

# *On the Sources of the Kantian Distinction between Voluntary and Involuntary Imagination: Remarks on Platner, Meier and Tetens*

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*The purpose of this article is to highlight some possible sources of Kant's theory of empirical imagination, with particular reference to the distinction between its voluntary and involuntary use. It will be shown that in Kant the discussion of the subject is not limited to the mere repetition or extension of Baumgarten's conception, but is affected by other influences, unified by the importance they attach to the psycho-physiological investigation of mental phenomena. Through the analysis of the reflections and the transcripts of the anthropology lectures, the contribution stresses how, not only Platner, but also Meier's *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* may have offered relevant insights to the first elaboration of the above distinction. Moreover, the Kantian conception of fantasy, as involuntary imagination, is compared with some passages of Tetens' *Philosophische Versuche*, before being described in its peculiar characters.*

Keywords: Kant, Imagination, Free will, Meier, Tetens.

## 1. *Introductory note*

The faculty of imagination certainly represents one of the core problems of 18th-century German philosophy and artistic-literary criticism, as well as one of the most controversial, to the extent that it constitutes an authentic dilemma<sup>1</sup>. The highly ambivalent nature of this concept – confirmed by the difficulty in distinguishing its various forms and functions on the semantic level<sup>2</sup> – fascinates and repels

<sup>1</sup> Götz Müller, *Die Einbildungskraft im Wechsel der Diskurse. Annotationen zu Adam Bernd, Karl Philipp Moritz und Jean Paul*, in Hans-Jürgen Schings (Hg.), *Der ganze Mensch: Anthropologie und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert*, DFG-Symposium (Stuttgart 1992), Metzler, Weimar 1994, pp. 697-723: p. 710; Rudolf Meer, Giuseppe Motta, Gideon Stiening, *Vom „Poison de l'imagination“ zur Essenz des Schematismus: Die Einbildungskraft in der Philosophie, den Wissenschaften und den Künsten des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, in Id., *Konzepte der Einbildungskraft in der Philosophie, den Wissenschaften und den Künsten des 18. Jahrhunderts*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2019, pp. 1-8: p. 2.

\*I would like to thank Professors Heiner Klemme and Claudio La Rocca for their precious suggestions and encouragement throughout this research.

<sup>2</sup> In the main philosophical Lexica of the period the terms *Einbildung*, *Einbildungskraft* and *Phantasie* are still used as synonyms. See, in this regard, Gabriele Dürbeck, *Einbildungskraft und Aufklärung. Perspektiven der Philosophie, Anthropologie und Ästhetik um 1750*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1998, pp. 17-21. For a reconstruction of the conceptual history, see Jochen Schul-