general," rather than in the relation that they happen to stand in the case of the perception at hand (*FI* 20:220). The object occasions my imaginative and cognitive capacities to discern a particular form in it, suggesting that it was designed with our judging power in mind: "the understanding and imagination mutually agree for the advancement of their business, and the object will be perceived as purposive merely for the power of judgment, hence the purposiveness itself will be considered as merely subjective" (*FI* 20:221).

We have seen that Kant characterizes judgment in terms of reflection, and suggests that imagination contributes to that reflection. On several occasions, Kant speaks of the 'relation' between imagination and understanding. Importantly, for our purposes, these different relations can be characterized as nothing but different acts of the power of judgment. What becomes evident is that there are different ways that these two faculties relate to each other, depending on the domain or context. When a rule is provided by the understanding (e.g., an empirical concept), the imagination apprehends the sensible given in a way that allows it to be subsumed under the rule; in doing so, it takes its direction from the understanding. This is the determining power of judgment. When no rule is provided, the faculties are in free play; the imagination does not combine the manifold of intuition in accordance with a determinate concept, but instead synthesizes of its own accord and presents its products freely to the understanding. This is reflecting judgment. Kant describes these as 'objective' and 'subjective' relations of the two faculties, respectively. The first case "belongs to cognition (as happened in the transcendental schematism of the power of judgment)" (*FI* 20:223; cf. *KU* 5:218). The second, however, is a matter of sensation—not regarding the way we are affected by an object, but rather the way that the activity of free play of imagination and understanding affects the subject (in particular, the pleasure that arises when the two faculties harmonize without any rule guaranteeing this will happen). Note that in both instances the imagination synthesizes the manifold. What differs between these two ways the imagination relates to the understanding is whether it is governed by a determinate rule in its synthesis, and thus whether the product of this synthesis is subsumed under a determinate concept by the power of judgment.

These different relations between imagination and understanding not only map onto different types of judgments (be they cognitive or aesthetic)—but in fact can only be fully made sense of by being situated within the activity of the power of judgment. For example, Kant writes: "in a merely reflecting judgment, imagination and understanding are considered *in the relation to each other in which they must stand in the power of judgment in general*" (*FI* 20:220; emphasis mine). Similarly: "For *in the power of judgment* understanding and imagination are considered *in relation to each other...*" (*FI*

20:223; emphasis mine). In contrasting the two kinds of relations, Kant describes the subjective relation as one in which: “the power of judgment, which has no concept ready for the given intuition, holds the imagination (merely in the apprehension of the object) together with the understanding (in the presentation of a concept in general)” (*FI* 20:224). What these passages suggest is that the relation between imagination and understanding must be seen as a relation that exists *within* the power of judgment—and that, likewise, the activity of the power of judgment, in some sense, *just is* a matter of relating representations from both the imagination and understanding.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, despite its different ways of relating to the understanding, the imagination is nonetheless always synthesizing.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, these different relations are most fully characterized in terms of their being situated within the power of judgment. This being the case, we can also consider the different roles the imagination plays in relation to the different kinds of subsumption that take place in the various acts of the power of judgment. While it is commonplace to assume that subsumption is only present in the determining judgments of the first *Critique*, Kant in fact sees subsumption as an essential part of all acts of judgment, including practical and aesthetic ones. In the broadest sense, subsumption is the act of bringing one thing under another, and Kant says that it is always a ‘function’ of the power of judgment (*KrV* A132/B171; A247/B304). In the first *Critique*, the power of judgment subsumes intuitions under concepts (thanks, in no small part, to the schematizing work of the imagination) (*KrV* A137/B176-A142/B181). In the ‘Typic’ section of the second *Critique*, the power of judgment subsumes a possible action under the moral law (*KpV* 5:68). Since a universal is given in both cases, the power of judgment is determining.

Perhaps more surprisingly, in the third *Critique*, Kant speaks of reflection as also involving subsumption: “Now since no concept of the object is here the ground of the judgment, it can consist only in the subsumption of the imagination itself (in the case of a representation by means of which an object is given) under the condition that the understanding in general advance from intuition to concepts” (*KU* 5:287). In the absence of a rule the imagination combines a manifold freely and yet in a way that agrees with the understanding’s more general aim of unifying an object in a concept. While the idea of subsuming a faculty under a faculty is admittedly a rather obscure idea, I suggest that we think of this in terms of the power of judgment holding up and comparing the imagination and the understanding. As we know, in the case of the understanding, no specific representation is put forward. Thus, instead of comparing an intuitive representation (provided by the imagination) with a conceptual representation of a determinate object (provided by the understanding) for the sake of subsuming the former under the latter, the power of judgment instead reflects on the imagination in its free synthesis in light of the more general aim on the part of the understanding that whatever is synthesized be capable of achieving the unity of an object. Thus, Kant says, reflecting judgment also has a “principle of subsumption, not of intuitions under concepts, but of the faculty of intuitions or

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Refl* 988 (15:432): the power of judgment is the faculty that “makes possible the agreement of the two in a case *in concreto*.”

<sup>20</sup> I thus disagree with Makkreel, for whom Kant’s account of the imagination in the first *Critique* (where it is synthesizing and schematizing) is entirely separate from his account in the third (where it is engaging in free play and behaves ‘interpretively’) (1990, p. 48-51). By extension, I also disagree with Makkreel’s sharp distinction between Kant’s conceptions of determining and reflecting judgment, as well as between reflecting judgment and reflection (2006, p. 223-244). For a criticism of Makkreel along these lines, see Hoerth, who claims that Makkreel’s position commits him to “split[ting] the imagination into two separate faculties,” thus creating a unity problem (2020, p. 6, 8-9).

presentations (i.e., of the imagination) under the faculty of concepts (i.e., the understanding)” (*KU* 5:287).<sup>21</sup>

What, then, is the link between the idea of a rule instructing the imagination in its synthesis and a rule instructing the power of judgment how to subsume? Are these not just the same rule? This question does not admit of a simple answer. We should first recall that the imagination may or may not be given a rule that instructs it in its synthesis. When it is given a rule, it is in the form of a determinate concept—that is, a concept of an object; the synthetic unity it produces is therefore fit for subsumption under that concept (by the power of judgment). Additionally, we should recall that the power of judgment, strictly speaking, never has a rule that instructs it in its subsumption (it cannot, given its very nature). To be sure, in its determining use, a universal is given—which is to say that judgment’s task is to bring a particular (provided by the imagination, as I contend) under a universal. But this rule is to be distinguished from the principle that always governs the power of judgment in its actions—that of purposiveness. In other words, even when the power of judgment is given a rule from the understanding, which it is tasked with applying, it does not cease to be governed by its own principle. On the contrary, it is guided by this principle in doing so. Were it to lack a principle altogether (as it did in the first *Critique*) its ability to bring particulars under universals would be arbitrary and blind. Kant makes this precise point about reflection: it requires a principle as much as determining (*FI* 20:211). To say that judgment is guided by its own principle even when it is assisting another faculty in applying its rules is just to say that the power of judgment is reflecting even when it is determining.

In what is perhaps his most explicit statement of the intimate relation between imagination and judgment, Kant not only speaks of the activity of the imagination as inseparable from that of judgment but also makes clear that it is a relation of the imagination to the *reflecting* power of judgment: “For that apprehension of forms in the imagination can never take place without the reflecting power of judgment...at least comparing [these forms] to its faculty for relating intuitions to concepts” (*KU* 5:190). In other words, wherever we find the imagination freely taking up the world, we will also find the power of judgment reflecting—that is, holding up the imagination to the understanding which always aims at bringing its products under concepts.

Insofar as reflection is a matter of holding up and comparing given representations, we can now ask: where do these representations come from? From whence are they given? Similarly, insofar as reflecting judgment is a matter of only a particular being given (without a universal also being given), we can also ask: where does the particular come from? What does it mean for it to be given? By now, it should be clear how I think we should answer these questions. In both kinds of judgment—determining and reflecting—a particular is given. For now, we can set aside the question of what it means for something (such as a particular) to be given, and focus instead on what it means for something to be a particular.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Remark in §38: subsuming not the imagination under the understanding, but our representation of an object under the ‘relation’ of the imagination and understanding (*KU* 5:290). See also a passage from the metaphysics lectures, where Kant describes the activity of the ‘merely reflecting’ power of judgment as follows: “We subsume merely under our faculty of concepts” (*LM* 28:675-676).

<sup>22</sup> There is a further question of how a ‘particular,’ for Kant, is distinct from related notions, such as ‘individual,’ ‘singular,’ and ‘object.’ I cannot take this up here, though it is certainly worthy of exploration.



To see how the imagination produces particulars, we can consider its activity in each of the three domains of judgment: theoretical, practical, and aesthetic. In the first two instances, the imagination provides particulars to the power of judgment for it to subsume under universals: (i) forming images (call these ‘perceptual/empirical particulars’) from given intuitions, which can be brought under concepts in cognition (theoretical judgment), and (ii) constructing possible actions (‘moral particulars’) from past experience, which can be brought under the moral law (practical judgment). In both cases, the imagination’s activity of synthesis is rule-governed, and the activity of the power of judgment is determining (subsumption of a particular under a universal). In the final instance, however: (iii) the imagination is free, synthesizing a manifold without a rule directing it—and indeed, in a multitude of different ways. Here, the product (an ‘aesthetic particular’) is something on which the power of judgment can reflect (aesthetic judgment).<sup>23</sup>

(i) That the imagination is responsible for providing a particular in the theoretical case is the least controversial. Indeed, a significant amount of the literature on the imagination in Kant has focused on this aspect of it—namely, his innovative claim that it is an essential part of making cognition possible. Most of these discussions concerns how Kant’s argument should be understood. What I am trying to argue here does not depend on any particular account of the imagination in the first *Critique* being correct. For what matters here is only *that* the imagination is what takes the deliverances of sensibility—given to us in an entirely undifferentiated and formless way—and bestows a form on them so that they can be subsumed under a concept of the understanding in an act of judgment. And, in fact, we have already seen what this looks like.

(ii) Turning to the practical domain (which we have so far not said much about), we can start by acknowledging that Kant himself seems to afford the imagination no role here. Kant says in the second *Critique* that “the moral law has no cognitive faculty other than the understanding (not the imagination) by means of which it can be applied to objects of nature... ” (*KpV* 5:69). Unlike in the first *Critique*, where the imagination schematized the pure concepts of the understanding, the imagination is unable to provide a sensible schema of the moral law: “[W]hat the understanding can put under an idea of reason is not a *schema* of sensibility but a law...and we can accordingly, call it the it the *type* of the moral law” (*KpV* 5:69).<sup>24</sup> In short, what mediates between the moral law and the sensible world is not a product of the imagination.

Even then, we should not be so quick to conclude that the imagination plays no role whatsoever in the practical sphere.<sup>25</sup> Given our concern with imagination’s relation to judgment, we can focus our attention on other ways imagination might play a role in making practical judgments possible. That is, even if imagination does not mediate in the precise way that it does in the case of theoretical judgments, it might nonetheless have an indispensable function in bringing about practical judgments.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gorodeisky (2019), who characterizes the three kinds of judgments as different in kind but nonetheless unified in terms of the lawfulness of the imagination. In all cases, she says, the imagination “presents the sensible world as lawful” (p. 105).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. a page before, where Kant tentatively speaks of the idea of the “schema of a law itself (if the word schema is appropriate here)” (*KpV* 5:69).

<sup>25</sup> For more extended discussions of how imagination might figure in Kant’s ethics, see: Ferrarin (2008); Freydberg (2005); Johnson (1985); Matherne (2024), chapters 11-13.

Kant treats the topic of ‘practical judgment’ [*praktische Urteilstkraft*] in a section of the second *Critique* entitled the ‘Typic.’<sup>26</sup> He defines it as the act of determining “whether an action possible for us in sensibility is or is not a case that stands under [a practical rule of reason],” and thus that “by which what is said in the rule universally (*in abstracto*) is applied to an action *in concreto*” (*KpV* 5:67). Since reason cannot apply its law on its own, Kant invokes the power of judgment to explain how it is that human beings can apply the moral law to specific situations. Kant also speaks of practical judgment as “a subsumption of possible actions [*möglicher Handlugen*] (as good or evil) under the [moral law]” (*KpV* 5:90). The universal in a practical judgment is a general moral principle or rule, while the particular is a possible action (that is, an action which we could perform).

What Kant means by ‘possible action,’ however, is not immediately clear. Most commentators have interpreted this in general terms—i.e., as descriptions of possible *types* of actions (Nuzzo 2014, p. 254; O’Neill 2004, p. 94). These are certainly operative in the act of moral appraisal, in which we test our maxims. Maxims, for Kant, are general; they contain act-type descriptions. If practical judgment were just a matter of moving from the Categorical Imperative to a maxim, then it would be less clear that there was any role for imagination. Yet in the Typic we see Kant speak of actions ‘*in concreto*,’ as well as ‘cases.’ This suggests that he has act-tokens in mind. In a practical judgment, we determine some act-token that instantiates the act-type whose moral possibility we have previously established. As general kinds of representations, possible act-types cannot be actualized in human behavior except through the act-tokens that instantiate them. By contrast, possible act-tokens are particular and are the kinds of things that can be actualized.

Imagination is thus essential for furnishing the relevant sensible content for the construction of a moral particular.<sup>27</sup> Recall that imagination is the faculty of representing what is absent. We might assume that this only refers to the past—i.e., calling to mind things that we have previously experienced. For example, someone who is deliberating whether to tell a lie must call to mind past instances of lying (e.g., having told a lie themselves or witnessed others tell a lie). Yet this ability of imagination can also extend to the future—i.e., calling to mind things that might come to exist but do not exist yet. For example, I might deliberate about whether to tell a lie in the specific situation in which I find myself. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the former is a condition on the latter; our ability to represent possible futures depends on past experiences (cf. Biss 2014, p. 8).

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<sup>26</sup> The ‘Typic’ section is notoriously difficult. It is beyond the scope of this article to settle the numerous interpretive controversies that surround it. For an excellent and thorough treatment of the ‘Typic’ section, see Westra (2016).

<sup>27</sup> For a contrasting view, see O’Neill, for whom there is no particular given in the case of practical judgment, since they deal with possible actions rather than actual, or existing, ones: “Practical judgment cannot presuppose that the particular act that is to be done is there to be judged” (2018, p. 89). While O’Neill seems to entertain the possibility that the imagination might provide the particular, she claims that such a particular would be too abstract to guide action: for “what we conceive or imagine cannot be fully determinate” (p. 89fn5). It is unclear why O’Neill thinks that a particular needs to be completely determinate for a practical judgment to be action-guiding. Though any action we perform is fully determinate, it is unnecessary (and impossible) for practical judgment to specify every single aspect of the action before it is performed in order to be efficacious. For example, my practical judgment that I ought to keep my promise to my friend to help them move does not specify what colour shirt I should wear while doing so. The relevant question, then, seems only to be whether the imagination on a given occasion can provide *enough* determinacy—or, the *salient* determinate content. I discuss this issue in more detail in a recent paper on practical judgment (Dunn 2023).

(iii) Finally, we have also already had occasion to consider how the imagination operates in aesthetic judgment—in discussing the ‘free play’ of merely reflecting judgment.<sup>28</sup> To reiterate: here, imagination is not governed by a concept, and is therefore free from a determinate rule instructing it on how to synthesize. In encountering a given manifold of intuition, it can combine this manifold in many different ways—for it is not ‘in the service’ of the understanding (*KU* 5:242). It “schematizes without a concept” (*KU* 5:287), whereas in the context of the first *Critique* it schematized concepts themselves, producing rules to guide it in its apprehension (*KrV* A137/B176). Here, it proceeds only on the general condition of the understanding discussed above. In this, it behaves both lawfully and freely. Accordingly, its product—an ‘aesthetic particular’—attains unity, just like the perceptual particular does. However, this is not the unity of a cognition through concepts, but rather a unity that is felt in the ‘unintentional’ agreement of the faculties themselves (rather than their representations). In this instance, the power of judgment does not subsume the particular under a concept (for none is given), but rather reflects on it.

Hence, in all three spheres of judgment, the imagination’s activity is such that it produces a particular—which can then be subsumed under a universal or reflected on. And without these acts of imagination, such judgments would not be possible.<sup>29</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

While the overwhelming focus of the literature on the imagination in Kant has been on the epistemological concerns of the first *Critique*—in particular, its account of perception and cognition—I have tried to make sense of an important aspect of the imagination (namely, its relation to judgment) across the three critiques. Thus, without attempting to be an exhaustive account, it is nonetheless a unified one. Before concluding, I want to consider what this account means for the status of the imagination as a faculty. Commentators have generally debated whether imagination is a species or sub-process of either (i) sensibility or (ii) understanding, or (iii) an independent faculty in its own right. However, now that we have seen just how close the relationship between the power of imagination and the power of judgment is, I want to conclude by suggesting that the former may best be seen as (iv) a sub-process or species of the power of judgment. While I cannot argue for this here, I will simply sketch out what I have in mind. As I said above, the imagination acts under the influence of the laws of both the understanding and the power of judgment. In empirical cognition, its synthesis is instructed by not only the categories, but a determinate concept of an object; in aesthetic experience, it is merely guided by the categories, but experiences freedom to the extent that it is not bound by a specific form. We can observe that its activity of providing form to formless matter parallels judgment’s activity of recognizing how to put particulars and universals together. That is, the function of the imagination in which “both extremes” of sensibility and understanding (intuition and

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<sup>28</sup> Here I focus only on aesthetic judgment (and not teleological judgment) because Kant takes it to be the paradigmatic exercise of the power of judgment (*FI* 20:246; cf. Pollok 2017; Gorodeisky 2019, p. 1).

<sup>29</sup> A strong version of the claim would have it that no judgment is possible at all without imagination. I cannot defend this claim here, nor do I need to. Even if there are some limited cases where an act of judgment does not presuppose an act of imagination (e.g., those of pure logic or those which deal strictly with ideas of reason), what I have tried to demonstrate here is how intimately bound up with judgment imagination is. More to the point: given imagination’s unique affiliation with sensibility, it is clear that it is always responsible for providing judgment with sensible particulars. My discussion of theoretical, practical, and aesthetic judgments show how imagination does this in each of these three spheres.

concept) “must necessarily be connected” is a correlate of the function of the power of judgment in which the gap between particularity and universality (as well as theoretical and practical) is bridged (*KrVA*124; *KU* 5:176, 195-196). In this way, there is a clear connection between the imagination’s ‘free lawfulness’ (or ‘lawfulness without a law’) and the power of judgment understood as the skill of applying rules without being rule-governed. Moreover, if we understand the activity of imagination as, in some sense, falling under the activity of judgment, then we can see it as guided by the principle of purposiveness. The influence of the principle of purposiveness on the imagination can be seen in the latter’s ability to determine how the various representations in a manifold ‘belong’ together (i.e., what form to give it, and how this is ‘suitable’ for the needs of understanding, *KU* 5:315-319)—mirroring judgment’s ability to determine whether a particular belongs with a universal (i.e., how to subsume it). What’s more, judgment’s performance of the latter task depends on the imagination first having performed its task, which I characterized as providing a particular.

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