**ABSTRACT**

The concept of the imagination has become central in twenty-first century cognitive linguistics, especially through the work of Mark Johnson (1993, 2014, 2018), in his discussion of moral imagination and its impact on judgment regarding all aspects of life. Inspired by John Dewey, Johnson extends the concept of the imagination, yet it is still a challenge to identify concrete characteristics that would allow us to understand the difference between imagining and other cognitive activities such as observing, feeling, or thinking. This distinction is crucial if we are to understand how people navigate ethical and aesthetical contexts, which is central to Johnson’s abovementioned studies. Though Lakoff and Johnson relied on Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance in their attempt to understand how metaphors function within the process of meaning construction, they did not make the connection between the concept of the imagination, as it appears in Wittgenstein’s writings, and the way that people construct metaphors. This paper addresses this lacuna by assessing the development of Wittgenstein’s writings on the concept of the imagination, so as to clarify two additional central aspects that he contributes to the debate about the imagination in the twenty-first century: the activity of the imagination as an intermediate link and as an expression of free will.

1. **HOW DOES IMAGINATION WORK?**

The philosophical revolution in metaphor research, initiated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003 [1980]), has led to an investigation of the embodied basis of all cognitive activities. Within this research program, imagination plays a central role, in art and poetry in particular, and in every personal unique expression, in general. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson defined the imagination as "necessary for expressing the unique and most personally significant aspects of our experience. In matters of personal understanding the ordinary agreed-upon meanings that words have will not do." (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 189)

Beyond precisifying the role of the imagination in embodying personal experiences, in his recent studies, Johnson examined the operation of moral imagination in particular, and exposed the various metaphors people utilize when expressing voluntary acts of moral deliberation (Johnson 1993, 2014, 2018). Nonetheless, throughout their research, Lakoff and Johnson emphasize that all human actions, at every level, are in fact manifestations of bodily and neurological processes. As such, all our actions can, in principle, be clarified through interdisciplinary research involving a linguist and a neuroscientist (Johnson and Tucker 2021, 265). At the end of such research, the personal dimension of the imagination is reduced, and unified with, the collective dimension; its conclusion makes the concept of the imagination redundant and offers an ‘objective’ observation:

Objectivity is then achieved through intersubjectivity – the capacity of abstract insight into the mind of another that shows that reality is not fixed by our egocentric perspective. […] The process of mind is then both embodied and cultural, a process of maintaining an identity through knowing, as we continually organize the relations of mind to participate in the events of the world. (Johnson and Tucker 2021, 279)

At this point, two questions arise: First, can the activity of the imagination be encapsulated in the general space of concept formation? Can the differences between distinctly individually constructed products of the imagination be reduced to a general array of human thought? Second, can the distinction between a voluntary action of imagination and an involuntary sensory action be eliminated? In the present discussion, I will present different possible interpretations of Wittgenstein’s concept of the imagination, which illustrate the function of the imagination as a separate mode of understanding reality, and is thereby irreducible.

1. **IMAGINATION FROM THE *TRACTATUS* TO *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS***

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein describes the imagination as the key that links our thought to reality through language.

A proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it. (Wittgenstein 1963, #4.01)

The imagination constitutes a bridge upon which the model is constructed – the individual way in which we picture the world. This is a general description, which reflects a family resemblance among all uses of the concept of the imagination. Another key in the *Tractatus*to understanding Wittgenstein’s development of the concept of the imagination is the parallel he draws between its usage in language and performing a musical composition (Wittgenstein 1963, #4.014-4.0141). This correspondence allows us to comprehend his seemingly poetic claim at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations*:

Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination. (Wittgenstein 2009, #6**)**

Wittgenstein argued that practically every use of language is based on the mental capacity for imagination: the metaphor of “Vorstellungsklavier” links the act of pronunciation and the mental act. Yet another mention of the activity of the imagination in a musical context appears in Wittgenstein’s discussion of remembering a tune. The tune already exists in the imagination and is extracted from it through the processes of remembering (Wittgenstain 2009, #184). In his later investigations into the philosophy of psychology, Wittgenstein also compared verbal language to a musical composition. He argued that music “speaks” and that:

…verbal language contains a strong musical element. (Wittgenstein 1980a, #888)

For our purposes, the connection Wittgenstein draws between imagination and music, on the one hand, and imagination and picturing reality, on the other, allows us to describe a first common denominator to all acts of the imagination: an act of the imagination reflects individual and personal creativity. The musical aspect of the imagination is engaged both in using verbal language and musical language; it embodies the personal mark that is manifest in the individual usage of a certain public language-game. The parallel between uttering a word and a musical performance shows how the act of the imagination occurs simultaneously in the concrete sensory domain as well as the domain of emotion or attitude.

Beyond describing the personal character of the imagination, in the *Philosophical Investigations*,Wittgenstein formulated the capacity to understand a language as conditional on acts of the imagination:

…to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life. (Wittgenstein 2009, #19).

At this point, Wittgenstein moves from specific examples of the operation of the imagination (uttering a word, picturing the world) to a deeper understanding of an entire form of life. Such an understanding involves understanding rules of behavior, agreements, and judgments (Wittgenstein 2009, #241-242). Given the central role that the imagination plays in formulating Wittgenstein’s philosophical aspirations, it is a wonder why so little attention has been directed at Wittgenstein’s concept of the imagination throughout the years (ter Hark 1990, 221).

1. **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IMAGES AND IMAGINATION**

In his later investigations, Wittgenstein compared various states of consciousness (sensation, emotion, imagery) and suggested certain distinctions by which to understand the nature of the elemental unit of the imagination – the image:

Images: Auditory images, visual images – how are they distinguished from sensations? Not by "vivacity". Images tell us nothing, either right or wrong, about the external world. (Images are not hallucinations, nor yet fancies.) **While I am looking at an object I cannot imagine it**. […] **Images are subject to the will**. Images are not pictures. I do not tell what object I am imagining by the resemblance between it and the image. (Wittgenstein 1980b, #63, my emphasis)

Wittgenstein did not distinguish between a visual and an auditory image, a fact that relates to the connections he draws in the *Tractatus* and in the *Philosophical Investigations* between imagination and music, world, and language (all three can be seen and heard). It is interesting to see that vivacity can characterize both an image and a sensation. The difference between an image and a sensation is that one cannot simultaneously think about them both. This seems to be the case because the sensation is involuntary, and the image arises from a person’s will. This is also the difference between an image and hallucinations or fancies:

A principal mark that distinguishes image from sense-impression and from hallucination is that the one who has the image does not behave as an observer in relation to the image, and so that the image is voluntary. (Wittgenstein 1980a, #885)

An image is not a source of knowledge about some object in particular, or about the external world in general. For this reason, though the act of the imagination is an activity, Wittgenstein struggled to characterize it as a tangible activity:

In this way--but in no other--it is related to an activity such as drawing. And yet it isn't easy to call imaging an activity. (Wittgenstein 1980b, #80)

Wittgenstein’s central contribution in his conceptual analysis of the concept of the imagination, beyond clarifying the act of picturing and understanding forms of life, was his attempt to distinguish different usages of the concept “imagination”:

One ought to ask, not what images are or what goes on when one imagines something, but how the word “imagination” is used. But that does not mean that I want to talk only about words. For the question of what imagination essentially is, is as much about the word “imagination” as my question. (Wittgenstein 2009, #370)

According to Mary Warnock, Wittgenstein focuses in this passage in the activity and not in the product of the mental image (Warnock 1976, 158). Warnock emphasizes that for Wittgenstein it is not descriptions of the mental image that will teach us what imagination is but observing our usage of images. Such usage is grammatical and exposes species of thinking. Indeed, Wittgenstein distinguished between seeing, observing, and imagining, and argued that learning the nature of each activity occurs through its description. Yet there is a significant difference between these activities:

The concept of imaging is rather like one of doing than of receiving. Imagining might be called a creative act. (Wittgenstein 1980b, #111)

The act of imagination involves a ‘doing’ component, not merely receiving. According to Wittgenstein, the act of the imagination is an activity that adds an interpretation, an additional perspective, or creates a change in the world, as we shall presently see. Before first, it is important to note Michel ter Hark’s distinction between imagination in artistic as opposed to mundane contexts:

The meaning of the German 'vorstellen' is 'to place something before one's mind'. […] In this sense 'to imagine something' is a certain activity and one which is directed at people or situations in reality. […] In English 'to imagine' can also refer to an activity which is directed at something fictional. This fiction may be quite ordinary, like somebody who imagines himself making the winning goal for his home team; it may also be artistic. Imagination in the artistic sense is usually referred to in German as 'Vorstellungskraft' or 'Einbildungskraft'. Wittgenstein does not use these terms; his analysis is more related to the first kind of imagining directed at reality. (ter Hark 1990, 222)

On Wittgenstein’s behalf, ter Hark introduces two additional concepts: ‘Vorstellung’ and ‘Einbildung’ (‘fancy’). The former is intended to denote, whereas the latter is meant for philosophical discussion regarding the inner contents of consciousness (ter Hark 1990, 222). Following ter Hark we must ask, what does Wittgenstein think that the concept of the imagination adds to how consciousness operates? I would like to merge several insights into a single complex description that will allow us to understand the characteristics of the activity of the imagination.

1. **IMAGINATION AS AN INTERMEDIATE LINK**

When bringing together the different usages of the concepts of the imagination within Wittgenstein’s writings we find that they jointly constitute a rich concept that allows seeing a hidden aspect followed by a hermeneutical consideration. First, it is impossible simultaneously to see and to imagine; that is, the activity of the imagination goes beyond and even contradicts the use of the senses. Second, an image does not add any knowledge about the world; that is, it engages the will, which is independent of worldly facts and is the subjective product of consciousness. The third characteristics complete the picture: an image is voluntary; it cannot be forced upon consciousness. In his book, Hans Julius Schneider (2014) expands on this complexity of the imagination and argues that, according to Wittgenstein, the imagination does not operate on its own, but accompanies activities that seemingly conflict with it, such as calculating (Wittgenstein 2009, #449). Furthermore, Schneider refers to Wittgenstein’s discussion of forms of life, in which Wittgenstein argues that the complexity of the imagination allows people to impress their life event into consciousness:

If one holds it as self-evident that people delight in their imagination, one should bear in mind that this imagination is not like a painted portrait or plastic model, but a complicated pattern made up of heterogeneous elements: words and pictures. One will then no longer place operating with written and phonetic symbols in opposition to operating with ‘mental images’ of events. (Wittgenstein 1993, 131)

Thus, the imagination is able to accompany all types of language use, from phonetic pronunciation, to picturing, and up to event-memory. This complexity sheds light on Beth Savickey’s argument in her study of Wittgenstein’s usage of the concept of the imagination. Savickey begins by arguing that when Wittgenstein asks us to imagine a language-game he directs the reader to grasp the relationship between a language and a form of life (Savickey 2017, 31). However, after reviewing the different places in which Wittgenstein mentions the concept of the imagination, and related research, Savickey concludes that we cannot comprehend a form of life through the imagination (Savickey 2017, 28-29). Furthermore, we cannot understand how the imagination operates by following Wittgenstein’s suggestion to imagine a form of life. She, therefore, reaches a methodological conclusion that Wittgenstein’s direction ought to be understood as a general suggestion about the function of language: language can have different functions (Wittgenstein 2009, #304). The two acts of imagination occur simultaneously, and the imagination allows us to understand that, in actuality, we are “imagining the same thing in two different ways.” Savickey emphasized that a language and a form of life are one and the same, and that language exemplifies the complexity of the activity of the imagination even in the simplest of forms of life.

The capacity of the activity of the imagination to unify two different ways, on the one hand, and to distinguish between different functions of language and forms of life, on the other, clarifies the role of the imagination as an intermediate link. Recall that locating and devising intermediate links is one of Wittgenstein’s central methodological directives (Wittgenstein 2009, #122). The difficulty with this interpretation is that it fails to capture an important aspect of the imagination according to Wittgenstein, which was mentioned but not elaborated upon (Glock 1996, 170). The imagination allows for hermeneutic flexibility in relation to the world, for a change of attitude, or for the recognition of an unforeseen possible action:

The concept of an aspect is related to the concept of imagination. […] Doesn’t it take imagination to hear something as a variation on a particular theme? And yet one does perceive something in so hearing it. “Imagine this changed like this, and you have this other thing.” One can produce a proof in one’s imagination. (Wittgenstein 2009, #254-255)

1. **CONCLUSION**

The above discussion unified the different functions of the imagination that were suggested by Wittgenstein and were presented in the research. In so doing, two central characteristics stood out. The first is the imagination’s capacity to serve as an intermediate link between the activities of the senses, between a sense and emotion, and between a sense and consciousness. The second function is the capacity conferred by the imagination to grasp dynamics and change, which are part of the nature of language and therefore also part of the activity of consciousness. Such dynamics is embodied in the differences among forms of life and in the possibility of grasping such differences be means of the imagination as well as in people’s ability to change their attitude and comprehend its complexity, whereby, through the imagination, consciousness unifies different ways of grasping reality and acting within it.

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