

# Aesthetic Investigations

Published on behalf of the Dutch Association of Aesthetics



---

## Amy Kind's *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*

*Author*

NELE VAN DE MOSSELAER

*Affiliation*

UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP

**Reviewed book:** Kind, Amy (ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, New York: Routledge, 2016, xx + 481 p.

---

### REVIEWED BY NELE VAN DE MOSSELAER

In the last twenty years, philosophers' interest in imagination has sparked. Although no one as of yet has succeeded or even dared to offer a clear-cut definition for imagination in general, there is a growing awareness that the imaginative faculty plays a central role in our daily lives and shapes our thoughts and actions in various ways. *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, edited by Amy Kind, consists of thirty-four chapters written by international experts on the most important aspects of the philosophy of imagination. As such, it is a valuable resource for anyone who is studying the imagination, be it within the field of philosophy, psychology, or aesthetics.

The first chapter, written by Amy Kind herself, thematises the difficulty of defining imagination. Researchers do not agree on what exactly imagination is, and how it works. Kind, however, provides a solid basis for reading a handbook on this elusive theme by summing up characteristics that are generally agreed on and by discerning different kinds of imagination (propositional, sensory, and experiential imagination and creative or recreative imagination).

As such, her chapter sets the tone for the entire handbook, which, while conceding the non-existence of a generally accepted definition of imagination, is able to provide the reader with well thought out insights, problems, and clarifications with regard to pre-specified aspects of imagination.

The subsequent chapters in the handbook are organised into six parts, each of which delves deeper into a specific research theme connected to imagination. The first section deals with historical treatments of imagination. The chapters within this section chronologically deal with the imagination-related ideas of Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Husserl, and Sartre. Starting with Aristotle's concept of *phantasia*, this section not only shows how the concept of imagination has evolved throughout the history of philosophy, but also succeeds in showing how older ideas are still relevant within current debates.

The second section of the handbook treats contemporary discussions of imagination. Besides sketching an increasingly exhaustive idea of what imagination is by examining the differences and similarities between imagination and other mental states, this section also explores the connection between imagination and these other states. The first chapter by Dominic Gregory, for example, studies the often oversimplified relation between imagination and mental imagery. It describes the important role mental images may play in our imaginings, while at the same time assessing the possibility of non-imagistic imaginings. Subsequent chapters in this section respectively explore the relation between imagination and belief, perception, memory, dreams and hallucinations, and desire.

The third section investigates the topic within the context of aesthetics. While the first chapter of this section deals with the relation between art and imagination in general, the subsequent chapters examine the more specific relations between imagination and music, fiction, and emotions induced by works of fiction. Chapters two and three of this section question the necessity of imagination in appreciating art, investigating whether we can even define art or the experience of music without reference to the imagination. In her chapter on imagination and fiction, Kathleen Stock characterises fiction in terms of its prescribing imagination, by nuancing Kendall Walton's theory that something is a fiction when it serves as a prop in a game of make-believe. Lastly, the fourth chapter of this section discusses the paradox of fiction and evaluates forty years of philosophical discussions on the question of how we can be moved by what we know to be fictional.

The fourth section deals with imagination within the philosophy of mind and cognitive science and explores a multitude of subjects including imaginative resistance, creativity, philosophy of action, imagination in child development and the possibility of imagination in animals.

The fifth section treats the research of imagination within ethics, psychology and political philosophy. The chapters in this section examine the role of imagination in moral thinking, empathy, and the so-called 'capabilities approach'. Noteworthy in this section is also Aaron Smuts' entertaining

exploration of the ethics of imagination and fantasy. Through an unexpectedly funny exposition of outrageous, cruel, or even criminal situations that may form the content of imaginings, he reveals the difficulty of judging the morality of imaginative episodes like dreaming, daydreaming, and fantasising.

The sixth and last section deals with imagination in relation to epistemology, philosophy of science, and mathematics. It investigates the importance of imagination in learning, thought experiments, modal epistemology, and scientific and mathematical thinking. Together with the previous chapters, this interdisciplinary section demonstrates the sometimes surprising ubiquity of imagination in both daily life and scientific thought.

All in all, the thirty-four chapters in this handbook provide an insightful overview of both the historical and current developments in the philosophy of imagination. Besides describing and evaluating the most important theories and discussions surrounding its topic, every chapter also contains an excellent and extensive list of useful references for further research. Moreover, although each chapter is perfectly readable as a standalone, the connections between the different chapters can add interesting insights. Authors regularly refer to other parts in the book that may flesh out the point they are making and thereby also show the possibilities of an interdisciplinary approach to imagination research. As such, *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination* is not only an invaluable source for any research dealing with imagination, but it also invites further enquiries within this very vibrant and fruitful field of study.

nele.vandemosselaer@uantwerpen.be

---

---