

The Epistemic Structure of the Imagination

Joshua Myers

Goals of the Dissertation

1. Develop a comprehensive account of how imagination justifies empirical belief.
 - Imaginative justification is (i) mediate, (ii) non-inferential, (iii) informative, and (iv) grounded in a doxastic attitude
2. Motivate the general interest and importance of the epistemology of imagination.

Chapter 1: Can Imagination Justify Belief?

Optimism: The imagination can justify empirical belief.

Argument from Skeptical Consequences:

1. Many broad domains of belief are based on the imagination.
 - *Which domains?* Spatial reasoning, physical reasoning, reasoning about other minds, and reasoning about future experiences...maybe more!
2. If optimism is false and many broad domains of belief are based on the imagination, then many broad domains of belief are systematically unjustified.

3. Many broad domains of belief are not systematically unjustified.
- C. So, optimism is true.

Chapter 2: The Structure of Imaginative Justification

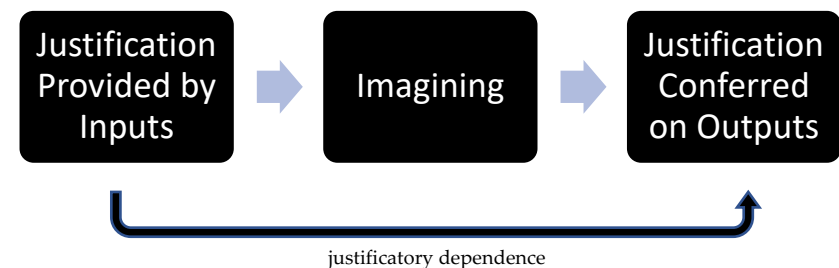
Immediate Justification View: Imaginative justification does not depend on any prior justification.

- *Problem:* Imaginings are only as epistemically good as the evidence by which they are informed.

Inferential Justification View: Imaginative justification depends on a separate, non-imaginative inference from beliefs that are antecedently justified.

- *Problem:* These putative inferences are (i) introspectively dubious, (ii) invalid, and (iii) too cognitively demanding

Mediate Justification View: Imaginative justification depends on one's prior justification without depending on an inference from one's prior beliefs.



Chapter 3: How Imagination Informs

The Format Account: The imagination is informative in virtue of its analog representational format.

1. The imagination is analog.
 - *Analog representation:* Representation by way of a structural correspondence between vehicles and contents.
 2. Analog representations are relationally fecund.
 - *Relationally fecund:* Explicitly represents relational information at no extra cost over and above the nonrelational information it represents.
- C. So, the imagination is relationally fecund.

This yields two senses in which the imagination is informative:

Representational Informativeness: The imagination can represent contents that are not already represented by a subject's prior mental states.



Justificatory Informativeness: The imagination can confer justification that is not already conferred by a subject's prior evidence.

Chapter 4: Imaginative Beliefs

Imaginative beliefs: States that are imaginative in format and doxastic in attitude.

The Functional Argument: There are imaginings that are evidence-sensitive, available for reasoning, and action-guiding.

The Epistemic Argument: There are imaginings that are epistemically based on evidence and therefore manifest an epistemic status as justified or unjustified.

The Voluntary Control Objection: Imaginings are under voluntary control, but beliefs are not.

- *Response:* The vehicles of imagination are under voluntary control, but the doxastic attitudes they are associated with are not.

The Two-State Objection: We merely need to posit distinct imaginative and doxastic states.

- *Response:* No separate, non-imaginative belief required for imaginings to play the functional and epistemic roles of belief.

Conclusion

The imagination is *a distinctive kind of ampliative reasoning*. It plays this cognitive and epistemic role by combining the analog format of imagery with the evidence-sensitive function of belief.