

“How Imagination Gives Rise To Knowledge”

Abstract: Although philosophers have long looked to imagination to play a central role in the justification of our modal beliefs, it has also long been thought that outside of the domain of modal epistemology the imagination has no important epistemic role to play. In the words of Brian O’Shaughnessy, it is “outside the cognitive circuit.” This paper aims to defend the imagination against this charge, which I call the *charge of epistemic irrelevance*. I start with case studies of two individuals – Nikola Tesla and Temple Grandin – both of whom enjoy extraordinary powers of visual imagination. As I argue, their imaginings serve not only to generate new ideas but to justify them. I then go on to apply the morals drawn from these cases studies to more ordinary acts of imagination. While Hume was right to note that nowhere are we more free than in our imagination, it is important to recognize that we can self-impose limits on that freedom and engage in what I call *imagining under constraints*. In such cases, as I argue, the imagination can indeed contribute to the justification of our beliefs about the world.