Presence and Kant's Definition of the Imagination

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Abstract

Kant defines the imagination as 'the faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition' (B151). It has recently been argued that this is incompatible with views on which intuitions are dependent on the existence of their objects, and that we should understand the imagination as a source of object-independent intuitions. This paper argues that the object-dependent view of intuition can account for the passage, if imagination is understood as producing sensible representations constrained by the form of intuition, rather than intuitions themselves. It argues schemata are this type of representation, and thus the views are at parity.

Introduction

One does not have to read far into the *Critique of Pure Reason* to discover arguably its central doctrine: that 'there are two stems of human cognition, which may perhaps arise from a common but to us unknown root, namely **sensibility** and **understanding**, through the first of which objects are given to us, but through the second of which they are thought' (A15/B29).[1] One key challenge in understanding the book as a whole is to account for how these two stems make unique contributions to cognition. But since Kant also introduces a threefold distinction between sensibility, imagination, and understanding (A78-79/B104, A94, A97, A115), another key challenge is to explain what the imagination is and how it relates to the other two faculties. This essay is concerned with the question of how the tasks of sensibility and imagination are to be allotted. There are many parts of the text one could look to in order to understand the roles of sensibility and imagination, but one passage has been the focus of recent discussion, a single passage in the B Deduction where Kant offers what looks like a straightforward definition of the imagination. On Guyer and Wood's translation it reads '***Imagination*** is the faculty for representing an object even **without its presence** in intuition' (B151). But the sentence is ambiguous between either a view on which the imagination's objects are represented in intuition despite being absent, or the imagination's objects are represented despite the fact they are absent from intuition. If one takes the first path, one ends up with a view on which the imagination, like sense, is a source of

[1] All references to Kant's works are to the Akademie edition by volume and page number, except references to the first Critique, which use the standard A/B pagination. I use the following abbreviations: *Anth.* = *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*; *CJ* = *Critique of the Power of Judgment*; FI = *First Introduction to Critique of the Power of Judgment*; *MDohna* = *Metaphysics Dohna*; *ML2* = *Metaphysics* L_2; *MMron.* = *Metaphysics Mrongovius*; *MVigil.* = *Metaphysics Vigilantius*; *LDW* = *Logic Dohna-Wundlacken*; *AMron.* = *Anthropology Mrongovius*; *ABusolt* = *Anthropology Busolt*; *APillau* = *Anthropology Pillau*; *Mensch.* = *Menschenkunde*; *Refl.* = *Notes and Fragments*; *Corr.* = *Correspondence*. All translations are from the Cambridge Edition unless noted.

intuitions.[2] This leads to a view on which intuitions are products of either sensibility or the imagination, and are compatible with both the presence and absence of the object they represent. The purpose of this essay is to argue that this conclusion is too quick. The second path is equally textually viable, and gives us a compelling picture of the imagination.[3]

Why should we be concerned with the question of whether the imagination produces intuitions? A major reason for focusing on this passage in the literature has been to rule out a controversial account of how intuition plays its role of giving objects. The debate in question concerns whether intuition's immediacy and givenness are best understood as requiring the presence of its object. According to object-dependent views it is, whilst according to object-independent views, intuition can achieve its role in cognition without the presence of the object. B151, a passage concerning precisely whether the imagination produces intuitions without the presence of the object, bears directly on this issue. But it is not only our account of intuition that is shaped by the passage at B151. Given B151 appears to be something like a definition, one might try to read off a theory of the imagination as a whole from it. Take Andrew Stephenson's object-independent account, on which the imagination (in veridical perception and hallucination) processes information encoded in sensations, incorporating information from previous perceptions to bind together sensations into an intuition.[4] Or take Samantha Matherne's object-independent account, on which the imagination produces intuitions in accordance with concepts, making concepts sensible by exhibiting them in intuitions.[5] For both of them, ordinary veridical perception requires the imagination to produce intuitions from something otherwise disorganized, with these intuitions presenting us with determinate objects apt for judgement.[6] So for both of them B151 is not a marginal text for understanding the imagination as a whole, rather it describes at least one key function of the imagination in cognition, as well as being important for understanding intuition.

This essay has the following structure. In §1 I summarize the state of the debate about B151, object-dependence, and imagination. The view I will target is the minimal claim that some intuitions are produced by the imagination, rather than the stronger claims that either all products of the imagination are intuitions or all intuitions are produced by the imagination. In §2 I show that the object-independent reading of B151 is not forced. The object-dependent reader can coherently claim that the imagination represents its object sensibly without claiming that it produces intuitions, both at B151 and at passages from the *Anthropology*. All that is required is that the imagination produces representations that are dependent on intuitions, rather than a proposal on which the imagination produces even inner intuitions. In §3 I provide a positive account of the imagination that accords with an object-dependent reading of B151. I argue that the imagination produces representations that are constrained by the form of intuition, rather than producing intuitions. Using schemata as my example, I show that this

[2] This reading was spearheaded in (Stephenson 2015: 497-498), (Stephenson 2017: 112-114), but takes an early form in (Parsons 1992: 83) and (Roche 2011: 361). It has subsequently been argued by (Matherne 2024: 74 n15), and endorsed by (Rosefeldt 2021: 3173 n7) and (Schafer 2017: 1681-1682).

[3] The view I have in mind broadly follows that of (Young 1988), though his view is silent on the nature of intuition.

[4] See (Stephenson 2015: 499).

[5] See (Matherne 2024: 96).

[6] See (Stephenson 2011: 4) and (Matherne 2024: 165).

makes good sense of the definition at B151, and thus the object-dependent view is at parity with the object-independent view. The views are therefore at a stalemate, which only further inquiry into the different acts of the imagination can break.

1 Presence and Absence

Before turning to my own argument, I want to begin by summarizing the current status of the debate about the relationship between B151 and the object-dependence of intuition. My aim is not to give a full defence of either side of the debate, but rather to give a motivation for the object-dependent view, to give the strongest version of the challenge from B151 to the object-dependent view, to show how object-dependent views have attempted to respond to the challenge, and why these have not moved those who hold the object-independent view.

1.1 Framing the Debate

Object-dependent views come in three main kinds, but all views are committed to the idea that if there is an empirical intuition of an object, that object exists.[7] The question that divides the first two views is what kind of relation to objects intuition is. Relational views understand the relation to be a primitive relation of conscious acquaintance. In particular, they all understand outer empirical intuitions to be states that require mind-independent objects to exist and be present to consciousness.[8] Causal views understand the relation to be causality: one only has an intuition of an object when it is caused by the existence of that same object.[9] A third kind of view is silent on what sort of relation holds between intuitions and their existing objects, and instead understands the question of object-dependence methodologically. On these views, the paradigm or definitional case of intuition is one where the object is present, and the faculty of intuition should overall be understood in relation to that success case.[10] Motivations for all of these views pull in different directions, and are justified by a wide variety of passages and systematic concerns that I will not discuss here. To simplify things, I am just going to discuss the relational view as the default kind of object-dependent view. In particular, I am going to discuss a version of the relational view that sees its account of outer empirical intuition as capturing a kind of naïve realism.[11] Naïve realism is the most demanding of these three views, and perhaps the most difficult to defend. But given it is compatible with both the kind of causal condition expressed by the

[7] I am taking this rubric from (Gomes and Stephenson 2016).

[8] See (Allais 2015), (McLear 2016), (Gomes 2014), (Gomes 2016). (Buroker 2006: 37), (Cassam 1993), (Warren 1998: 221 fn55) seem to me in this camp, though do not identify as naïve realists. (Hanna 2001: 210) holds a view which might be unacceptable to some naïve realists, on which both past and future objects can be intuited.

[9] See (Watkins and Willaschek 2017) and (Tolley 2013).

[10] See (McDowell 1998: 475), (Smyth 2024: 58).

[11] The salient contrast here is with sense datum theories of perception. Sense datum views are also relational, but affirm that what one is related to in veridical perception as well as hallucination is a mind-dependent object that possesses all the properties it appears to have. The naïve realist by contrast holds that in veridical perception we are acquainted with a mind-independent object. There is an important question here as to whether the Kantian relationalist can adopt both views, accepting naïve realism for outer empirical intuition and a sense datum view for inner empirical intuition. This is the inner intuition proposal I discuss below.

second camp, and is compatible with the kind of disjunctivism expressed by the third, what I say should be compatible with those views too. Indeed, those views are all targets of the objection from B151, so should welcome the defence given here.

On the other hand, object-independent views have a 'locus classicus' (Gomes and Stephenson 2016: 57) in representational views of intuition. For a state to be representational is typically understood as that state having a content, that is, in making a claim on how the world is, if the representation is accurate. But it is important that the world not need be so for the state to have the content it has. It is for that reason that the paradigm case of a representational state is belief. What individuates beliefs is their content, or the conditions under which they are accurate, not whether they are in fact true. To be a representationalist about intuition is to claim that our sense representations also do not require the presence of the object to be about an object.[12]

One motivation for adopting a relational account of intuition is to make sense of the difference between concepts and intuitions, both in terms of the representations Kant says they are, and the role he assigns both in cognition. According to this argument, we can characterize the different kinds of mental states by the kind of relationship they have to their objects. Concepts and judgements are like beliefs, and thus possess accuracy conditions, so *represent* their objects in such a way that does not require their presence. The relational account asserts that because for Kant 'it is correctly said that the senses do not err; yet not because they always judge correctly, but because they do not judge at all. Hence truth, as much as error, and thus also illusion as leading to the latter, are to be found only in judgments, i.e., only in the relation of the object to our understanding' (A293/B350), we should deny that intuitions have accuracy conditions or are representational like beliefs.[13] On the other hand, representationalists need to understand intuitions as having accuracy conditions. They therefore need some other story about how concepts and intuitions differ; Stefanie Grüne for example argues that concepts are structured like propositions, whereas intuitions are structured like pictures, and thus can be accurate without having propositional contents, and this is sufficient to distinguish concepts from intuitions.[14] In addition to this debate about what is required to distinguish concepts and intuitions, as (Gomes and Stephenson 2016: 64) show, if one adopts an object-dependent view of intuition, cognition will involve predicating properties of actual objects, whereas if one adopts an object-independent view of intuition cognition will merely be a representational state with objective purport. As a consequence the results of the Deduction are different on the two readings: object-independent views will only have to show that representations with objective purport require the categories, whereas object-dependent readings will have to show that objects in fact instantiate the categories. Therefore the question of object-dependence has significant consequences for how we read the *Critique* as a whole.

It is in this context that Kant's theory of the imagination becomes salient.[15] As early as Parsons,

[12] For a particularly clear elaboration of this view, see (Pereboom 1988) and (Cummins 1968).

[13] This objection comes from (McLear 2016).

[14] See her (Grüne 2014).

[15] This is not to say that there are not other objections to the relational view. I will be bracketing for example arguments that utilize Kant's theory of perception itself like (Stephenson 2011) and (Roche 2011) or his theory of pure intuition like (Grüne

it has been claimed that Kant's account of the imagination implies that for intuition to be immediate, all that is required is *phenomenological presence* without the actual existence of the object.[16] Borrowing a distinction from (Stephenson 2017: 112-3) we can distinguish two readings of the definition at B151:

> Reading 1: ***Imagination*** is the faculty for representing an object even **without its presence** in intuition.
>
> Reading 2: ***Imagination*** is the faculty for representing an object in intuition even **without its presence.**

If we adopt Reading 2, at minimum this implies that A) some intuitions are produced by the imagination, when the object of those intuitions is absent. But some commentators have gone further. Some hold that A) holds because B) all products of the imagination are intuitions, or C) all intuitions are produced by the imagination.[17] It is worth being precise that it is only A) that I am attempting to establish parity with: I think as it stands both B) and C) are doubtful, but someone who defends A) need not hold either. C) is on the face of it hard to stomach, as Kant denies the identification of imagination with intuition in the Refutation of Idealism, where Kant argues that if outer intuitions were mere products of the imagination that would 'annihilate the faculty of intuition' at (B276-277).

B) similarly leads to some uncomfortable results: for example, (Matherne 2024) holds that schemata and images, as products of the imagination (A140-41/B179-181), are intuitions. Both of these identifications are controversial.[18] The defender of B) can bite the bullet here, but it is worthwhile to point out that it leaves us with an extremely stretched notion of intuition.[19] Traditionally intuitions are defined as immediate, singular, and given (A19/B33, A320/B377). But Matherne is committed to denying that intuitions produced by the imagination are either immediate or singular (Matherne 2024: 77,148).[20] This leads her to characterize intuition as 'spatio-temporal representations of particulars' (Matherne 2024: 74). How are we to understand this? If what is spatio-temporal is the particular, then the definition seems to include too much. If I make the judgement 'My cat is running after a mouse', I have represented my cat running after a mouse. Now, this is certainly a representation of a particular, my cat, and is certainly spatio-temporal insofar as it involves motion. But this judgement is clearly not an intuition, exactly because it lacks the characteristic immediacy that intuition offers. If what is spatio-temporal is the representation, then the definition seems to include too little. Whilst it extensionally defines human sensible intuition, Kant seems to think there is a more general definition of intuition. Consider that Kant seems to argue that space and time are intuitions from some more general definition of intuition, and that Kant makes reference to other kinds of intuition (even if they are merely

2017).

[16] See (Parsons 1992: 83).

[17] For a book length defence of the two camps, see (Matherne 2024) and (Waxman 1991) respectively.

[18] For the view that schemata are intuitions, see (Allison 1981) and (Matherne 2024: 150), and for criticism see (Williams 2025: 1204-1205) and (de Boer 2016). For the view that images are intuitions, see (Matherne 2024: 145), and for criticism see (Tracz 2019) and (Tolley 2019).

[19] A lot of this will hang in (*CJ* 5:351) where Kant seems to directly state that schemata are intuitions. See (Matherne 2024: 111ff) for discussion of imagination as a faculty for intuition production in the *Critique of Judgment*.

[20] It is not entirely clear to me how Matherne understands the givenness, at (Matherne 2024: 78) it seems to be connected to receptivity. If this is the case, then this condition is also clearly lost, insofar as acts of the imagination are acts of spontaneity.

possible) which are not spatio-temporal, both sensible intuitions which are non-spatio-temporal as well as intellectual intuitions (B72, B144-145).[21] If we accept Matherne's account, it is difficult to see what resources we have to understand this broader notion of intuition. Thus my focus is on A) alone.[22]

There have been three major strands of responses to the argument for object-independence from the imagination, though they are not always distinguished by defenders of the object-dependent view. The first view accepts that the imagination produces intuitions, but insists that it produces only inner intuitions. These inner intuitions are still relational, but they acquaint us with inner images, rather than mind-independent objects; these images are thus to be understood as a kind of sense data.[23] The second view denies that the imagination produces intuitions at all. Instead, it claims that if we are attentive to Kant's language, he defines the imagination as a capacity for representing in intuition, but that this does not mean that it necessarily produces intuitions. Instead, a faculty can produce quasi-intuitions, or intuitive representations, whilst still being a faculty for intuition.[24] The third view claims that whilst the case of the imagination shows that some acts of intuition are object-independent, this does not show that we can prove results about the essence of sensible intuition from these arguments; or put another way, we do not learn about the essence of a faculty from its failure cases. Given this last strategy, at least at the word of its main proponent, does not save relationalism, I will bracket it for now.[25] Though it should be noted that its general strategy is compatible with the strategy I propose, which is a version of the second, intuitive representation, strategy.

1.2 Against the Object-Dependent View

In his (Stephenson 2017), Andrew Stephenson makes three objections to the inner intuition proposal.[26] The first objection is textual: Kant rarely unequivocally states that the imagination produces inner intuitions, and key passages seem to speak against the proposal. Most notably for our discussion, B151, no matter how understood, seems to speak against it. For take the reading under which the imagination represents objects which are absent from intuition, Reading 2. This turns out false on the inner intuition proposal, because there really is an object of intuition, specifically an inner intuition. Now take the reading under which the imagination represents absent objects in intuition, Reading 1. This also turns out false on the inner intuition proposal, because the object is not absent from that intuition: it is there in the inner intuition.[27] The natural move for the inner intuition proposal is to claim that the object is

[21] See (Smyth 2024: Ch5,7,8) for thoughtful discussion of both points.

[22] To be even more explicit, we could distinguish between two versions of A). A1) would be the view that the senses produce intuitions when the object is present, and the imagination produces intuitions when the object is absent. A2) would be the view that the senses produce intuitions when the object is present, and the imagination produces intuitions when the object is either present or absent. I take it that A2) must be what the object-independent view has in mind, given Kant thinks the imagination plays a role in veridical perception. See (Matherne 2024: 107 fn21) for this objection to A1). She takes Stephenson to fall into this camp, though given he also holds that imagination plays a role in perception, I find this hard to accept. In what follows I will always understand A) as A2).

[23] This is only defended in detail in (McLear 2014) and (McLear 2017). But it receives tentative support in (Allais 2015: 156 fn22), (Leech 2016: 219) and (Gomes 2016: 546 fn19).

[24] This is the explicit strategy in (Hanna 2005: 266-7), (Allais 2015: 156 fn22), and (Watkins and Willaschek 2017: 95).

[25] See (Smyth 2024: 58-9 fn21).

[26] See also (Schafer 2017: 1681) and (Grüne 2014).

[27] I am paraphrasing the argument given at (Stephenson 2017: 114).

absent of *outer* intuition but still present in *inner* intuition, but this requires reading a qualification into the text that Kant does not explicitly state. Even were this move accepted, Stephenson's two further arguments, which are more philosophical than textual, come into play. The first runs as follows: on the inner intuition proposal, the imagination in memory must produce inner intuitions. But this seems wrong: when I remember something, it does not seem to me that I remember an internal copy of that something, rather I remember that very something. The inner intuition proposal seems to have no way of accounting for this, and is forced to say that all memories are essentially illusions, where something which is not external appears external.[28] The third objection picks up on this problem. If it is the case that the phenomenal character of experience could be explained by inner intuitions that merely seem to be outer intuitions, it is unclear what special role outer intuition is supposed to have in uniquely characterizing the conscious character of perception.[29] In what follows, I will take these objections to be decisive.

The object-dependent view might therefore seek to simply deny that the definition at B151 really implies that the imagination produces intuitions at all. Stephenson and Matherne also level a set of objections against this view. The first is simply textual: Kant regularly attributes intuitions to the imagination, or claims the imagination is a part of sensibility.[30] The second and third arguments bear directly on B151. Stephenson claims that the sentence that follows the definition at B151 requires that the imagination produces intuitions. It reads:

> Now 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 the understanding, belongs to **sensibility;** but insofar as its synthesis is still an exercise of spontaneity, which is determining and not, like sense, merely determinable (B151-52)

Stephenson's argument claims the following

> There are two things about this passage that tell strongly in favour of reading 2 [Imagination is the faculty for representing an object in intuition even without its presence] and against reading 1 [Imagination is the faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition]. First, that Kant talks about the imagination giving 'a corresponding intuition to the concepts of the understanding', thus implying that imagination is indeed a faculty of intuition. Second, that he infers that the imagination 'belongs to **sensibility**' from the fact that 'all of our intuition is sensible', an inference that only makes sense if imagination is a faculty of intuition (Stephenson 2017: 113)

[28] I am paraphrasing (Stephenson 2017: 119). There is a broader question here for the inner intuition proposal of how anything inner ever appears to be outer, given that Kant thinks that 'Space, as the pure form of all outer intuitions, is limited as an *a priori* condition merely to outer intuitions.'(A34/B50). For this point see (Grüne 2014) and (Schafer 2017: 1681). McLear suggests Kant is equivocating on the word 'form' in passages like this, a strategy I will not discuss here, though it seems to me has not received enough discussion. See (McLear 2017: 96).

[29] I am paraphrasing (Stephenson 2017: 120-3).

[30] These are extensively discussed in (Stephenson 2017: 111 fn17), (Stephenson 2015: 496-7), and (Matherne 2024: 107).

This suggests that the definition at B151 simply must assume that the imagination produces intuitions. A final objection, which I take to be in the background of discussions of B151 is that the reading that suggests the imagination does not produce intuitions seems to be insufficient to characterize it.[31] For if it reads 'The imagination is the faculty to represent an object, even without its presence in intuition', it seems like that definition would also include *judgements* about absent objects. If I just judge falsely that there is a lion in the room, I have represented the lion, but it is not present in intuition.

In addition there is also a question of how philosophically satisfying the strategy of defining 'quasi-intuition' is. Hanna writes that

> I think that the best overall construal of what he is saying is that imagination is essentially intuition *minus* object-dependence: so imagination is an immediate, sense-related, singular, and nonconceptual cognitive capacity that can represent either existing or non-existing objects. Or otherwise put, imagination is *quasi-intuition*. (Hanna 2005: 266-7)

What Hanna is essentially proposing a version of logical subtraction. But such a procedure, as Yablo puts it, is both 'powerful' and 'perilous' (Yablo 2014: 4). To adapt an example of his, one fares well if one subtracts the redness from a tomato, leaving its shape, but one cannot very well subtract redness from its scarlet colour and be left with anything meaningful. Given the object-dependent view holds that intuition is defined by its object-dependence, we need to be reassured that there is anything workable 'left over' once that fact is subtracted. What, for example, does Hanna mean by the immediacy of imagination, if that immediacy is constituted by the presence of the object for intuitions? Without such reassurance quasi-intuitions or intuitive representations remain difficult to understand.

In the next section, I will argue that an object-dependent view of the intuitive representations kind can meet these challenges, and give an acceptable way to read B151. The strategy will be to show that all that is requisite to defend a version of the intuitive representation strategy is to assert that whatever is produced by the imagination is dependent on intuition. And once this is established, in the final section I will show what that dependence relation is.

2 Resisting Intuition Production

In this section I will show that the reading of the imagination as a producer of intuitions at B151 is not forced. That is, the reading of the sentence that implies that the imagination is the faculty for representing an object, even without its presence in intuition, is textually and philosophically unproblematic. That is, Reading 1 is as defensible as Reading 2. I will argue that all the passages strictly require is that the imagination is a faculty grounded in intuition. In the next section, I will argue that this grounding relation is a specific kind of representing, where the representation in question is constrained by the form of intuition.

[31] Neither Stephenson nor Matherne explicitly state this objection, but it is clear from both of their attempts to show how imagination is different from judging at (Stephenson 2015: 498) and (Matherne 2024: 77).

2.1 B151 Revisited

I begin with the challenge that Reading 1 underdetermines the imagination. Throughout, I have been calling the passage at B151 a *definition*. But in a technical Kantian sense, philosophical concepts like 'imagination' cannot be defined, in the sense of 'exhibit[ing] originally the exhaustive concept of a thing within its boundaries' (A727/B755), and instead 'philosophical definitions come about only as expositions of given concepts' (A730/B758). What this means is that we cannot present all of the marks of a given philosophical concept, and the best we can do is make it distinct enough that it can be distinguished from others, even if it cannot be distinguished uniquely (i.e. it is not a complete concept).[32] So what we want is an account that at least partially distinguishes the imagination from other faculties of the mind. As mentioned above, Reading 1 seems to fail this challenge. So the object-dependent reader will want to extend the definition to include the sentence that follows it: 'Now 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 the understanding, belongs to **sensibility;** but insofar as its synthesis is still an exercise of spontaneity, which is determining and not, like sense, merely determinable' (B151-52). That is, they will want to claim that the imagination represents absent objects *sensibly* rather than intellectually.[33]

But as mentioned above the object-dependent view needs to respond to two arguments from Stephenson. The first argument is that because the imagination gives a corresponding intuition, it must produce an intuition. The second argument is that because Kant infers from our intuition being sensible to imagination belonging to sensibility, imagination must be a faculty of intuition. What can the object-dependent view say in response to these two arguments?

To account for the first argument, the object-dependent view need only claim that when Kant says the imagination can give (*geben*) a corresponding intuition to the concepts of understanding, this can be read as the intuition already being there, with the imagination merely mediating between the intuition and the concept by giving an intuition to that concept. Presumably, the object-independent reader does not think that intuitions 'give' us objects in the sense of creating them (A19/B33), for that would turn our intuition into an intellectual one which produces its objects (B139, 145). Rather, both the object-dependent and object-independent views agree that intuitions give us objects in the sense of giving us access to them.[34] So I take it that it is not obvious that because the imagination gives intuitions to concepts, it produces intuitions, any more than because the intuitions give objects to us, they produce objects.

The second argument requires a more technical response. Stephenson claims that Kant's argument runs:

P1 All our intuitions are sensible

[32] Matters are somewhat more complex than this, but this is fit for our purposes. See (McAndrew 2023) for discussion.

[33] As I will discuss below, this seems like the relevant distinction in context between figurative and intellectual synthesis.

[34] For the purposes of argument, both agree to understand access in phenomenological terms. See (Stephenson 2017: 120-1). See (Chaplin 2022) for a rival view on which the givenness is not to be understood phenomenologically.

P2 All products of the imagination are intuitions

C All products of the imagination are sensible

Where P2 is an otherwise suppressed premise that is found in the definition on their reading. What the object-dependent view therefore needs is an alternative to P2 that is suitably related to the definition. A natural candidate would be something like this:

P1 All our intuitions are sensible

P3 All products of the imagination are dependent on our intuition

P4 All representations dependent on our intuition are sensible

C All products of the imagination are sensible

This is a move analogous to that made by the disjunctive theory of perception, which claims that hallucination is indistinguishable from perception, not because hallucination and perception share some common core, but rather because hallucination inherits its nature from perception.[35] Now it is clear that P3 and P4 are not to be found in the definition at B151. And as it stands, the grounding relation is too broad: empirical judgements are in some sense dependent on intuitions, but we ought to distinguish them from products of the imagination. So to take this strategy, the object-dependent view needs to substantiate P3 and P4, and demonstrate them to be premises that Kant holds. As long as they can do so, their view is at parity with the object-independent view.

The key strategy for the object-dependent view is therefore to claim that the imagination's products are dependent on sensibility, or dependent on intuition, without themselves being intuitions. But to do so requires there to be sensible representations that are not intuitions. And at least three cases seem to establish that Kant did in fact believe in such representations. Sensations are sensible representations that are always structured by the form of intuition (A19-20/B34).[36] A schema is a 'mediating representation' which is '**sensible**' (A138/B177) and is dependent on the form of inner sense, time (A139/B178). And images are also sensible representations (A320/B377), though whether they are intuitions is more debatable. As stated above, it is by no means clear that Kant understands any of these to be intuitions; indeed in the case of sensations it would be very difficult to affirm that they are. So understood, the object-dependent view has an escape strategy.

2.2 Beyond B151

I agree with Stephenson that there is a paucity of passages where Kant makes systematic use of intuitive representations. Furthermore, Stephenson and Matherne give us a huge amount of passages that seem to suggest the imagination produces intuitions in the absence of the object. But we should be

[35] Indeed, they might like (Martin 2006) just define hallucination as the state which is indiscriminable from veridical perception.

[36] The sense in which they are representations is complex, see (Jankowiak 2014).

very careful here, as not all of them obey the strict logic of B151, which asserts that imagination is the faculty *also* without the presence of the object. Of the passages they both assemble, the vast majority simply assert that the imagination is the faculty to represent absent objects sensibly.[37] Given these are exclusively student notes, it is natural to think that Kant was simply paraphrasing a standard definition of the imagination from Baumgarten: 'I have a faculty of imagining, or the FACULTY OF IMAGINATION (§557, 216). And since my imaginations are perceptions of things that were formerly present (§557, 298), they are perceptions of the senses that, while I imagine, are absent (§223)' (Baumgarten 2013: 211 §558). As the translators note this is adopted from the Wolffian definition: 'The faculty for producing perceptions of sensible things that are absent is called the faculty of imagining or imagination' (WPE §92) (ibid.)[38] But this cannot be the whole of Kant's considered view: his definition requires that the imagination be involved when the object is indeed present. The only texts Matherne and Stephenson cite which maintain the *auch ohne* formulation are two handwritten notes (*Refl.* 15:86, 18:618-9) and two passages from the *Anthropology* at (7:153) and (7:167). With regard to the former, I agree with Stephenson that 'Such texts can be extremely useful, but they should never trump what Kant himself wrote, especially in the B edition Transcendental Deduction' (Stephenson 2017: 116). This leaves us only with the passage at B151 and the *Anthropology* passages that could strongly support the idea that in Kant's considered view the imagination produces intuitions.

The *Anthropology* is adapted from Kant's lectures on the Empirical Psychology section of Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*, though with significant additions. Two passages suggest the object-independent view:

> **Sensibility** in the cognitive faculty (the faculty of representations in intuition) contains two parts: **sense** and **imagination.**—The first is the faculty of intuition in the presence of the object, the second even **without** the presence of the object. (*Anth.* 7:153)

> Imagination (*facultas imaginandi*), as a faculty of intuitions even without presence of the object, is either **productive**, that is, a faculty of the original presentation of the object (*exhibitio originaria*), which thus precedes experience; or **reproductive**, a faculty of the derivative presentation of the object (*exhibitio derivativa*), which brings back into the mind an empirical intuition had previously.—Pure intuitions of space and time belong to the first presentation (*Anth.* 7:167)[39]

The first definition is very close to B151, but perhaps pushes the object-independent view further, insofar as the imagination is defined as a faculty of representations in intuition. As long as everything that is 'in' intuition is *an* intuition, this seems to grant the object-independent view some support. But

[37] I.e. (*MMron.* 29:881, *MVigil.* 28:449, *MDohna* 28:673, *ML2* 28:585, *LDW* 24:701-5, *AMron.* 25:1241, 1257, *ABusolt* 25:1451, 1456, *APillau* 25:750, *Mensch.* 25:944). None of these contain an *auch* formulation.

[38] Stephenson notes this connection at (Stephenson 2015: 497).

[39] I am using the translation offered by (Stephenson 2017: 114) here as the Cambridge edition contains errors, in the first quotation rendering 'Vorstellungen in der Anschauung' as 'intuitive representations', and in the second quotation rendering the plural 'Anschauungen' as the singular 'intuition' and omitting the word 'auch'.

the object-dependent strategy can again affirm that to be a representation in intuition is just to be a representation grounded in intuition, and we are at the same place as we were with regards to B151.

The second quotation is more complex. On the face of it, it might seem that Kant is asserting here that the imagination produces intuitions. But there are reasons to doubt this implies that in the final analysis, imagination is a source of intuitions. Kant goes on to write that

> The power of imagination (in other words), is either *inventive* (productive) or merely *recollective* (reproductive). But the productive power of imagination is nevertheless not exactly *creative*, for it is not capable of producing a sense representation that was *never* given to our faculty of sense; one can always furnish evidence of the material of its ideas. To one who has never seen *red* among the seven colors, we can never make this sensation comprehensible, but to the person who is born blind we cannot make any colors comprehensible (*Anth* 7:167-168)

What does Kant mean here by his distinction between productive/inventive, reproductive/recollective, and creative? It is useful here to once again turn to Baumgarten, who in the section immediately following the one previously quoted that defines the imagination, writes:

> §559 A PERCEPTION that becomes less obscure in the soul IS PRODUCED (it is explicated), whereas a perception that becomes more obscure IS COVERED UP <*INVOLVITUR*>. And when a perception that was once covered up is produced, it IS REPRODUCED (it recurs). Now, things that were sensed are produced (i.e. developed) by imaginations (§558), and hence they were once produced (§542) and afterwards covered up (§551). Therefore, perceptions are reproduced through the faculty of imagination, and nothing is in the faculty of imagination that is not first in the senses (§558, 534). (Baumgarten 2013: 211-2)

What Baumgarten is describing here is a process by means of which the imagination does something to perceptions: it produces them only in the sense of *explicating* them or making them less obscure. Baumgarten reserves the language of creation for divinity, writing in §926 that 'To actualize something from nothing is TO CREATE' (Baumgarten 2013: 310). Kant's word for 'creative' is *schöpferisch*. When one turns to the original Latin edition, Baumgarten gives German glosses of his creation words in this section, and they are all forms of *schöpfen*: *CREATURA* is glossed as *ein Geschöpf*, *CREARE* as *erschaffen*. So it is very plausible that this is the view that Kant intends his readers, or at least his students, to have in mind. And all the view really amounts to is a dependence of imagination on intuition: one can only imagine p if one has intuited the parts, or intuitive qualities, of p. This is what is sometimes called 'The experiential constraint on phenomenal imagination [...] to phenomenally imagine an experience with a certain feeling, you must have actually experienced that feeling.' (Peacocke 2021: 301), who summarizes many of those who have endorsed it, and notes that the 'constraint is so widely accepted that

it is rarely given any significant defense' (ibid.). But the experiential constraint does not decide whether imagined episodes are of the same kind as the perceptual ones they are based on, so can be accepted by either an object-dependent or independent view. This tempers the idea that in (*Anth.* 7:167) we should understand Kant's language of being a faculty of intuitions as implying that the imagination generates new intuitions. It instead looks like Kant is rather claiming that imagination is a faculty dependent on intuition which manipulates those intuitions.

Of course, the object-independent view is perfectly at liberty to state that Kant's view is not Baumgarten's. Clearly, Kant has disagreements with Baumgarten. For Baumgarten, the imagination is merely reproductive; it cannot originally reduce the obscurity of a perception, rather it only ever partially restores the clarity of a perception, and all sensations are fundamentally obscure (see also §570). But the key point is that Kant seems to be using the terms productive/inventive, reproductive/recollective, and creative in the same fashion that Baumgarten does. And if he is, then the passages do not suggest, as the object-independent view wants to affirm, that the imagination produces intuitions. And if the object-independent view wants to more radically distinguish Kant from Baumgarten, they will have to discard a lot of the passages that are evidence for their view, and provide an account of what Kant means instead in the *Anthropology* passage concerning the productive imagination. Because at least provisionally, Kant simply does seem to be asserting Baumgarten's view that imagination is something done to sensory representations. A natural retort would be that intuition is not produced *ex nihilo* but rather from some sensory matter or sensations. But this makes it very hard to understand what Kant means when he writes that 'Pure intuitions of space and time belong to the productive faculty' (*Anth.* 7:167) given that pure representations are those 'in which nothing is to be encountered that belongs to sensation' (A20/B34).

To conclude: the object-dependent view can deny that the imagination produces intuitions at B151, by claiming that all that the following sentence requires is that the imagination is dependent on sensibility such that its products are sensible. With regards to the *Anthropology* passages, it needs to claim that 'representations in intuition' are not necessarily intuitions, and that a 'faculty of intuitions' need not produce intuitions. But in order for that to be persuasive, what is required is an account of what it is that the imagination does, if not produce intuitions. This process will need to be appropriately dependent on intuition, such that the imagination is genuinely 'sensible', that its representations are 'in intuition', and is a 'faculty of intuitions'. I turn to this now.

3 Imagination and Representation

In this section I want to make the case that the view described is plausible, and that it finds textual support. The key claim is that Kant thinks that the imagination is a faculty of intuitions in a restricted sense: he takes the imagination to be a capacity not to produce intuitions, but rather to represent intuitions in such a way that the representations are constrained by the form of intuition. I will begin by showing that

the products of the imagination are dependent on intuition, and that representations dependent in this way are sensible (P3 and P4). I then turn to articulating a way for a representation to be constrained by some other representation, without being of the same kind, thus giving us a dependence relation which is not identity. I then show that schemata are a non-intuitive product of the imagination that fit this account of B151.

3.1 Intuition-Dependence and Sensibility

The first idea to get on the table is that products of the imagination are constitutively dependent on intuition. A natural way to understand the difference is to suggest that a representation that is of an intuition in the relevant sense is constrained by that form of intuition. What is important to appeal to here is that some things can be represented in judgements which cannot be represented in the imagination. Whilst I cannot imagine two parallel lines on a flat surface meeting, I can form the judgement 'two parallel lines meet on a flat surface'. These are constraints that stem from intuition, which are then inherited when this intuition is represented. This gives us a first approach to P3: all products of the imagination are grounded in our intuition, in the sense that they are constrained by our form of intuition. This also solves the problem with P4, which stated that empirical and mathematical concepts are grounded in intuition but not in the properly sensible. Once the grounding relation is clarified, this problem disappears: empirical concepts and mathematical concepts are not constrained by the form of intuition.[40] The concept of a 'regular decahedron' is perfectly possible to form, even though the form of space makes any corresponding intuition impossible. Likewise for empirical concepts like 'cat playing with a regular decahedron'. The concepts lack sense and significance, but they are perfectly formable, unlike their corresponding sensible representations.

Is there evidence that Kant holds such a view? We have already seen above that Kant holds that the imagination is constrained in its activity by the matter of intuition. That is, one cannot imagine sensations one has not previously experienced like colours. But it follows from Kant's formulation that all representations of the imagination will be constrained by the form of intuition as well. For he writes that 'for [the imagination] is not capable of producing a sense representation that was *never* given to our faculty of sense' (*Anth.* 7:168). And given anything that can be given to sense is for us in space and time, all imagining is constrained by our form of intuition. What is significant here is that we can certainly *think* objects unconstrained by the forms of intuition (though such thinking lacks sense and significance): the objects of such thinking are what Kant calls noumena in the negative sense (B307-8, A253-5/B309-11).

Whilst not published, this also appears in Kant's letter to Rehberg of 1790. Though we do not have Rehberg's original letter, Kant paraphrases his challenge as follows

> The question is: Since the understanding has the power to create numbers at will, why

[40] Of course they are so constrained for their truth, but I take that to be a different standard.

> is it incapable of thinking $\sqrt{2}$ in [rational] numbers? For if the understanding could *think* it, it ought to be able to *produce* it, too, since numbers are pure acts of its spontaneity, and the synthetic propositions of arithmetic and algebra cannot limit this spontaneity by the condition of intuition in space and time. It seems, therefore, that we must assume a transcendental faculty of imagination, one that, in representing the object independently even of space and time, connects synthetic representations solely in pursuance of understanding (*Corr.* 11:207)

Kant's response is a resounding rejection of this position - all thinking of numbers involves synthesis in time (*Corr.* 11:208). So once again, we see that Kant affirms that all imagining is constrained by space and time in a way that understanding is not.

Of course, the object-independent view will not deny any of this data. For they exactly think that the imagination produces intuitions, which are constrained by the form of intuition.[41] The real question then is whether a representation can be constrained by the form of intuition without being an intuition. I turn to that now.

3.2 Dependence or Identity

What the object-dependent view needs is therefore a way in which a mental state can be constrained by features of another mental state without being identical kinds of state. In our case, that products of the imagination can be constrained by the form of intuition without being intuitions. Is there any such relation? In contemporary philosophy of mind, it is sometimes held that the imagination is subject to the following constraint:

> Dependency Thesis [...] to imagine sensorily a ϕ is to imagine experiencing a ϕ (Martin 2002: 404)[42]

The dependency thesis is framed as neutral on the question of object-dependence of perceptual experience.[43] What it claims is that the reason why imagining ϕ resembles perceiving ϕ is because in imagining one represents an episode of perceiving ϕ. For Martin, whilst the perceptual level is object-dependent, the imaginal level is object-independent.[44] But what is important is that the second level only gains its character because of its relation to the first. My claim will be that this is the model we should attribute to Kant. When one imagines, one does not produce an intuition, rather one represents possible intuitions. This leaves us with an account of imagination that is dependent on intuition but is not identical with it, just as imagination for Martin is dependent on perception without being identical with it.

[41] See (Horstmann 2018: 59-60) for exactly this claim.
[42] See also (Peacocke 1985), (Vendler 1984: 59), (Williams 1973).
[43] Though a key part of Martin's argument is to show that representationalist views which take perception to be object-independent struggle to account for it. I will not rehearse that argument here.
[44] See (Martin 2019) and (Martin 2001) for an elaboration of this view.

It is important the kind of representation of an experience here is still sensible, rather than judgemental. If I suppose that there is a lion in the room, then I need not be in any phenomenal state at all. But if I visually imagine that there is a lion in the room, then I sensibly represent how the room would look if there was a lion in it. But naturally, I can do so whether or not a lion is in fact in the room. What we need to explain is what it means for this second-level representation to be dependent on the first. As Martin points out, there are two natural candidates. On the one hand, one could argue that they both represent the same kinds of properties: phenomenal properties. But doing so makes it difficult to understand how imagining and perceiving in fact differ in kind, as it seems now that the same property could only be distinguished by its intensity in perception and imagination. It does not seem right, for example, to assert that imagining an itch is just to have a weak itch.[45] Nor does Kant speak like this: imaginings are not just weak intuitions.[46] The alternative Martin suggests is that we characterize why the imagination is sensible in terms of the object it represents: a *represented* itch need not exist, so we avoid the previous problem. Martin himself declines to answer whether 'we can explain what imagining is in terms of a more general concept of representing' (Martin 2002: 407). What we have said above suggests Kant does have an answer: one represents sensibly when one represents as constrained by the form of intuition.

It remains to be asked whether this is enough to call the imagination a faculty of intuition, or faculty of representations in intuition. What the object-dependent view will need to say is that a faculty of x is a faculty to represent x in such a way that is constrained by the form of x. One thing to note here is that Kant sometimes individuates faculties by their products, and sometimes by their principles.[47] Sensibility does not have principles in the same fashion a rational capacity does, but one strategy would be to extend the idea that the form of a faculty defines it. So because imagination's representations are structured by the form of intuition, it is a faculty of intuition.[48]

The question is whether Kant holds a model like this. Are there representations which are constrained by the form of intuition that are not intuitions, does he think they are representations of intuitions, and does he think that the imagination produces them? My answer is affirmative, by means of the same example: schemata are representations of the imagination that are constrained by our form of intuition produced by our imagination which are not intuitions. Furthermore, they can plausibly be understood as giving an intuition to the understanding, as described in B151-2.

[45] See (Martin 2002: 405-6).

[46] Baumgarten is again relevant here. He writes '§567 I distinguish imaginations from sensations (1) by their degree of clarity (§562), and (2) by the impossible coexistence of the state of the past, which imaginations convey, with the state of the present, which sensations convey (§298)' (Baumgarten 2013: 213). On this picture, imagination's phenomenal character differs from that of perception in two ways: it is weaker, and represents its object as past rather than present. It is significant that Kant does not include any analogue to these two claims in his treatment of the imagination.

[47] See (*FI* 20:246) for the most extensive discussion of this, and (Schafer 2021: 663-4) for discussion of what principles are in this context.

[48] On the account offered (Smyth 2024), anything that plays the role of providing extra-conceptual grounds for cognition will count as a faculty of intuitions. As long as this does not imply that the products of the imagination are intuitions, this is compatible with my account.

3.3 Imagination and Schematism

Schemata are distinctive products of the imagination (A140/B179). They are also sensible representations, specifically sensible conditions of judgements (A138/B177, A136/B175, A140/B179, A181/B224). Furthermore, they are constrained to the specific form of our intuition; in particular, they are 'transcendental time-determination[s]' (A138/B177). It is because they are so grounded in our form of intuition that they can allow us to relate categories to appearances. As Kant puts it, 'the schemata of sensibility first realize the categories, yet they likewise also restrict them, i.e., limit them to conditions that lie outside the understanding (namely, in sensibility)' (A146/B185-6, cf. A139/B178). The object-dependent view therefore needs only to show that schemata represent intuitions. A passage from the Doctrine of Method seems to suggest exactly this:

> All of our cognition is in the end related to possible intuitions: for through these alone is an object given. Now an *a priori* concept (a non-empirical concept) either already contains a pure intuition in itself, in which case it can be constructed; or else it contains nothing but the synthesis of possible intuitions, which are not given *a priori*, in which case one can well judge synthetically and *a priori* by its means, but only discursively, in accordance with concepts, and never intuitively through the construction of the concept. (A719-20/B747-8)
>
> The mathematical concept of a triangle I would construct, i.e., give in intuition *a priori*, and in this way I would acquire synthetic but rational cognition. However, if I am given the transcendental concept of a reality, substance, force, etc., it designates neither an empirical nor a pure intuition, but only the synthesis of empirical intuitions (which thus cannot be given *a priori*) (A722/B750)

Given that 'Synthesis in general is [...] the mere effect of the imagination' (A78/B103), and that 'The schema of a pure concept of the understanding [...] [is] only the pure synthesis, in accord with a rule of unity according to concepts in general' (A142/B181), it is natural to assume that what Kant is pointing to here, in the case of what categories are related to, is a schema. It is worth noting that, if that is so, schemata are distinguished from intuitions, instead mediating between sensibility and the categories.[49] Furthermore note that the relation to *possible* intuitions can be glossed such that the representational objects of episodes of imagining are possible intuitions. To unpack this thought, consider that content represents a possible object: when I believe that p, p need not be the case. So if the imagination represents possible intuitions, it can be understood to be representational in the way described. And finally, note that what this representation does is give content to a concept. They are therefore ideal candidates for what the object-dependent view takes to be the topic of B151.

[49] Matherne discusses such mediation views, arguing that Kant's two stem view of cognition implies that we should expect the imagination to be 'somehow integrated into either sensibility or understanding' (Matherne 2024: 53). I find this argument puzzling; just because something has two essential parts this does not mean that all other parts must be assimilated to these two parts. The essential parts of a window are its pane and its frame, but that does not mean that the glue that holds them together is somehow part of the pane or the frame.

Why focus on schemata rather than images?[50] A primary reason is that they are likely the topic of the discussion in §24 of the B Deduction where B151 is found. Here is the context:

> This **synthesis** of the manifold of sensible intuition, which is possible and necessary *a priori*, can be called **figurative** (*synthesis speciosa*), as distinct from that which would be thought in the mere category in regard to the manifold of an intuition in general, and which is called combination of the understanding (*synthesis intellectualis*); both are **transcendental**, not merely because they themselves proceed *a priori* but also because they ground the possibility of other cognition *a priori*.
>
> Yet the figurative synthesis, if it pertains merely to the original synthetic unity of apperception, i.e., this transcendental unity, which is thought in the categories, must be called, as distinct from the merely intellectual combination, the **transcendental synthesis of the imagination**. (B151)

The context here is a kind of combination that is distinct from that thought in a mere category. So what we are describing is exactly the process by means of which categories get their sense and significance in relation to our form of intuition. Now it may well be that the process here is broader than schematism, insofar as it is prior to concepts (B161), but it is certainly closer to that than mere mental imagery.[51]

To summarize: the object-dependent reader can affirm that B151 is discussing schematism, not intuition production. Schematism is understood as a process by means of which intuitions are represented sensibly, in such a way that they can give sensible contents to concepts. Of course, the object-independent view can either affirm that schemata are indeed intuitions, or deny that schematism is what is at issue in this passage. But both of these would take significant work to defend. It is for this reason that I claim that the object-dependent view is at parity with the object-independent view.

Conclusion

I have argued that Kant's definition of the imagination at B151 does not rule out an object-dependent view of intuition, by affirming that the imagination produces intuitions of absent objects. This is because the definition at B151 can also be understood as affirming that the imagination represents objects in intuitions in a manner constrained by our form of intuition, without producing said intuitions. The case I have concerned myself with is schemata, which are intuitive representations that present us with possible intuitions, rather than intuitions. One consequence of adopting such a view is that one avoids the pitfalls of the inner intuition proposal as regards memory. According to Stephenson's objection, the inner intuition proposal gives a false account of the phenomenal character of memory: it predicts that memories should have as their objects inner states, when they are in fact world objects. My proposal

[50] For a proposal where images are representations of intuitions, see again (Tolley 2019) and (Tracz 2019).
[51] For the view that the two processes are identical, see e.g. (Curtius 1914). (de Boer 2016) and (Allison 1981).

does not fall into this problem, for in reproductive imagination, one simply presents an intuition one once had.

I have focused in this essay on the very minimal claim that the imagination ever produces intuitions in the absence of objects. But it is worth pointing out that the standard object-independent view claims more than this: it seeks to understand the actions of the imagination in general in terms of the production of intuitions.[52] This means that the imagination is somewhat flattened out: its distinctive products, images and schemata, must be understood as two of the same kind of representations. A consequence of adopting a view on which the imagination can produce any representations that are constrained by the form of intuition is that this is not so: the imagination can take up a variety of different representational tasks. This paper has claimed that the object-dependent and object-independent views are at a stalemate regarding B151. The next step is to look at these different tasks, and to see which view fares best.

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[52] See most prominently (Matherne 2024).

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