The Imagination in Education
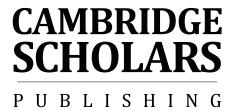
The Imagination in Education:
Extending the Boundaries of Theory and Practice

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

To Jane and Quinn

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

I have learned much as an educator, researcher, and academic but there are, for our immediate purposes, two important understandings that I have grown into over the last few years. First, approach everything; students, ideas, researchers, carnivorous mega-fauna, with humility. Do not assume you; know what the other is thinking, understand fully any particular position within a complex of ideas, or have the full range of understandings, historical or otherwise, that any concept, including something as rich as the imagination, might contain. The second, assume everything to do with teaching and the imagination is more complex than you (or anyone else for that matter) can explain over the matter of any particular piece of research work (or lifetime of work). Those who claim simplistic generalizations are usually missing something, often the rich and varied point. So, bearing these in mind, the challenge for an editor of an eclectic collection of essays focused around the imagination and education is to properly situate, with respect to each other and to a larger discussion, without over simplification and to honestly honour the particular unique character and contribution of each without over glorification. This is no easy task based on the seeming diversity of these papers, however as one begins to delve into these discussions certain threads appear that might help to tie this project together and further its potential as a contributing member to a much larger and ancient conversation that has as its backbone a sense of possibility. This collection is about possibility, how we conceive of it, how we make sense of and enact our conceptions of it, how we expand the range of it, and how we actively invite others into the exercise of it. It is that sense of hope, wonder, and creative ability, I believe, that impels teachers, thinkers, and learners to continue doing what they/we do everyday.

Part I: A Focus on Theory.

For thousands of years humans have wrestled with the questions and possibilities of the future, made stories of the past, and wondered at the present. It is within this miasma of possibility that the concept of imagination has salience and has, as a result, garnered traction from a who's who of significant thinkers. The challenge of making sense of the

imagination has always been like trying to catch smoke with one's bare hands. How does one define it such that it isn't so amorphous as to slip through one's grasp, or so rigid as to become simplistic to the point of uselessness. These first four papers remind us of this challenge and rather than attempting to capture smoke, the graceful arcs they trace through space allow us to get a better sense of the edges or boundaries of the discussion itself. We are, in some ways, being shown the area of discussion. Through the papers we also see the paradoxical coupling of focus and expansion. We are asked to lean in and consider the imagination as a faculty or virtue or the triangulated space found at the conjunction of perception, awareness, and context. At the same time, we are reminded, by Kobayashi in particular to lean back and consider the imagination as the potential lynchpin of our human existence, operating in every moment while also potentially orchestrating the boundary areas of our lives. The imagination, in this view, becomes involved in everything that radiates out from the ever-shrinking points of light known as "is" and "now".

The collection begins with an intriguing philosophical contribution by Chris Higgins from the University of Illinois. His project is to take a first step towards what he suggests is a "radical revision" of the concept of the imagination. In order to do this he first offers an historical overview which situates the imagination, if not in opposition to, as at least pertaining to a different realm than that occupied by what is conceived of as reality. With this in mind the second project of the essay is to suggest a more realist conception of the imagination through considering the imagination, more precisely the family of terms gathered under the umbrella term of imaginative, as an acquired virtue read: involving education. The result, a theory of imagination broad enough to avoid the supposed realism/idealism duality but concrete enough to offer a means to consider both its employment and its improvement for educators.

The work of Gadi Alexander from Ben-Gurion University follows nicely, and begins by reminding us that children actively use their imaginations and often rich, potently "real" worlds are being created in seeming independence of the schools in which they spend much of their time. Alexander's central question is, can we learn about the imagination itself and its potential to support curriculum through actually listening to those who are engaged in the imagining? This research ends with the use of several illustrative examples offering concrete ways educators have, and might, connect content to the imaginings of the imaginers themselves. By making the child's imaginings important to the educational process Alexander opens in an intriguing and relatively unexplored line of inquiry that several other authors in the second section will examine as well.

Adding complexity and contrast to these discussions are the final two papers of this section. Simon Fraser University's Shu-Hwa Wu shares some of her more cognitive and psychological work, modeling the role of the imagination as process, amongst other fundamental processes such as awareness, perception, and intention. Bearing in mind the dynamism of these processes and the ever-changing contexts within which they occur, Wu comes to the conclusion that the imagination is a necessary component of rich learning. Meanwhile, University of Hawaii's Victor Kobayashi traces an arc for us from a very different boundary land. Invoking William Blake while acknowledging the struggle to grasp reality, this work proposes three levels of imagination that act to assist us in both drawing closer to and getting distance from our own experience of that reality. In this way students have an opportunity to expand beyond the somewhat limiting boundaries of the "observable" and transcend themselves across the curriculum. Both these papers contribute to the larger conversation, Shu through thoughtful engagement with Vygotsky such that we have a better sense of the complexity of it all and Kobayashi through drawing the imagination beyond Arts into play and the very soil of learning itself.

Part II: From Theory to Practice, Generally.

One of the joys, and frustrations of the life and work of an educational philosopher is dealing with this apparent, if ill-defined, borderland area between theory and practice. This is an area that is, for me, less definite than seems to be widely accepted. However, the fair and genuine challenge to our theoretical work may be caged in the never-ending question, "that theory stuff is all well and good but can it/does it work 'in the real world' and, show us where". The intent of this question, setting aside the implication that theorists are all ivory-towerish eggheads who aren't practitioners themselves, is a good one. It is asking, nay demanding, that the theorist, the applied theorist for that matter, make good on their claims by dealing with the living, breathing complexity that is education. This leaves us with the responsibility to take our claims into education in general and, often, on into education in the particular. As such, the impetus is upon us, beyond the obvious educational implications section of our erudition, to work with and support actual practitioners in genuine educational settings and, potentially most importantly, to live those theories in our own practices such as they are. This section is a step in that direction.

This section is also intriguing from an educational researcher's perspective. The four papers that make up this section use very different

methods to try and get at the particulars of their questions. The range is intriguing as is the, dare I say, imagination employed in the design and application. All four of these papers also make a conscious decision to take the child seriously. Herein, the child becomes the possessor of a culture and language, the creator of worlds, a co-researcher, and a critical reflector. For these researchers the child is not just as an adjunct to the adult project of educating but is a member of a viable and different group known as children that must be understood and honoured if education is going to have success. There are interesting ramifications for research and teaching if the moves offered, to varying degrees, in all of these papers is taken seriously. Considering this in light of the imagination itself, allows these papers to open discussions which may prove deeply valuable.

Finnish research Pentti Hakkarainen begins this section with a close exploration into children's play worlds. By thoughtfully inserting educators as disruptive characters in the children's imaginative play we see a process of evaluation, reassessment, and response happening that allows researchers to better understand how children are making sense of and defining their worlds. A Russian trained psychologist from the Vygotskian tradition, Hakkarainen brings us up close to the children with his, and Vygotsky's, method known as genetic experimentation. This process of close observation coupled with sophisticated use of video allows the researcher to monitor each detail of a particular child's response to these educational disruptions and produce a richer picture of psychological development and the imagination in action. Not only intriguing as a research project, this work extends the imagination and educational conversation by having us think hard about children's play and how we, as educators, might engage with it.

The second paper in this section focuses on the work of four innovative Brazilian researchers. Starting from a fairly radical position of assuming children have a culture and language that is unique, although situated within a larger cultural context, they propose gathering artifacts, the products of the children's imaginations, that are representative of that culture in order to help teachers and researchers better understand what it is to be a child. Thus, the growing project becomes the creation of a children's museum, not for children, but about children. This, when done in conjunction with research into how this premise of a separate culture supported by a museum, changes the work of the educator, or more specifically the educator cum anthropologist. The ramifications of this work are really exciting as adult educators begin to think across cultural lines to better align curriculum and pedagogy to the culture of their students.

British researchers Anna Craft and Kerry Chapell follow the Brazilian lead in that their research starts from a non-traditional premise with regard to children. In this research the qualitative methodology focuses on a group of dance students who themselves are engaged as researchers in their own right. The result is two distinct conversations, that of the children and that of the teachers, coming together to inform the larger question. This richly textured ethnographic work offers the reader potential methodologies and interesting practices with regard to engaging the imagination and learning dance. The result is an intriguing new inquiry-based imaginative pedagogy.

The last paper in this section has components of the other three and yet travels its own distinct path. Scottish artist and researcher Maureen Kelly Michael begins by offering an overview of project KNOWHOW, a research project overseen by Michael which tries to understand and represent the practice of the art-teacher. The hope is that through this work other teachers will come to better understand their own practice and see windows of possibility for the expansion, revitalization, and re-imagination of that practice. By centralizing artistic artifacts, this research uses an arts-based narrative inquiry method in order to examine and facilitate the critical reflection of teachers on their own imaginative educational practices.

Part III: From Theory to Practice, Key Challenges.

When one first begins to consider the question of the imagination and education what often appears are images of the Arts. Painters, actors, and dancers creating and teachers supporting, challenging and bringing imaginings to fruition. That is all well and good but what role, if any, does the imagination have in subjects such as math and science. This divide, between the Arts and Sciences, reflects one that has long existed in the Western philosophical tradition. Imagination has been equated with fantasy and posited in opposition to reason while simultaneously being understood to be the action, at times dangerous, of an idle mind, one seen to be wasting time. Where then does this idle fantasy find purchase in the hard rational work of the empirical sciences? By extension, a question might also be asked about whether the imagination is in fact exactly that, a construction of Western tradition. How, and in what form, might educators consider the imagination and the very act of teaching across cultures? What happens to these discussions when we encounter other epistemologies, other worldviews? In some ways the diversity of the authors in this book offers hope that the imagination might permeate

across cultural barriers. But even if it does, there are very practical questions to be asked with regard to the hows of what might be considered an inclusive and imaginative education practice.

The first research presented in this section is done by Danish/Australian researcher Thomas Neilsen and comes out of six months of work he did in Canada. Neilsen chose to spend his sabbatical working with, teaching and learning from, interviewing and listening to, and researching a project focused on imaginative inclusive education. The project builds out of work by Kieran Egan and the Imaginative Education Research Group and tries to integrate that theory with the cultures and educational needs of two First Nations communities in northern Canada. In the first large scale comprehensive piece of research coming out of this project, Neilsen offers some key insights into the successes and challenges of doing this kind of substantive, change inducing, educational work. Key amongst his findings is the need for time in order to: build relationships, share knowledge, understand protocols, support and move educators, and transform educational practice. This work is an important addition to the conversation of imagination and education across cultures and as a transformative process.

The second research presented in this section follows from Neilsen but comes from a very different perspective. That of being inside the culture that is having education brought to it. Artist, educator, researcher, and Kanaka Maoli descendent Herman Pi'ikea Clark focuses on a visual based research method that is drawn from his own culture. Situated in a larger discussion of what research looks like if it is to avoid colonialist impositions, Clark suggests that research itself should come from the culture being discussed. He then proceeds to model this through his work while asking questions of educators with regard to how we think about and imagine education, how we understand and value knowledge between cultures, and how we express and assess that knowledge in a multiplicity of contexts. One of the implicit results of this conversation is the important role the imagination must play in order to do justice to this work.

The final three papers in this collection move to the other challenge mentioned above. How, and with what kind of success, does the imagination appear in the context of science and math education? Argentinian researchers and science educators Patricia Monzon and Maria Vinuela begin by suggesting an explicit bridge between the Arts and science. By using artistic production in the context of senior physics classes they have found that students are better able to understand the subject itself. The artistic work appears to help students in the their

epistemic flexibility, their knowledge mobilization, and their own self-regulation. Through close discussion of examples, this research shows that this combination of factors has direct influence on the expansion of scientific understanding. This important connection between the Arts and Science offers interesting possibilities to researchers and educators alike.

Canadian mathematics professor and educator Leo Jonker engages with the lived complexity of education. His work is grounded in his experiences teaching math in Canadian public schools and leads him to problematize two key constructivist positions: concrete/familiar before abstract, and experience/discovery before competencies. Building on examples where memory and competency appear necessary prior to discovery and on the work of key theorists, Jonker sketches in the challenges. Thankfully he then responds with a more complex model suggesting how better understanding the role of imagination, conceptual understanding, and the memory might change mathematics education. This search for a model that better aligns with his experience as an educator results in an important contribution to the field and, if extended, has interesting repercussions for education as a whole.

Last but certainly not least, math educators and researchers Pamela Hagen and Irene Percival offer both a new research framework and a response to what appears to be a growing struggle in mathematics education, how to engage the students' interest. By having teachers focus on students' affective responses while also using lessons based on Egan's Imaginative frameworks, this pair suggest that engagement can increase. For researchers the Participatory-Affective Engagement (PAE) framework employed here may prove a boon to the ongoing challenge of studying engagement. For educators this is an innovative conversation that takes on the challenge of "making math engaging".

Before ending this introduction it is important to acknowledge that this is not a project that happened in isolation and there were important contributions made in order for it to come to fruition. First to all the authors, thank-you for your work, your thought and care, the contributions you are making to children, and for responding to my sundry emails in a timely fashion. Without you this would have been a short book indeed. Thank-you also to Dr. Catherine Broom who worked with many of the authors in the lead up to the particular conferences in which much of this work first appeared. And to Dr. Kieran Egan and Dr. Mark Fettes, co-directors of the Centre for Imaginative Education, for your support, your wisdom, and for the opportunity to play in the fields of the imagination. A big thank-you to Teresa Martin, without whom the conferences would never have happened in the first place, and to Cambridge Scholar's

Publishing and Amanda Millar, the support was key. Lastly, to Dr. Paddy Blenkinsop, a wise eye and sharp mind.

In the end, I hope you find this book as interesting, stimulating, challenging, and inspiring in this process of reading as I have and that it does indeed help to expand the imagination.

Sean Blenkinsop, 2009

PART I

Chapter One

Modest Beginnings of a Radical Revision of the Concept of Imagination

Chris Higgins, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Abstract

In this essay, I make a case for, and begin to lay out, a realist conception of imagination. In the first section, I show that the legacy of contrasting imagination and reality persists, even if it now takes more subtle forms. In the second section, I outline the contours of an alternative model of imagination as a set of related dispositions which enable us to make greater contact with the world in its complexity.

Why we still don't have the theory of imagination we need

According to a popular bumper sticker, "reality is for people who lack imagination." In this paper, I want to argue that this conception of imagination, as that which enables us to embellish or depart from reality, is pretty much exactly wrong. When properly understood, imagination can be seen as a kind of epistemic virtue. If you are a realist, then precisely for this reason you should care about the imagination; if you care about the imagination, you are a realist. If you take yourself to care about one of these things but not the other, then you are confused. Or so I shall argue.

The alert reader will already have his or her first objection ready: surely there are nobler tasks for philosophy than debunking bumper stickers! In point of fact, I will reply, bumper stickers are almost where the rubber meets the road for philosophy; we would do well to see what beliefs people actually hold clearly enough to affix and dearly enough to display. William James was right to note that everybody has a philosophy under his hat; people were simply more discreet back then. Bumper

stickers, T-shirts, and the like often give us a direct look at important
assumptions in a raw form, the same assumptions that appear, in disguise
or gussied up, in sophisticated theories.

In any case, this particular bumper sticker has a distinguished and
explicit philosophical provenance. Plato famously described imagination
(and the artists who fed it) as a threat to the *Republic*. As imaginative
beings, Plato thought, we were especially gullible, prone to believe
whatever stories we were exposed to, regardless of their truth. And for
Plato, even true stories and images are suspect since they make us feel that
we have grasped the truth when we have but apprehended only the outline
of its shadow.[1] Or consider David Hume, who thought all of us amateur
liars for our everyday use of imagination and poets "liars by profession."[2]
As recently as Jean-Paul Sartre, we find the imagination defined as a form
of "magical thinking," as a "function of consciousness [that creates] a
world of unrealities."[3] Throughout the history of philosophy, imagination
has been understood primarily as the capacity to picture that which is
unreal or absent, as a power of inventiveness, and often in combination as
a fictive capacity.[4]

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[1] See Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis:
Hackett, 1992), 63. The critique of poetry begins at 376e-398b; the poets are
finally banished at 595a-608b. Imagination (*eikasia*) is introduced at 509d-511e in
the famous figure of the "divided line," as the lowest of four modes of grasping
reality, one that apprehends the merely visible world through mere likenesses. It is
certainly possible to complicate this standard reading of the *Republic* by attending
to Plato's own use of images, from the very project of building "a city in speech" to
the fact that the lowly place of imagining is conveyed by the image of the divided
line. Indeed, immediately after the divided line is introduced, Socrates'
interlocutors are invited to "imagine" (514a) the allegory of the cave. For an
interesting reading of Plato's anti-mythic myths, see Jonathan Lear, "Allegory and
Myth in Plato's *Republic*," in *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, ed.
Gerasimos Santas (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).
[2] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (B1.3.10).
[3] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. anon. (Secaucus, NJ:
Citadel Press, n.d.), 177 & passim, title facing page.
[4] It is customary to note that ancient versions of the imagination tend to be more
passive, modern ones more active. For my purposes here it makes no difference
whether we are talking about a passive mirroring function which reproduces
appearances in the soul or an active faculty which embellishes reality or invents its
own forms. In either case, the products of imagination by definition stand at some
significant remove from the real.

Now any reflective reader of fiction will tell you that this is an unfortunate name for a major branch of literary art, since just about the least interesting thing we could say about the epistemological status of novels is that they are not factually accurate.[5] But the problem remains. The products of the imagination are thought to be, in a word, imaginary. When we speak of realism in novels, we typically mean a convincing form of illusionism, a particular rhetoric for mimicking the real. Despite my respect for bumper stickers, especially those backed up by 2400 years of intellectual history, I propose that a better word for this is fantasy. What we admire in the imaginative is not the ability to lead us away from this world towards an as-if world, but the ability to increase our contact with this world in its complexity. C.S. Lewis is hardly more imaginative than Richard Ford just because he takes us all the way to Narnia and Ford takes us only as far as exit 8A on the NJ Turnpike. Indeed as anyone who has read both authors will attest, *The Sportswriter* ultimately takes us much further than *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.[6]

There are two main exceptions to this rule, but in my view, one protests too little and one too much. The overly modest response is to upgrade the imagination from a fictive to a hypothesizing capacity. For Alan White, and following him Kieran Egan, the imagination becomes thinking of something as "possibly being so."[7] This upgrades imagination to a mode of thinking rather than a type of non-thinking, and it allows for imagination to play a role in types of thinking aiming at the truth. White and Egan, in this respect at least, are building on the work of Gilbert Ryle who had earlier chided us for our bad habit of equating imagination and make-believe, of contrasting thought and imagination.[8] Ryle offers the example of an historian who must both "be fertile in hypotheses and

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[5] Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. rev. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd Rev., Continuum Impacts ed. (NY: Continuum, 2004), 73.

[6] Cf. Robin Barrow, "Some Observations on the Concept of Imagination," in *Imagination and Education*, ed. Kieran Egan & Dan Nadaner (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 82-85.

[7] Alan White, *The Language of Imagination* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 184. Cf. Kieran Egan, "A Very Short History of Imagination," unpublished ms., (Vancouver, British Columbia: Imaginative Education Research Group, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, *http://ierg.net/about/imagi.html*), Accessed: Sept. 2007, 13ff.

[8] See, e.g., Gilbert Ryle, "Thought and Imagination," in *On Thinking* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979).

careful about his evidence."[9] Both of these are forms of thinking, Ryle
argues, and both are crucial for arriving at historical insight. But human
beings often give themselves cognitive "half-holidays." When it is the
imaginative component that is abandoned, the result is dreary,
unenlightening history. When it is the evidence-weighing and hypothesis-
testing component that is left behind, thought goes on the half-holiday
Ryle calls "pure make-believe." He calls it *pure* make-believe, because he
sees imagination, like White and Egan, as a kind of make-believe that can
partner with serious truth-seeking inquiry. Imagining, he writes, is "the
innovating, inventing, exploring, adventuring, risk-taking—if you like,
creative—vanguard or scout patrol of thinking."[10] This first exception,
then, carves out a place for the imagination as an aid to inquiry while still
not quite establishing imagination as a form of knowing in its own right.
As White puts it, "our imagination is equally neutral as to whether we
have either any knowledge of, or any belief in, what we imagine to be
so."[11] It is not enough to protest against the equation of imagination and
fantasy; we need to develop the connection between realism and
imagination in a robust way.

If Ryle and White protest too little, Coleridge and company protest too
much. This view, running from German speculative idealism into British
romanticism, combines two features of Kantian thought into a synthesis
Kant never dreamed of: the conception of the productive imagination
(*Einbildungskraft*) which appeared in the first edition of his first Critique
and the concept of genius on offer in the third Critique. Indeed, as Richard
Kearney and others have noted, Kant seemed to sense what he had
unleashed, weakening his account of the primacy of the imagination in the
second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[12] And as Hans-Georg
Gadamer has pointed out, later readers of Kant were greatly taken with his
concept of genius but much less so with the humble role he accorded it in
the *Critique of Judgment*.[13] Regardless of the accuracy of its Kantian
provenance, the result, as Kearney puts it, was an "absolute conflation of
reason and imagination."[14] Specifically, the idea was that imagination was:

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[9] Ibid., 51.
[10] Ibid.
[11] White, *The Language of Imagination*, 188.
[12] Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture*
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 157 & passim.
[13] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 47-52.
[14] Kearney, *Wake of Imagination*, 177.

> ...the primary and indispensable precondition of all knowledge. Nothing could be known about the world unless it was first pre-formed and transformed by the synthetic power of imagination.[15]

The price for this epistemological reassessment of imagination is twofold. First, it is not clear how much is gained if imagination becomes a condition of the real, since this may and has been taken to mean that the real is not that real after all. If the only world is a created world, than as much as creating it may be special, knowing it seems rather unimpressive. Rather than concluding that the imagination is a form of knowing, we may instead conclude with Schelling that "the objective world is simply the original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit."[16] (Or put another way, one repercussion of the Kantian revolution was a fresh wave of epistemological skepticism). And really, how special is this act of creation? That is, the second price we seem to pay for the romantic inflation of the imagination is that it becomes a universal and transcendental operation in the human mind. The idealist productive imagination is invisible, ubiquitous. Each of us performs the synthesis of apperception that allows a unity of perception, but it is our transcendental ego that does the job. In reference to this imagination, it makes little sense to talk of those who are less and who are more imaginative, or of cultivating the imagination.

Coleridge tries to solve this problem by distinguishing this transcendental imagination, which he calls "the primary imagination," from a "secondary imagination," which is an "echo of the former, coexisting with our conscious will."[17] Coleridge's secondary imagination, epitomized in the sensibility of the poet, is a "synthetic and magical power" to reconcile "discordant properties."[18] It "dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates," even as it "strives to idealize and unify," all in the effort "to recreate"; it is the human power to find the vitality in things, which "as objects... are essentially fixed and dead."[19] This conception solves the problems adduced above: it allows us to speak of imaginative acts rather

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[15] Ibid., 157.

[16] Friedrich Joseph Schelling, "System of Transcendental Philosophy," trans. Peter Heath, in *System of Transcendental Idealism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), §3d. Cited in Kearney, *Wake of Imagination*, 179.

[17] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Portable Coleridge," ed. I.A. Richards (New York: Viking, 1950), 516.

[18] Ibid., 524.

[19] Ibid., 516.

than a ubiquitous faculty operating behind our backs; it enables us to make sense of the fact that some people are more imaginative than others (or that one person is more imaginative in one sphere or moment in her life than in another); and, it retains the possibility that the imagination is educable. Despite these advantages, this conception ultimately offers us another "magical power" of invention rather than a cognitive one enabling us to have truer and fuller contact with the real.[20]

Let me sum up this part of what I have to say by comparing my view to Kieran Egan's balanced and helpful review of theories of the imagination. Like Egan, I am troubled by the tendency to see reason and imagination as "more or less discrete, and mutually anti-pathetic, categories," a tendency which, Egan rightly notes, "remains influential still."[21] In countering this tendency, our bumper sticker might be Wordsworth's "imagination is reason in her most exalted mood." Imagination, I will argue, is not only compatible with truth-seeking and reality tracking, but is a name for one kind of excellence in these pursuits. It is for this reason that I also share Egan's sense that it is a mistake to construe the imagination as something "implicated in all perception and in the construction of all meaning."[22] On this view, calling someone's thought imaginative becomes superfluous.

By attending to what we might call the grammar of imagination, I can bring out one further similarity with Egan's view and show where we begin to diverge. Like Egan and others, I embrace the Wittgensteinian insight that human beings have a bad habit of believing that every noun we use corresponds to a thing in the world, a habit that, when it encounters the names of personal qualities, leads to the doubly bad habit of inventing mental faculties. Ryle captures this insight with his usual pith when he writes:

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[20] Coleridge does distinguish imagination from both fantasy and fancy. By fantasy, though, he means an image in the mind that simply mirrors an object in the world. [See Kearney, *Wake of Imagination*, 182.] By fancy, he means any mere rearranging of "fixities and definites" as opposed to a genuine synthesis that dissolves and recreates in a vital fashion. [See Coleridge, "The Portable Coleridge," 516.] Nonetheless this still leaves the secondary imagination closer to world creation than to tracking the reality of the world.

[21] Ibid., 20.

[22] Ibid., 21.

> It is quite proper to say that *Pickwick Papers* is a work of imagination. But to say this is not to say that it is a work issued by a sub-department of Charles Dickens.[23]

Here, however, is where I begin differ even from those, like Egan, who wish to de-reify the imagination. The typical strategy for curing us of the tendency to treat imagination as a substantive noun has been to emphasize the verb, "to imagine." Instead, I want to suggest that imagination is best understood as a sort of virtue term. When we say that a person or work has wisdom, courage, or imagination, we mean that he, she, or it is wise, courageous, or imaginative. In other words, imagination is essentially a predicate, a predicate which comes in both adjectival and nominal forms (e.g., Annabel is imaginative; Zoe shows imagination). Returning to Wittgenstein and Ryle, we can say that it is only because we tend to give pride of place to the nominal form of this predicate, and to reify it, that we get caught up in the hoary debates over what sort of psychological apparatus the imagination is: Is it closer to reason, perception, or emotion? Is it a faculty, sub-faculty, or coordinating faculty? And so on.

I do not want to overstate this difference between building one's account of imagination around the verb, "to imagine," and around the adjective, "imaginative." If imagination is a virtue than it is a quality of persons, which shows itself in their works and actions. When we say that someone is courageous, for example, we mean that they have a disposition to act courageously. If one never displayed courage, we would have reason to doubt their courage. The difference between verb-based and predicate-based accounts, then, is largely one of emphasis.

Nonetheless, it does make a difference whether we start with the idea of a quality that we find in a person's being and doing or start from the assumption that imagination is a special kind of doing. The latter assumption leads to significant problems in the analysis of imagination. When we start by equating imagination with the act of imagining, we typically end up with the idea that imagining means literally picturing something in the mind's eye. This then leads to a further problem, since imagining must be distinguished from dreaming and hallucinating. This is what seems to drive Egan and others to conclude that imagination must be "an intentional act of mind," a solution that entails problems of its own.[24] Imaginative acts willed as such would seem to be the exception. When we

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[23] Ryle, "Thought and Imagination," 62.
[24] Egan, "Short History," 21. Emphasis mine.

display imaginativeness, it is rarely because we are trying to be imaginative; more likely, we are trying to write an essay, play a sonata, make a joke, create a syllabus, and so on. There may be a moment where I consciously try to imagine a framing device for an essay or a new activity for my class, but it seems wrong to limit imagination to these moments. Finally, it is not even clear how much the verb approach does free us from faculty psychology. Because actions must come from somewhere, we find ourselves tempted to back-order a "capacity," which turns out to be a faculty in disguise. In my view, then, imagination is best understood neither as a noun or as a verb, but as a predicate, a quality predicated of persons along with their actions and works.

My difference with Egan, however, extends beyond the fact that he construes imagination as an activity to the way he understands that activity. As I mentioned earlier, Egan follows White in saying that "to imagine something is to *think of* it as possibly being so."[25] My account departs from both parts of this definition. First, I will argue that imagination shows up in all of the major modes of human interaction with the world. The quality I am interested in is certainly found in thinking, but not only there. Second, as I have already suggested, I believe it is a mistake to center the imagination around notions of the possible, the hypothetical, or as Brian Sutton-Smith puts it, "the subjunctive mood of mind."[26] At one point, Egan notes a capaciousness in White's definition, claiming that it

> captures both the sense in which we can conceive of the world as other than it is, with flying horses and ourselves ruling it and the sense in which the historian or physicist or any of us strives to conceive of the world exactly as it is.[27]

In my view, we must at long last corral these flying horses if we are truly to do justice to this second, neglected aspect of imagination.

It is not that I disagree with Egan when he states that imagination "is the *source* of invention, novelty, and generativity," but I do worry that this might be taken to mean that imagination itself is equivalent to fabrication

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[25] White, *The Language of Imagination*, 184. Emphasis in original.
[26] Brian Sutton-Smith, "In Search of the Imagination," in *Imagination and Education*, ed. Kieran Egan & Dan Nadaner (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 19.
[27] Egan, "Short History," 17.

and fictionalization.[28] Imagination may well lead to inventions, but imagination itself is not about adding to the world, but about connecting with it. As Dewey says, a person of full or imaginative perception is capable of "seeing what is there."[29] Rather than speak of novelty, then, we would do better to think of imagination as kind of freshness of vision. Indeed, this is how Egan himself glosses the second half of White's definition, noting that it

> encompasses Coleridge's sense of imagination as thinking that is unsubdued by habit, unshackled by custom, and as that which enables us to transcend those obstacles to seeing the world as it is that are placed before us by conventional, inadequate interpretations and representations.[30]

Here Egan seems to be referring to the passage from the *Biographia Literaria* where Coleridge describes Wordsworth as the truly imaginative poet, as the one capable of "awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world."[31] This idea will be important to the model of imagination I propose, a model that does not merely object to the opposition between reality and imagination but is built from the ground up around the insight that the real and the imaginative go hand in hand. It is to this task I now turn.

Imagination and complex realism: Outline of a theory

In the course of my review of the literature, I have already indicated some of the features of my theory of imagination. I would now like to lay out my account more fully and systematically, in a series of relatively succinct, numbered theses. My intention is neither to feign mathematical precision nor to affect epigrammatic profundity. It is simply to sketch the broad contours of an alternate model of the imagination quickly and clearly. A discussion follows each thesis.

Thesis #1: Imagination is a virtue.

1.1   The defining form of this family of terms is "imaginative." Imagination is simply the nominal form of this predicative.

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[28]Ibid., 17, 21.
[29]John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (NY: Perigree/Putnam, 1980), 52.
[30]Egan, "Short History," 17.
[31]Coleridge, "The Portable Coleridge," 518.

1.2   Imagination is a normative predicate, a term of praise.

1.3   What we are praising is a capacity of persons as embodied in their words and deeds and works.

1.4   Virtue terms are those that help us answer the questions what is human flourishing, what are the qualities of an admirable person, and what is excellent to become? "States that are praiseworthy," Aristotle writes, "are the ones we call virtues."[32]

1.5   There is no definitive list of the virtues. Virtue terms are controversial by nature, since visions of human flourishing are thick, various, and rooted in contingent ways of life (as opposed to thin and easily generalizable).[33] Still, in many such schemes imaginative excellence has held a place of honor.

Discussion

Before moving on to the second thesis, in which I say more about what kind of virtue I take imagination to be, I want to pause to consider some of the advantages of a virtue framework for imagination theory. By viewing imagination as a virtue term, we can make good on two intuitions which cause trouble for faculty (and quasi-faculty) theories: namely that imagination is variable and that it is mutable.

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[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985). One question I will not have time to pursue here is whether, according to Aristotle's famous distinction, imagination should be considered a moral or intellectual virtue. My basic position is that imagination like *phronesis* tends to complicate this distinction rather than to fit in either category.

[33] For a history of changing conceptions of the virtues along with a defense of the inextricability of the virtues from the plural and parochial practices in which they are discovered and nurtured, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, second ed. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), chaps. 10-14. MacIntyre's account of the virtues is also helpful for showing how the virtues are simultaneously deeply shared and individualizing possessions. The virtue of imaginativess as I am understanding it is learned in communal practices, such as disciplines. I am grateful to Mark Fettes for pointing out the need to show more clearly why my approach does not lapse into the individualism that has marked much of the discourse on imagination, for example in the concept of a creative genius. As he rightly notes, any *complex* realism must factor in the way social and cultural forces shape our commerce with the world.

That imagination is variable I take to be an observable fact: some people are more imaginative than others, and individuals may be more imaginative in some regards than in others. This fact accords well with my contention that imagination is a term of praise. Theories that excessively broaden imagination, for example making it synonymous with mind itself, have difficulty accounting for such variability or the idea that imagination is praiseworthy. In such theories it makes as little sense to praise someone for being highly imaginative as it would to praise someone for perceiving objects in spatial and temporal terms.

Theories that view imagination as something more like a sense could maintain that some people happen to have keener imaginations, just as some have a keener sense of smell or sight. These theories, however, have trouble accounting for the idea that imagination is mutable, that it can be educated and miseducated. Certainly, eyesight may deteriorate over time, but this does not capture the force of the powerful romantic idea that many people lose the imaginativeness they possessed as children.[34] Meanwhile, the idea that imagination is *formed* over time by our interactions with teachers and the works of culture will seem completely alien in theories where imagination is understood as cognitive equipment.

In contrast, virtue theory holds that virtues are *acquired* excellences of character. The virtues are not in-born, but cultivated over time, through practice and contact with those who embody and display the virtues. Virtue theory is also compatible with the notion of miseducation. One may well become less virtuous over time. It is worth noting, however, that a virtue approach to imagination is only compatible with a soft form of romanticism. In its strongest form, romanticism holds that imagination is paired with innocence and impaired by our entry into the life of language and culture. If a quality is at its fullest in early youth and only declines over time, that quality is not a virtue. However, a virtue approach is compatible with the notion that specific cultures over specific periods tend to cultivate the vices of unimaginativeness more than the excellences of imagination.

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[34] See, for example, William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," in *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, ed. Jack Stillinger, Riverside Editions (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965). Cf. Maxine Greene, "The Shapes of Childhood Recalled," in *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on the Arts, Imagination, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

Thesis #2: Imagination is acquired skill in contacting the real world in its complexity.

2.1   Here I am understanding the real not as that which is left over when human conceptions and perceptions are removed, not as a world of brute facts or primary qualities. Neither am I arguing for an idealistic conception in which the world is simply the product of our projections. Rather, I am arguing for a complex realism. The world is accessible to us, but it also admits of an infinity of aspects.

2.2   In other words, it is a mistake to assume that interpretations necessarily distort. Bad interpretations can distort, and there are certainly enough bad interpretations to keep us busy. But what distorts is not their interpretativeness, but their sloppiness, vagueness, narrowness, solipsism, tourism, proneness to wish fulfillment, and so on. The point is that good interpretations reveal. Do they reveal the world itself? No. They reveal to some degree an aspect of the world.

2.3   Human beings are capable of rich and thoroughgoing contact with the world, but we are also prone to narrow and falsify our commerce with complexity. We equate the world with our familiar interpretations of its familiar aspects, or retreat to as-if worlds.

2.4   We call a person, or their works or actions, imaginative when they manage to free themselves, and often us along with them, from such banality and fantasy. We experience imagination as a good, the good of a return to ourselves, as the relief of letting go of a lie, as an enlargement of prospect.

2.5   Each cramp in human sensibility calls for its own uniquely fashioned crowbar, and thus not much can be said in general about how imagination works. There is no imaginative method or recipe. Casuistry is required in the study of imagination.

2.6   We can however take one further step before turning to cases. This is to note that human beings relate self and world through a variety of modes, central among them thinking, feeling, and perceiving. By saying this, I do not mean to suggest that these are the only modes of connecting to the world, nor to suggest that they are entirely separable from one other. Blindness in one mode

usually has an analogue in one or more other modes. Insights in one mode will often reverberate in another.

2.7   The original thesis, then, can be refined as follows: Imagination is acquired skill in one or more of the major modes of relating self and world; to be imaginative is to be skilled at making greater intellectual, emotional and/or perceptual contact with the real.

Discussion

At this point, let me consider two questions likely raised by my linking of imagination and realism. The first asks how this relates to the more traditional association of imagination with idealism. Imagination, it has often been thought, is less about exploring the actual than it is about conceiving of the possible. Writers who speak about the social imagination, for instance, typically have something like this in mind. Human hope and social change are both predicated on the ability to stare down the facts and maintain: and yet, I can imagine this otherwise.

My response to this is to refuse the very dichotomy between realism and idealism. When properly understood, realism and idealism should be seen as allies, both of which require imagination. I think the true contrast here is between fantasy and banality, as two rival strategies for escaping the real. By fantasy, I mean the setting up of an as-if world. By banality, I mean the gleeful equation of the real with our familiar labels for the familiar aspects of the world. Confusion enters because fantasy likes to distance itself from the real in the name of idealism, and banality likes to grab the mantle of realism when it rejects talk of ideals. But we must insist that realism is no closer to banality than it is to fantasy. And we must insist that idealism is no closer to fantasy than it is to banality.

It is the hallmark of fantasy, not of idealism, when someone indulges in airy invocations of truth, beauty, and goodness. Such sentimentalism and kitsch are the rhetorical markers of fantasy. The tone of idealism is decidedly different and much crankier. The true idealist loves ideals too much to write fiction about them. She wants as much contact with the actual article as she can get, but this means confronting ideals as they enter the world, namely as attenuated, distorted, obscured, compromised. The person who loves a good seminar discussion, for example, is more likely to be found worrying over the discussion they just had: how it left the text