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BEING OUT OF ORDER: ON CREATIVITY AND ITS VALUE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

I contend that a common form of human creativity operates in domains as diverse as art, science, and everyday life. Creativity is the capacity to introduce novel ways of making sense of experience, which entail new meaningful possibilities. Creativity enacts the becoming of new being. Three primary results characterize my study. First, creative novelty is discontinuous with antecedent orders that would seek to make sense of them. Thus, complete explanations for creative acts necessarily fail. Nonetheless creative novelties must be partially continuous with antecedent conditions in order to achieve meaning and value. These two aspects of creative novelty provide the basis for claiming that creativity puts one “out of order,” and this entails the characteristic, inextricable from creativity, that one creates something from nothing. Second, creative novelty is a modification of one’s own sense-making. This result is the key to grasping the generality of creativity in multiple domains and its importance in understanding the self. Scientific practice and everyday problem-solving often require creative work no less than artistic practice, and creativity affects one’s conscious ordering of experience which can account for much of who one is. Third, creativity does not necessarily imply a positive value. I argue against conceptions that either stipulate the positive value of creativity and its results or argue for the intrinsic value of new being. As a consequence, the evaluation of creativity stands to be much more complex, for both creators and the recipients of their creations, than is implied by contemporary definitions of creativity.
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I contend that a common form of human creativity operates in domains as diverse as art, science, and everyday life. Creativity is the capacity to introduce novel ways of making sense of experience, which entail new meaningful possibilities. Creativity enacts the becoming of new being.

Three primary results characterize my study. First, creative novelty is discontinuous with antecedent orders that would seek to make sense of them. Thus, complete explanations for creative acts necessarily fail. Nonetheless creative novelties must be partially continuous with antecedent conditions in order to achieve meaning and value. These two aspects of creative novelty provide the basis for claiming that creativity puts one “out of order,” and this entails the characteristic, inextricable from creativity, that one creates something from nothing. Second, creative novelty is a modification of one’s own sense-making. This result is the key to grasping the generality of creativity in multiple domains and its importance in understanding the self. Scientific practice and everyday problem-solving often require creative work no less than artistic practice, and creativity affects one’s conscious ordering of experience which can account for much of who one is. Third, creativity does not imply a positive value. I argue against conceptions that either stipulate the positive value of creativity and its results or argue for the intrinsic value of new being. As a consequence, the evaluation of creativity stands to be much more complex, for both creators and the recipients of their creations, than is implied by contemporary definitions of creativity.
These results are distributed within the text as a whole, with some sections first introducing the key claims, and others reinforcing or supplementing my arguments for them.

Chapter One introduces the key themes that occupy this study, provides some context from previous work on creativity, and argues for my phenomenological approach. Crucial to what we want from an understanding of creativity, I think, are answers to the questions why we create and what is created, which would be largely lost or misrepresented in other approaches to creativity.

Chapter Two focuses on meaning, and provides the most summary, but imprecise, version of my view of creativity. This chapter has a blatantly practical sensitivity, positioned as it is in investigating creativity in our everyday world of meaning. It argues for a view of creativity that responds to a revised version of Meno’s Paradox: that we cannot recognize creativity, because either we would have to know what was created beforehand, in which case there is nothing new in the creation, or we would have to create something before we could know it, in which case the knowledge could not be connected with what we already know. This chapter shows how created meaning can be simultaneously discontinuous with preceding, familiar practice in one way and yet continuous with it in another way.

Chapter Three focuses on creative novelty. I investigate novelty phenomenologically before turning to concerns with explaining creativity in more fine-grained scientific and philosophical systems. I argue for the view that, most generally, creative novelty is a new way of making sense, which necessarily expresses a discontinuity, a “disorder,” in its relation to antecedent conditions. The most general problem with systematic attempts to explain creativity is that they exclude or occlude creative novelty by either failing to
account for it directly, ignoring it, or reinterpreting it in a way that illegitimately makes it disappear. In short, they offer what I call explanation with compensation—a kind of empty explanation that falls short of genuine understanding. On another argumentative front, I emphasize the importance of meaningful continuity within creative activity. Creations must be continuous with antecedent conditions, even if they are not determined by them. Based on this investigation, I criticize an attempt to define creativity in terms of spontaneity and efforts to extend the concept of creativity to all experience.

Chapter Four argues for a minimal constitutive value of creativity, but seeks to add a great deal of complexity to the evaluation of creativity by examining the role of creativity in forming persons and selves. Through creative acts, I argue, one can develop one’s own way of thinking and doing, in addition to new cultural objects. And a value-creator can even introduce new values. This situation suggests the importance of further investigation into the relation between creators, their creations, and the world than I introduce here.

In a brief summation, I offer what I think are the most promising—and needed—directions for further research.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO A PHENOMENOLOGY OF CREATIVITY

"Expressions such as "a world in pieces" or "a world turned upside down," trite as they have become, nonetheless express a feeling that is authentic. The rift between the rational order and events, the mutual impenetrability of minds opaque as matter, the multiplication of logical systems each of which is absurd for the others, the impossibility of the I rejoining the you, and consequently the unfitness of understanding for what should be its essential function -- these are things we run up against in the twilight of a world, things which reawaken the ancient obsession with an end of the world."¹

The idea of creativity animates our hopes for continuous cultural transformation and improvement, and it informs several prominent models our culture offers for how to live—the artist, the inventor, the intellectual, the entrepreneur, and the civic leader. One notable part of the importance of these models comes from the value of their products—art, invention, theory, private institutions, and social institutions—and another part comes from the sense that these lives of creative pursuit are those most worth living. There is currently no shortage of claims for the existence of human creativity to explain a wide range of phenomena, and claims to explain creativity itself.² The concept figures centrally in understanding artistic production and the generation of new ideas in scientific theory and everyday life. With some refinements, creativity serves in conceptions of the self, as an

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¹ Levrin, 7
² For psychological views supporting creativity, see, e.g., Boden (2004), Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and Sternberg (2011). For representative views of those who resist the distinctiveness of creativity, see Weinberg (1986) and Minsky (1982).
ethical virtue,\textsuperscript{3} or in theories of language.\textsuperscript{4} Such associations initiate the philosophical wonder for one who takes creativity as an object of study.

Creativity depends on the idea that change is possible, that the future need not mean the same thing as the past, that not all is vanity, that there may be something new under the sun. Creativity names this possibility. Yet creativity is sensible, possible, and desirable only on a specific background of conditions for its existence. Indeed, not all creative work need be considered desirable. The basic claim with which I begin this dissertation is this: we do not understand creativity well enough to cultivate its value or mitigate its disvalue. I will have to substantiate this claim. But, furthermore, my goal is to offer an understanding of creativity and a position on its value and disvalue.

This philosophical wonder directed at creativity is both contemporary and classical. For example, Mark Johnson proposes that,

\begin{quote}
The greatest mystery that remains [for a theory of meaning]...is how creative imagination works--that is, how new meanings and new connections emerge. ... We are really only beginning to see how something new can emerge that transcends and transforms what has gone before.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Johnson contends that in some way creativity must be rooted in the meaning-making capacities of our embodiment. He implicitly returns to some of our oldest philosophy and attempts to overcome its inadequacies, descriptive and theoretical. Plato’s dialectical attempt to understand the meaning of a term by providing a theoretical definition terminates in a divine intuition of Forms. The semantic or “felt” meaning of a term is

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{3} Nietzsche is representative here. See, especially, “Schopenhauer as Educator” (1997). More recently, see Kieran, “Creativity as a Virtue of Character” in The Philosophy of Creativity (forthcoming).
\textsuperscript{4} This conception of creativity applies in particular to Noam Chomsky, whose discussion of creativity ranges across his published works. For an overview, see: D'Agostino (1984).
\textsuperscript{5} Johnson 2007
\end{footnotes}
ultimately supplied by a direct aesthetic apprehension of its essential nature, made possible by the tacit knowledge of an eternal soul. This view informs one of Plato's theories of creativity, his hopeful one, which we find in *Symposium*: a creative act is really an act of love that gives birth—brings into being—a new object. At the highest point of the ladder of love stands a philosopher who gives birth to new theories and ideas. This act is a kind of madness (cf. *Phaedrus*), but it is a madness guided by a vision of Beauty. For Johnson, if we can understand how our natures situate us in a world of meaning that gives rise to new meanings then we may perhaps get this creativity without divinity. For both philosophers, creativity is immensely important, practically and theoretically.

But from a conservative standpoint, this importance only intensifies with Plato's theory of creativity, his pessimistic one, that creativity involves a dazzling species of ignorance that often bewitches youth, hijacks education, and undermines conditions for justice. Or we see the danger of creativity in Nietzsche's reminder that every creation is also destruction. Creativity should not be inspected through rose-colored glasses.

So why don't we understand creativity?

My answers to this question are threefold. First, the idea of creativity is mired in a mess of popular associations. Second, despite its prominence in popular consciousness, the sweep of its historical associations, and the attention psychological science pays to it, creativity is philosophically suspect. Creativity exists, I argue, itself as an ambiguous phenomenon, one that escapes predictive efforts or full theoretical explanation. Consequently, theoretical constructions of creativity purport an understanding of creativity

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6 Plato's less hopeful theory emerges most notably in the *Ion* and the *Republic*.
7 See, for example, Nietzsche's claim in the *Genealogy of Morals* that every creation of an ideal is the destruction of another ideal (Nietzsche, 2007, page 65).
without attending to the philosophical problems underlying it. The final problem, rooted in the previous two, is that we cannot appreciate the value or disvalue of creativity without understanding it. Put more specifically, most conceptions assume that creativity is always positively valuable. But there is no basis for this claim.

With respect to the first answer, I will not engage many popular associations. Where I can avoid it, I do not try, for example, to identify the many ways in which the term is used in an effort to articulate a bunch of family resemblances. I just mention that the result of my efforts should move one from a hazy, emotional sense of creativity that seems prominent—*creativity is wonderful*—to a conception that specifies creativity with greater precision. In this way, we are equipped to evaluate it more appropriately.

The rest of this dissertation is devoted to answers two and three. This introduction will lay out some of the overarching ideas related to investigating creativity and try to make sense of my basic approach, which seeks a phenomenological understanding of creativity.

1.1 THE SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS OF UNDERSTANDING

Creativity seems to begin precisely where familiar meaning and predictability end, when the artist introduces a new style, the scientist a new paradigm, or the entrepreneur a new resource from the world’s waste. These things surprise us with new meanings. This creative work starts at “an end of the world”—where the typical meaning offered by that world no longer does justice to our experience or the problems we aim to solve. Were this not the case, then the familiar practices, problem-solving, and discovery we normally depend on would always be sufficient, and creativity would not be necessary.
If we cannot count on a full rational understanding of creativity, then it would be a mistake to begin by assuming our results must be fully rational. Understanding is consistent with partial non-rational intelligibility, if that is what the phenomenon demands. Artworks provide an intuitive example here. But there are ways of approaching a phenomenon that fail to recognize this demand for non-rational understanding, and there are ways of approaching a phenomenon that could totally overemphasize it. To be clearer, one may look at creativity and see in it an entirely determinate phenomenon consistent with other rationally coordinated phenomena. Or one could see in it some radical break from the constraints of knowing and doing—perhaps even physical law—that make sense of all the rest of experience. The ultimate basis for this dichotomy in attempts to understand creativity is the tension between affirming a principle of sufficient reason—everything must have some basis in or continuity with what exists around it—and the sense that creativity concerns something genuinely new, or a discontinuity with what comes before the creative act. Navigating this tension is no small feat. Here we are concerned with what understanding looks like.

Suppose that understanding is roughly the compatibility of one’s experience, knowledge, and capacity to act with the demands of a situation. Understanding is reflected in one’s capacity to cope effectively with things, people, and oneself. When coping effectively, we typically do not realize the demands of a situation to which we are already adequately responding. But problems of different kinds challenge one’s understanding and put more explicit demands on us. So if I notice mold in my basement and need to know why it is there, I realize a demand for explanation. If I know that dim, moist areas like my basement provide excellent conditions for mold, then I may be satisfied. Or I may remain
dissatisfied, for instance, if I stumble upon the thought that there are dim, moist places where mold does not grow—i.e. I do not have the knowledge to meet fully the demand for explanation. Or I may remain satisfied with my explanation and realize a question and demand elsewhere. “Why is my basement so moist?” Alternatively, however, perhaps I do not know much about mold and cannot concoct an explanation for its presence in my basement. Nonetheless, I might say that biologists (or mold experts) surely understand how mold propagates. In this way, I may be satisfied, but indirectly. The mold is not understandable to me, but I have confidence that the mold is understood by someone. In another version of this, a devout theist, when faced with some inexplicable event, may still claim, “though this event is beyond my understanding, it is nonetheless part of God’s plan.” In both of the latter cases, a general principle supervenes on one’s immediate demands in a situation and, so to speak, compensates for them. This is explanation with compensation. One symptom of a compensation is the inability to answer the child’s question, why, for oneself.

But this inability to answer “why” is just a symptom. Imagine the person who realizes his color-blindedness late in life. He has lived a life so ordered as to conceal the possibility of a distinction taken for granted by others. Only a finely honed moment, in which the distinction is made to matter, opens up its surreal possibility, and opens up the necessity of finding a new way to cope. Surveying his past, this man will find that the world in which he was coordinated with others was never quite the same for them as it was for him, and that his identical forms of behavior always contained an implicit compensation for some feature others responded to directly. Or take the mold example again. If I find myself satisfied with the first explanation that mold grows in dim, moist place, and lack the
sensitivity to counterexamples, then only another set of circumstances would challenge my understanding—e.g. when I needed to grow some mold and found my basic understanding for its conditions deficient. Or take one of the problems with writing that Plato introduces in the *Phaedrus*, that writing enables the representation of understanding without understanding itself. In an everyday case, we know that a person may provide the missing term in “1 + 1 = __” without understanding arithmetic, because he has seen it written before. A genuine understanding would enable one to perform arithmetic in cases one has never seen before. In cases of compensation, one fortifies experience artificially, permitting one to cope for a time without genuine understanding. In such cases, a faux-understanding operates, one that works, but which comes with risks both practical and theoretical. I will develop several applications of this concept of compensation in the chapters to follow, but the core of it is this: compensations are empty explanations or incomplete understandings that one takes to be “full” or complete. In one’s effort to understand something, one takes a limited amount of the sense or evidence afforded by experience to account for the whole thing. To overcome a compensation can be exhilarating, because it means encountering a phenomenon anew; but it can also be daunting, because it reveals the inadequacy of one’s past ways of thinking and doing.

On the other hand, within the concerns of everyday understanding, I know of no better conversation-enders than “Why is there something rather than nothing?” or, “Why does anything exist at all?” There are ways of calling into question any piece of presumed intelligibility. If I ask my friend what causes the mold in my basement and he responds that we really do not understand the nature of causation, then I am unlikely to be moved—I certainly will not be helped. More precisely, I will think he either intentionally feigns
ignorance or is legitimately blind to the intelligibility of the situation as offered and the legitimate concern one can have for it. In this case, the word “cause” has a context to help the term refer precisely to the system of things in which I am working with at least some traction; my friend takes the term out of its context and supplants it with something irrelevant. He uses a representation to introduce ignorance, rather than compensate for a lack of knowledge. Some questions and some attitudes—Cartesian doubt, for example—raise philosophically important issues, on which one can even make some progress. But when pitted against an immediate concern in experience, they deprive us of the intelligibility offered within that experience. When taken seriously, babbled wisdom effects the bewitchment of intelligence (c.f. Wittgenstein), separating one from one’s legitimate concerns and the concrete evidence offered by engaged experience. Or this wisdom is dismissed, spreading rumors of the irrelevance of philosophical inquiry for life.

These are the Scylla and Charybdis of understanding: compensation and deprivation. In an everyday sense, we can see Sophists cultivating these dangers in the courts to their advantage. If the object is conviction, rather than justice, one may need to fortify a case with compensations that work for the limited time they are necessary. If the object is to produce doubt, one can deprive the evidence of its internal coherence for the time it takes a jury to vote.

Are creative acts or events understandable? The answer to this question depends mightily on the demands we set in the course of its investigation. It seems clear enough to me that, within everyday life, we are quite confused about how to answer this question. When someone introduces a new idea, indeed an idea that may never have been thought before, we easily wonder where it could have come from. This kind of wondering sets the
demand for some kind of reductive explanation. Why did it take Einstein to articulate relativity theory? Why Picasso to introduce cubism? Why Ford to innovate the assembly line? On the one hand, we point to copious antecedent conditions operating prior to this work—the early advances in scientific thought, artistic influences, market conditions—and often want to say the next advance was inevitable. On the other hand, the fact that we are looking for further understanding implies that something in the situation resists this reduction. The creations do not seem impossible—that would deny the de facto evidence of the idea or doing. Nor does creation seem improbable. That dismisses the ingenuity evident in the creation, as if any of us shaking ideas around long enough would eventually give birth to this new one. The creations seem impossible with respect to the way we were thinking and doing before the creation; then they often seem entirely sensible in their being, though still not in their arising from antecedent conditions. In everyday life, when we call something “creative,” and really mean something extraordinary by it, we tend to acknowledge this discontinuity—a break in a chain of being and becoming one could not have predicted. We can find the falling of dominoes intellectually engaging and important, but not creative.

This description of the everyday understanding of creativity holds when one reflects on one’s own experience as well. If, after thinking or doing something one takes to be creative, one seeks its origin, there is little progress to be made. Certainly, one may analyze the idea into its constitutive elements and point to environmental conditions or occasions for their synthesis. One may see that each of the necessary elements was ready and available for the synthesis. But even isolating that moment of synthesis—even, or especially, one as celebrated and prominent as a Eureka moment—does not quite answer to
the understanding demanded: what brought this synthesis into being? How did one have this idea, which seems impossible relative to all the ways one was thinking before, whether for minutes or for decades?

Yet the characterization of the creative moment as a peculiar way of bringing something *impossible* into being is the one position that must be denied by someone who seeks to fully explain creativity. There is an immediate risk for one who adopts this explanatory pursuit, because he may limit his sensitivity to the demands made by the phenomenon of creativity and make his own demands instead. His demand for understanding is a demand that all things be fully determinate or rationally coordinated. Thus he risks a compensation in his understanding. Nonetheless, clearly this demand is quite sensible.

Why would one demand that creativity be fully determinate? In everyday understanding, one may simply think that “everything has a reason” whether we can find it or not. But, more precisely, one may claim that there is no *creatio ex nihilo*—no creation from nothing—and believe that every event is continuous with antecedent and subsequent events which explain the character of the event. That is, a before and after bracket every event, and these brackets relate to a present event through causation. By causation, most will think of physical or psychological causation, which relates an event to antecedent conditions, but one may well have Aristotelian final causes in mind as well—an event may relate to an essential developmental necessity for teleological explanation. If we want to understand an event or phenomenon, we look to the network of causal factors of which it is a part. Such a view, I take it, is sensible, and following through on a causal reduction of a putative act of creation always contributes something to its characterization. Having
something to say by way of explanation denies a view of creativity in which new entities or
new ideas simply pop into existence without precedent and magically exist with new
meaning. Einstein, Picasso, and Ford had a great deal to work with, after all. They were not
wizards, and they required great knowledge, skill, and sensitivity to create as they did.

But the question is whether such a reduction yields explanation without
compensation. I argue it does not. In creative acts, the grounds for understanding
themselves shift—what counts as a fact changes or what counts as the meaning or use of an
object changes. Thus, the intelligibility of a situation in retrospect can be clearly presented
in a way that was impossible before the act. The links a new being makes to its past are
typically newly made as well.

Suppose (1) that there are situations in which our meaningful engagement in a
situation proves under- or over-determined. What this means is that our customary skills,
values, and knowledge are either so incomplete or so conflicted that we are unable to act—
to think something or do something more. Consider as examples one caught up in a moral
dilemma, one who has reached the end of the expressive possibilities of tonal music, or one
who has reached the end of the theoretical explanations provided by Newtonian physics. At
that point only a very peculiar event can resolve the difficulty and enable further
meaningful action—making a choice, breaking for atonality, or conceiving of a new physical
theory. I will argue for calling this event “creativity.” Creativity builds a new meaningful
continuity between how we thought and acted before and how we think and act now.

Suppose further (2) that the investigation of creativity leads us into just such a
situation, where paradoxes and entrapments of reason look inescapable. At just this point
creativity would be called on to fortify our experience with a continuity it could not have on
its own. Creativity could conceal its own existence by affirming an understanding that
denies creativity. This, I propose, is precisely what we do when we try to explain creative
acts—we look for a bunch of putative causes and, at some ad hoc point, declare the act
explained. In this way, one can create a compensatory theory that disguises creativity.

Part of my work in this dissertation is to justify these two suppositions. In the
investigation of creativity, the difficulty is to hold onto the phenomenon long enough to see
just how much we can learn. I argue that creativity is necessary to enable action wherever
determinate orders of thought, action, and meaning prove over- or under-determined—
where resources available to us, and our abilities to work with resources, prove inadequate
to the task of managing our concerns. In such situations, we respond to disorder in our
experience. Creativity is our way of introducing new order—new ways of making sense,
which realize new possibilities. But undetermined as it is by any antecedent meaningful
order, creativity can indicate something about ourselves, our own being out of order—our
position with respect to orders of meaning as their creators. Creativity enables action when
we come to the end of a meaningful world, and changes ourselves and our world when
given concrete form.

1.2 A PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTION OF CREATIVITY

To begin, we need a substantive view of creativity around which to frame an
understanding. By examining a psychological understanding of creativity, I identify two of
the major themes for the philosophical investigation of creativity: why we create and what
creative novelty is.
I begin with Arthur Koestler’s concept of bisociation from *The Act of Creation* (1964), still among the richest and most sustained treatments of creativity. As far as I can tell, contemporary explanatory theories of creativity make little advance on the major philosophical assumptions underlying such theories, even if they offer conceptual or empirical refinements. The basic idea of bisociation is that, in the creative act, one perceives an identity in two habitually incompatible associative contexts. Roughly, for example, one can see the bisociation of two associative contexts in a joke, quoted by Koestler from Freud:

Chamfort tells a story of a Marquis at the court of Louis XIV who, on entering his wife’s boudoir and finding her in the arms of a Bishop, walked calmly to the window and went through the motions of blessing the people in the street. ‘What are you doing?’ cried the anguished wife. ‘Monseigneur is performing my functions,’ replied the Marquis, ‘so I am performing his.’

The context of adultery and the context of job functions bisect to form a curiously fitting bisociation, which many will find funny. More contemporary psychological conceptions, using terms like “cognitive fluidity” or “conceptual blending,” deviate little from the substance of Koestler’s general view. In effect, such psychological conceptions reproduce the old Humean view that new ideas or behaviors are recombinations of preexisting material. This recombination view remains standard, even as psychologists dispute how this recombination takes place, whether through ordinary, everyday processes like problem-solving or extraordinary, exotic processes like insight or Gestalt. My concern is not with the psychological disputes, except insofar as they commit to unsupportable fundamental assumptions.

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8 Koestler, 33
But I accept much of the basic description and fertility of the recombination view. Beyond Koestler and recombination psychologists, we find affinities with Koestler’s conception in some philosophical conceptions of metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* describes the “essence of metaphor” as “understanding or experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”⁹ While the aims of their study differ from Koestler’s, what they describe as a metaphor is systematically a bisociation of associative contexts. The metaphor argument-is-war bisects habitual associations of argumentative methods and rigor with the stakes and strategy of war (“He attacked every weak point in my argument”). And when Lakoff and Johnson suggest an alternative metaphor, argument-is-dance, we are meant to see the fecund, perhaps creative difference such an alternative metaphor could make. When Nietzsche begins *Beyond Good and Evil* with, “Supposing that truth is a woman—and why not?” he too establishes a bisociative context for further exploration.¹⁰ Examples of possible creativity, then, may be as easy to spot as a new metaphor.

On Koestler’s view, most human life is governed by ordered patterns of thought and behavior he calls matrices or associative contexts. A “code” of fixed rules governs a matrix, which is more or less flexible with respect to the environment in which it is deployed, and which brings coherence and intelligibility to the activity. For example, a game of chess requires a set of fixed rules to govern play, in terms of which a variety of possibilities emerges. How one approaches a game of chess is then a matter of strategy—whether to advance aggressively or build a strong defensive position, for instance. To break one of the rules violates the coherence of the game, yet it can also indicate a sudden release from what

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⁹ Lakoff, 5

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 3
one takes for granted about the game. As Koestler puts it, “to the experienced chess player a rook moving bishopwise is decidedly ‘funny’”. Even without breaking the explicit rules of the game, however, one can challenge further habitual rules—he calls these ‘heuristics’. For example, a novice player is usually taught to control the center of the board from the outset by advancing center pawns. In practice, such a heuristic places constraints on a player in addition to the rules of the game.

This analysis extends beyond orders of behavior with explicit rules. Bodily skills like riding a bicycle, which exhibit know-how rather than propositional knowledge, similarly have an order. The improvisation of a pianist follows the typical constraints of the diatonic or chromatic scale—though a “mistake” to such a musician may be welcome to another atonal or twelve-tone composer. The constraints of the piano also order the musical possibilities of such a composer. Non-Western instrumentation and composition afford a much different set of musical possibilities.

In the creative act, two matrices are brought into contact. Depending on the context of emotional and intellectual states, this contact may be one of collision, fusion, or confrontation. Koestler identifies these three idealized types of bisociation with comedy, understanding, and aesthetics, respectively. However the same set of matrices can often generate any of the three types, which are neither mutually exclusive nor discrete; rather they present a continuum along which the wide range of creations we encounter occur. To illustrate, consider the bisocation of human and machine. In the first case, taken as fodder for comedy, we have the collision of our lofty aspirations—our hubris—and our earthly, mechanical limitations. “The variations on this theme are inexhaustible: the person slipping

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11 Koestler, 42
on a banana skin; the sergeant-major attacked by diarrhea; Hamlet getting the hiccoughs; soldiers marching like automata; the pedant behaving like a mechanical robot; ...

This bisociation also furnishes material for intensive intellectual stimulation. Human-as-machine plays its role as early as Pythagoras, treating the body as a musical instrument, up to the present day—whether as mechanism, machine, or physical object, science has tracked an understanding of ourselves on the basis of an external object governed by physical law. Yet we may also perceive this link between human and machine aesthetically, in the tragic end of a promising life by a fluke illness, the melting of Icarus’s wings, or Frankenstein’s monster. Or, to take some examples from film and television, we get the automated, exploited workers in *Metropolis*, the networked Borg of *Star Trek*, the machines made human by memories in *Bladerunner*, or the machines made human by emotions in *Artificial Intelligence*. To take another example, Don Quixote may be read as a comic hero at one’s leisure, or as a psychological study, or as a tragic fight against windmills. One may seek out additional examples with ease: human as animal (or animal as human) in biological science, *Animal Farm*, or Disney movies; Duchamp’s urinal as a work of art; the physical world as atoms, waves, or strings. Each of these bisociations, on Koestler’s view, has its origin in some human act of creation, bringing frames of reference into new contact.

Based on this conception of creativity, Koestler seeks to account for apparent acts of creativity, from Kekulé’s work on the structure of the benzene molecule (he saw a snake eating its own tail) to Gutenberg’s discovery of the printing press, combining the grape press with existing printing methods.

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12 Ibid. 47
1.3 THEMES FOR INVESTIGATION

From this point in the account, I am able to extract two major themes for philosophical investigation, one focused on explaining why we create and the other dealing with the novelty of creations.

First, why does one create?

Koestler has a complicated answer to this question involving the emotional satisfaction involved in doing creative work. For example, laughter and weeping, according to Koestler, have no biological function other than to discharge the stress involved in being the complex organisms we are, living within orders of behavior, but capable of recognizing the limitations and contradictions of this behavior. Emotional and intellectual satisfaction stems from encountering and overcoming these limitations.

Yet this is a curiously blithe answer to the question. There are two immediate hints of this. First, satisfactions of the sort Koestler describes are generic biological functions, which one may purchase cheaply—indeed, Koestler goes to great (and interesting) pains to show how his view explains ticklishness. But the creator, focused intently on a specific subject matter, is not moved by the promise of a generic experience; such an experience is only a distraction from complexities of concepts or values in which she is involved. If she only wanted to laugh or cry, there are far easier ways to achieve this. Only within her singular work does she find something of the movement that keeps her working—though I have yet to adequately describe this movement. The pedant seeks a sublime thought; the sublime thinker thinks a thought and finds it sublime. Koestler himself seems to recognize some of this when he notices that the effect of a good joke is on the audience; the comic himself tends not to laugh during the serious work of crafting his jokes. Thus, second, these
biological functions are better understood as effects of creative work. They can be powerful for an audience, and quite important in communicating creative work, but they are ultimately external to the creative work, rather than constitutive of it.\textsuperscript{13}

But I seek to make a more general point about attempts at explaining creativity. The more pressing question is not why one creates, understood as asking for a proximate or functional explanation. Asking for a proximate explanation begins by assuming an objective analysis of human beings, which inevitably results in an ordering of objective necessities. Even if successful, this explanation more appropriately answers the question \textit{how} creativity works, while assuming a translation from “meaningless” behaviors or events to meaningful intentions and actions. Starting with an objective analysis, and forgetting to investigate the meanings involved in creativity, there would be no way of recognizing any compensation such an explanation involves. The question \textit{why one creates} must be rephrased to make its significance clearer. The question, rather, asks: what do we experience of being that it affords—or even requires—creativity? The question calls for a concrete understanding of our creative way of being. The scientific analysis of being creative offers a view that conceals its own origin in the kind of being that seeks explanatory intelligibility, but which is open to other kinds of understanding as well.

Second, what is the novelty of creativity?

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\textsuperscript{13} It would be a mistake to take my claims here to imply that creativity is dispassionate, emotionless, or always “serious” in tone. On the one hand, it can indeed feel, in one sense, dispassionate—a sense that led Edgar Allan Poe to describe his work as completely “rational.” On the other hand, an improvisational jazz musician working a club plays in a medium replete with emotional sensitivity and tones of aesthetic value. His “getting into the music” need not be divorced from the requirements for generating creative content in that medium. The medium requires it.
Anyone who studies creativity must brush against the difficulty of understanding novelty, and it is exceedingly tempting to simply brush the question aside:

The creative act is not an act of creation in the sense of the Old Testament. It does not create something out of nothing; it uncovers, selects, re-shuffles, combines, synthesizes already existing facts, ideas, faculties, skills. The more familiar the parts, the more striking the new whole. Man's knowledge of the changes of the tides and the phases of the moon is as old as his observation that apples fall to earth in the ripeness of time. Yet the combination of these and other equally familiar data in Newton's theory of gravity changed mankind's outlook on the world.¹⁴

I will put this starkly: creativity will not be denied a relation to discontinuity or nothingness. Either a creative act brings something new into being or it does not. If it does, then there is no sense in denying ex nihilo creation outright. Something that did not exist now exists. Something that was nothing is now something. And if the creative act does not bring something new into being, then there is only a deflated sense in speaking of something new resulting from creativity. One cannot reduce the novelty of a recombination to the familiarity of its constitutive elements, making it completely continuous with antecedent conditions. Were this all we could do, we would be in the position of one who sees only the typewriter in the personal computer, the latter more deficient because now you have to plug it in. Moreover, one cannot even smooth out this wrinkle by claiming that the novelty of creation is found in the new reality of what was previously only a possibility (or an unrealized necessity, put more strongly). A person who knows what his schedule looks like the next day will not find any novelty in executing that order on that day, nor will a person find novelty who sees that yesterday's events determined what happened today. And if one is simply surprised by what yesterday determined for today, this surprise may just point to a lack of knowledge rather than to any creative development.

¹⁴ Ibid. 120
I take these two themes as the charge for philosophical investigation.

1.4 SEDIMENTED BELIEFS ABOUT CREATIVITY

I offer the following results of past work on creativity in order to introduce a background of conceptual resources commonly used for defining or describing creativity. These resources include two criteria used to define creativity, the analysis of creative activity into four related terms, and the broad philosophical positions that underwrite a conception of creativity. I briefly criticize aspects of this background along the way in preparation for my positive statement of how to proceed in investigating creativity.

1.4.1 Two Criteria

To be a creation, researchers often assume that an identity must satisfy the two criteria of novelty and value. Creativity, then, is the capacity to create something novel and valuable. Novelty seems essential to the definition of creativity in order to distinguish it from determinate or rule-governed processes like making, discovering, or reasoning, or to signal something distinctive about the creative product. Intuitively, for example, the activity of a painter who establishes a new style seems different from the painter who uses the pre-established style as a model, the painter who copies someone else’s painting in detail, or the printer who prints copies of a painting to sell. Where is the creative novelty?

The standard definition of creativity also includes a criterion of value in order to exclude eccentric, trivial, or valueless novel identities. Depending on one’s analysis of novelty, many acts or objects—from personality quirks to broken glass—could end up being creative,

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15 See, for example, Hausman (1984), Boden (2004), Sternberg (2011), Csikszentmihalyi (1996). “Identity” here stands for whatever, by hypothesis, might be created—things, objects, entities, ideas—with enough intelligibility to be recognized or identified.
were it not for this criterion. Both novelty and value receive much fuller attention in subsequent chapters, but their introduction here is necessary to advance my own approach.

1.4.1.1 Novelty

Novelty can be interpreted in numerous ways. An extremely inclusive interpretation, for instance, attributes novelty to every possible identity, because every identity is unique in some way. An identity is novel if and only if it is unique. Every paper cup churned out by a factory is novel, because it is singular, or self-identical. Minimally, every identity possesses its own extrinsic properties of space and time; every grain of sand is unique in its location and temporal appearance. Such a promiscuous interpretation does not do justice to creativity, because it trivializes the notion of novelty: nothing can fail to be novel.16

A slightly narrower interpretation recognizes novelty only in the first instance of a type. Call this first instance a prototype, and all subsequent instances copies. The type, in this case, is a model for concrete particulars, each possessing identical intrinsic properties. The particulars are then organized by the extrinsic property of temporal succession, and the first instance in the series is the prototype. Then an identity is novel if and only if it is a prototype. So the first paper cup is a prototype, while later paper cups are copies.17 This

16 Despite my dismissal here, it will be important to sharpen my criticism of this view in Chapter Three in response to those who might defend it. One might defend this view precisely if one thinks everything is creatively novel in a special way (e.g. Bergson) or nothing is creatively novel in a special way (e.g. reductionism).

17 This view, as far as I offer it, invites further clarification in accord with a theory of types. Supposing a type is itself a model specifying intrinsic properties, do we allow that the first instance of the type may be deficient or faulty as an instance of the type (a cup may have a hole in it)? A prototype, we might think, must fall within an acceptable range of possessing all and only the intrinsic properties of the type, though this may only be a practical issue for making satisfactory copies. Did Edison produce a prototype for light bulbs only with the first working bulb, or do the early faulty bulbs suffice?
view has the apparent benefits of restricting novelty to a non-trivial class and using the structure of time (temporal progression) as a defining characteristic—rather than using temporal properties *simpliciter* as just one more extrinsic relation. On the inclusive view of novelty, it does not matter *when* something comes into being, but only that it has temporal properties. The special emphasis on time in the prototype view, however, seems relevant for both an intuitive understanding of novelty and for specifying what it might mean to *bring something into being*. But this view has some objections. First, there is at least the logical possibility that two prototypes are brought into being independently and at the same time.\(^\text{18}\) And second, if the extrinsic property of temporal succession is relevant to defining novel identity, then this view seems unable to handle cases of independent, unrelated creation. Suppose two agents bring an identity into being independently, and that this identity possesses its own unique intrinsic properties. For instance, two agents design and make a new kind of cup, but at the same time. I do not see the prototype view capable of analyzing this case into just one prototype, which matters to the extent that temporal priority is supposed to settle what is uniquely novel. And if the new cups are designed decades apart, the prototype view implies that we should regard the earlier cup as a creative novelty, but not the later cup, which seems to miss the creativity of the later designer who, by hypothesis, did not know anything about the earlier work.

A more restrictive conception of novelty attempts to define a special class of novelties appropriate for defining creativity. Restrictions come in at least two kinds. First,

\(^{18}\) Of course there is a host of difficulties related to a theory of time and a conception of simultaneity (e.g. issues of infinite divisibility of time, of relativity, and the like). Practically speaking, we just talk of simultaneous events relative to a unit, and we select the unit based on our interests: Allosaurus and *Tyranosaurus* lived at the same time (the Age of Dinosaurs—these dinosaurs actually lived millions of years apart). I can speak and gesture at the same time, but this is because actions are temporally-structured identities with overlapping extensions.
one might restrict creative novelty to a particular type of identity, so that, for example, actions are created but objects or artifacts are only created indirectly. In Chapter 3, I argue for a view of this kind, according to which creative novelty is a new way of making sense, often embedded concretely in new objects (paintings, theories, and so on). Second, one can restrict creative novelty to particular categories of identities, for instance forms of objects or styles of production rather than particular instances of forms or styles—a new literary genre, rather than a particular work in that genre. Typically, these candidate restrictions must be explained with a great deal of care. For instance, does manufacturing a newly designed paper cup count as creative novelty? Does the new design itself count as the novelty? Would making cups of a familiar design out of a new material count as creatively novel? Is one creative in writing a new horror novel, or must one pioneer a new literary genre, or even a new expressive medium? The difficulty for those who venture this kind of analysis is to provide a principled break between different identities that clearly, at least in principle, separates creative from non-creative novelty.

Add to this difficulty the problem of perspective. An identity may be personally or subjectively new, but historically or culturally old, even hackneyed. If one comes up with the idea that, “I think, therefore I am,” then one may well have been personally creative, on some views. Nonetheless, from a historical perspective, the idea is merely a copy of Descartes’ claim in his Meditations. The question, then, is whether there are good reasons to privilege some perspectives over others in a definition of creative novelty.

Margaret Boden offers one contemporary account of novelty that attempts to deal with these issues. On her view, creative novelty consists of a modification of constraints

19 Boden, 2004
on a conceptual system. A conceptual system is a rule-governed organization of thought and behavior, and to be creative, one must remove, add, or transform the rules of a conceptual system. On these grounds, Boden distinguishes between exploration in terms of a conceptual system and creativity, which modifies a conceptual system. For example, in composing his forty-eight preludes and figures, Bach explores the musical system constrained by the rule that all music must have a home key. Schoenberg, by contrast, exhibits creativity by dropping the constraint of a home key and producing atonal music. Schoenberg counts as creative, while Bach does not, in this idealized example. Similarly, Kekulé counts as creative by dropping the constraint that all carbon chains must be linear. On Boden’s account creative novelty is restricted to a particular type (conceptual schemes) and a particular category (forms of conceptual schemes). Alternatively, Hans Joas argues that creativity is properly analyzed as an aspect of all and only human action, with rationally- or normatively-led action serving to modify creative action.20

One may object to Boden’s account on numerous grounds. For instance, the account may appear too exclusive if it rejects the creativity of the majority of artistic or scientific work. Or it may appear too inclusive if, say, one need only add the rule of adding potatoes when cooking chili to count as creative. But these objections may miss the mark when one argues, first, that the conceptual distinction between creativity and exploration does not demean exploration or strip it of its importance, and, second, that the historical perspective should not be used as a criterion for assessing personal creativity. Not all creativity has to be world-changing. But an additional objection asks whether the distinction between exploration and creativity is sustainable when the modification of a conceptual system is

20Joas, 1996
made on the basis of regular higher-order rules or heuristics. For example, if one follows the rule to “add an ingredient” to make new entrees, this looks like an instance of exploration again. “Modify a constraint” may be a general rule for exploring conceptual systems themselves. And, in any case, which constraint? And in what way?

Among this analytical work, several key ideas rise to prominence. I call these symptoms of creative novelty. The first symptom appears when no method, procedure, scheme, or set of antecedent conditions can be understood to be sufficient for determining how or what one makes (or creates). Kant voiced this view in his *Critique of Judgment*, with the idea that a genius produces something for which there is no definite rule or procedure prior to production. 21 Second, some identity is a creative novelty if it cannot be or could not have been predicted within an explanatory theory or account. Third, the identity must exhibit a difference in kind from standard examples in its domain, a difference that challenges assumptions about what counts as good or bad in the domain, what counts as an instance within the domain, or even what the domain ranges over. So, for example, Duchamp’s “Fountain” challenges the domain of art in all three ways. Fourth, the creative product, despite its novelty, serves as a model or exemplar for further production—for copies. Finally, specifically creative novelty appears to be appropriate or apt; it seems to resolve issues or offer insights entirely germane to a situation. Call this set of symptoms the standard view. 22

In my own treatment of creativity, I range from strong agreement (symptom 1), to qualified endorsement (symptoms 2, 4, and 5), to qualified rejection (symptom 3) of the

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21 Kant, 2000. See also Koestler, 209 and Hausman, 40.
22 D'Agostino (1984) nicely summarizes many of these ideas about creativity.
symptoms represented in the standard view. But I should note an immediate
dissatisfaction with a way of arriving at these views, whether they agree with mine or not.
One path to these symptoms is a method of analysis, which tries to cut our body of terms at
joints according to consistent and helpful usage, decompose them into simpler parts,
disambiguate them by identifying conflated meanings, or translate them into a language
with more perspicuous logical form. This analysis finds distinctions in the way we use the
concept of novelty and, together with the method of counterexamples, attempt to piece
together a definition with a precise and consistent extension. In this way, analysis equips us
with more precise tools for thought. However, one faces one practical and two principled
problems in favoring this analytical method. First, the practical problem: one risks
selection bias more than is necessary. If one already thinks creativity has mostly to do with
art, or acts, or objects, or geniuses, or genre-production, or problem-solving—if one starts
with a preconception like this, then it is possible one sharpens tools in too small a domain
or in the wrong domain entirely, because one sets to work in a single, rich domain and,
after all, finds oneself very busy. The first principled problem: on its own, analysis can at
best only clarify what we already think. The curious thing about analysis is that it cannot
reveal anything new, unless supplemented by additional skills of noticing and articulating
some element of the analysans with a direct reference. To take a silly analogy, I might
“analyze” a chair into the constitutive elements of the seat, legs, arms, and back. Each of
these elements will already have a sense because I am already familiar with them. Then I
might ask whether the arms are really necessary for the object’s being a chair, or I might
divide chairs into types (armchairs and non-armchairs) for the sake of clarity. But I would
not, for all of this analysis, have left the ambit of my familiarity. I would not have learned
anything. Consequently, we have a second principled problem: if I offer a single definition of a chair at this point, it cannot fail to be stipulated and motivated. I must use some obscure selection criterion to determine what counts as a chair in the “right” way. Something quite different happens if one accustomed to only non-armchairs encounters an armchair and seeks to make sense of it or if one analyzes an object and discovers an unaccountable remainder, like gaps in Mendeleev’s periodic table, or if one finds in the analysans additional features requiring careful descriptive work—for these are each a matter of unfamiliarity that calls for additional investigation. Different too is the case of analyzing a concept like freedom into positive and negative freedom, which is a matter more of drawing a distinction than decomposition. These cases show analysis to be a tool for thought and description, but not a replacement for it.\textsuperscript{23}

I cannot convince myself that any one method escapes all criticism, or even that the methods we have so far invented can perfectly complement each other. All investigations, for example, must start somewhere. Analysis is an important tool in investigation, and I often use the word to describe what I do.\textsuperscript{24} But if all we do, in the case of creative novelty, is delineate all the different senses of novelty with which we are already familiar and stipulate that one counts as creative novelty, then we will not have gone very far in our investigation. I, too, will have to ask that we call something specific creativity. But this comes later in the investigation and not from an overly obscure criterion for selection. I

\textsuperscript{23} I am not targeting all the figures mentioned above with this criticism, but rather larger or smaller parts of each one. The key is to realize that not all the philosophical work has been done once one offers an analysis.

\textsuperscript{24} I have not intended to deny the relevance of analysis in even the sense I have attacked. But I especially do not want to deny its importance in other senses, like in geometric analysis or in the Classical sense of simply “loosening up” a phenomenon, or even an everyday sense of tearing something apart to see how it works. In each of these cases, it remains important to notice that synthesis, some kind of insight, or additional tinkering is necessary to give the “analysis” its point.
seek to highlight a specific phenomenon, and whether one wishes to join me in calling it “creativity” is beside the point, for one would still have to call it *something*.

Another way of going wrong in investigating creativity, from my point of view, involves studying lots of different kinds of things called “creative” and, lacking a general formulation that would encompass them all, simply allows “creativity” to mean many things. Irving Singer is representative of this tactic:

...I make no attempt...to give a definition of the word *creativity*, or of the concepts that flock around it. The portmanteau language that we all use in this area does the work of communication in too many scattered ways for us to think that any single, rigorous, totalistic statement of necessary and sufficient conditions can account for every instance alike. ... What we need to clarify is how they may *overlap* and metaphorically *suggest* a resemblance to the creativity in one another. ... Trying for anything else is unneeded ... and could easily misrepresent the individual and inherently distinct phenomena that are involved.

I sympathize with the problems Singer notes. I agree that “creativity” and its analogs have achieved a degree of use that makes a coherent synthesis of conditions for their application unlikely. Unlike Singer, however, I have no temptation to credit every claim to creativity every time the claim is made. I agree with Singer that the effort to offer a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for creativity—a definition, on one view—would be difficult. But I argue that there is, in fact, a specific phenomenon at work in many “domains” of creativity, even if not in all the cases one wishes to call creative in every domain. The special difficulty involved in defining creativity relates to the phenomenon itself, and not the general problems involved in defining any complex term in a family of resemblances. I define creativity to be the capacity to introduce new ways of making sense. Clearly I will mean a lot by this formulation, and I will not be able to give necessary and sufficient conditions for

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25 Singer, Locations 308-312
identifying creative acts except in extremely controlled cases, but this formulation at least promises a way to integrate a great deal of creativity in diverse domains.

1.4.1.2 Value

The investigation of creative value reproduces some of the problems of creative novelty, and adds others. Some of these problems result from the stipulative character of the criterion of value. The complexity of values and their analysis, for instance, ensures that the stipulation makes little contribution to understanding many concrete cases, because value often seems relative to a perspective. By hypothesis, many creations possess only “subjective” value—say, one’s private, idiosyncratic thoughts recorded in a journal. Or a creation may possess social value, but lack subjective value. It seems that creations may possess intrinsic value, but lack utility, or vice versa, in the cases of artworks or new technology. In addition, some putative creations – for instance, propaganda techniques or the institution of slavery – have a dubious value. Finally, some thinkers have conceived of values themselves as created entities (cf. Nietzsche), as the identities created rather than a property of those identities. Unless a more specific theory of creative value is offered, its inclusion in the definition of creativity is liable to confuse rather than clarify matters. The challenge for an account of creative value is to specify precisely what the criterion of value amounts to.

Some take up this challenge. Carl Hausman, for example, argues that being as such has intrinsic positive value, and that therefore anything brought into being creatively possesses at least this value. This view implies that there can be no intrinsically negative (or evil) creations.26

26 Hausman, 44 ff.
I admire Hausman’s recognition of the problem—that one cannot simply stipulate the value of creativity. Nonetheless, I will not find his treatment sustainable. In my own treatment, I will find a bare minimum of constitutive value (chapter 4) for creativity, a value that is not clearly positive value. The important task is to introduce much more complexity into an account of the value of creativity, rather than simplify it through a stipulation or brief argument. I will argue that much of this complexity rests in the contribution creativity makes to the self and in the heightened form of creativity we find in value-creation.

1.4.2 Four Areas of Research: Agent, Process, Product, and Place

In addition to the investigation of novelty and value, a survey of creativity research indicates four typical areas of focus: the creative agent, the creative process, the creative product, and the creative place. For example, Freud investigates the creative agent as one whose psychological complexes express themselves in a work.27 Alternatively, many investigators have attempted to catalog particular traits of artistic or scientific geniuses to explain creativity.28 Second, Graham Wallas offers one of the first models of the creative process in 1926, proposing that creativity occurs in a series of five stages.29 More recently, Finke, Ward, and Smith have developed a model of the creative process emphasizing imaginative generation and exploration – the “Geneplore” model.30 Such models of the creative process abound in contemporary psychology. Third, a focus on products, put generically, looks at the results of creativity. In psychology, this can mean running an

27 See Freud, 1995. For a criticism of Freud's, see Singer, Location 814 ff.
28 Francis Galton (circa 1869) offered an early version of this approach.
30 Finke, 1992
experiment to see how many different associations one can generate given a prompt. In art, this can be studying an artwork for its creative merits. Clearly, this emphasis can go in many directions. Heidegger, for example, emphasizes the creative product (the artwork) almost exclusively, but in its manner of presentation as a created entity.\textsuperscript{31} Fourth, one may focus on contextual elements of \textit{place}, taken to range over physical location, social conditions, access to resources, and so on. Among philosophers, Nietzsche has perhaps given the most attention to \textit{place}, first in specific exhortations to shape one's local setting to support one's work, and, in a more attenuated sense, through investigating culture with an eye for conditions supporting excellence (creative excellence included).\textsuperscript{32} Finally, philosophical figures like Plato and Kant seem to discuss multiple aspects of creativity, focusing alternately on the agent, the process, and the product. Admittedly, one must do some interpretive work to understand them in quite these terms.

I mention these distinctions for the sake of comprehensiveness in registering some of the ways investigators have attended to creativity. In my own treatment of creativity, I give the concepts of the self and the created novelty greatest prominence, with minor emphases on process and place. The upfront delineation of research into these areas is liable to fall prey to the methodological problems mentioned above plus others. Note, for instance, that improvisational production in jazz or dance may require investigation in all four divisions, and perhaps the traditional divisions themselves need to be rethought in such cases. Or consider models of creative process stemming from descriptive psychology. That these models are possible should not be surprising, since, in their construction, one

\footnote{Heidegger, 2001, “The Origin of the Work of Art”}
\footnote{Nietzsche, 1997. The themes of creation and culture appear throughout Nietzsche’s work.}
begins with a set of cases one already assumes are creative and abstracts details from them until they appear to have similar stages or elements. Once constructed, any cases that disagree with the model are either reinterpreted to establish an agreement, offered as an exception to the rule, or dismissed as uncreative. Or they might be admitted as genuine counterexamples—like musical improvisation to the Five Stage model. But I do not know what the point is of offering this counterexample if it leads only to further revisions of the model. Both the model-construction and the admission of the counterexample are based in a prior sensitivity to what counts as a case of creativity, which continues to go unexamined.

I do not know that this problem can be entirely avoided, but it at least helps to be sensitive to it. I will offer details for specific phenomena, and my basic defense to phenomenological criticism must be either that I have ineptly described the phenomenon (which is a sorry defense) or that, whatever it is an objector is pointing to, it is not what I am pointing to. Once we overcome these issues, however, an objector succeeds if her phenomenon subsumes mine and offers greater insight into creativity. In this way, we argue about the basic sense of creativity and not the examples different senses illuminate, mediated prematurely by a theoretical model. The main point is to avoid narrowing one’s focus into one aspect of the phenomenon to quickly, and to the extent that I do this too, I expect my account to remain open to revision.

1.4.3 Basic Philosophical Positions

One’s broad philosophical orientation often implies a particular account of creativity. The most basic methodological division in studying creativity is between descriptive and explanatory approaches. A descriptive approach attempts to identify specific characteristics of creative agents, processes, products, or places, without
necessarily interpreting the characteristics in terms of a unified theory. Descriptive approaches focus on observation rather than interpretation, to the extent that this is possible. Explanatory approaches attempt to conceptualize creativity within a theory and in relation to other elements of philosophical or scientific systems. Such approaches are most distinct from descriptive approaches if they include prediction as a necessary feature of a successful explanatory theory.\(^{33}\)

Explanatory approaches include naturalism, rationalism, and supernaturalism. Here, naturalism is the view that reality, including all identities and events, is entirely law-governed and can be known through empirical investigation of the physical universe; minimally it rejects any claims to \textit{a priori} knowledge. On this view, creativity too must be well-ordered and intelligible in terms of natural law. Rationalism proposes that a set of rational principles explains reality, some of which may only be known \textit{a priori} (by reason alone, without reference to any empirical data). Finally, supernaturalism posits a principle of origination not governed by natural law. Any of these approaches attempt to explain reality in either of two ways: either deterministically or teleologically. On a deterministic view, the state of the universe temporally prior to the occurrence of some event is necessary and sufficient for the occurrence of that event. On the teleological view, a reference to future events, purposes, or rational necessities may be included in an explanation of an event. Both explanatory approaches suggest a system of necessities in terms of which creations must themselves be necessary, though the conception of necessity can vary considerably, say, between some determinist and teleological accounts. Without

\(^{33}\) Hausman (1984)
this creative necessity, creations are anomalies that weigh against the adequacy of the explanatory theory.

By contrast, one may insist that creativity cannot be fully explained, because creativity is essentially unprecedented, undetermined, or without necessity. On such a view, some aspects of creativity must remain inexplicable. At best, we can hope for a descriptive account, and perhaps creativity is not a proper object of inquiry at all.

One point should be made about these positions from the outset. If we start with any of them, we are likely discover a version of creativity that confirms our presuppositions. This is because we allow the positions to imply what creativity must be, and our understanding, as we already know, is susceptible to compensations and deprivations where they are artfully administered. I take a different approach to creativity, a phenomenological approach, with the aim of seeing what creativity can reveal for philosophical reflection, rather than what extant philosophy tells us creativity must be. Though I acknowledge that I, too, must make some presuppositions, I do not think they are the presuppositions that settle the extent to which creativity is explicable. I finish this chapter, then, by explaining what I mean by this approach.

1.5 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF CREATIVITY

The point so far has not been to develop a complete record of investigations into creativity, but rather to orient the discussion for effective transmission of my central view that creativity is an essentially phenomenological concept—a concept that finds in its adequate expression a necessary reference to direct experience.
Phenomenology, as I shall use the term, comprises two recognizably different strands—a primary and a secondary strand. The primary strand considers the respect in which all claims or assertions bear a relation to a perspective, and implies a fundamental philosophical position. The secondary position offers a more precise take on how one may concretely do work in phenomenology.

The primary strand finds its classical expression in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which records his view of the ordered transformations of consciousness as it manifests a variety of robust perspectives. Each stage of consciousness in Hegel’s work is given a philosophical articulation. Consciousness is interminably unsettled by its inability to satisfy its self-engendered criteria for verifying its claims in experience. For example, the claim of consciousness to be entirely determined by an external world of objects finds disconfirmation as the world varies with the contents of its concepts; the claim of consciousness to possess the power of constructing its own world of objects finds resistance in objects themselves when it tests this claim by trying to spontaneously varying their properties. Crucially, for Hegel, concepts like consciousness, subject, object, and experience possess shifting concrete referents, ending their restless quest for stability only in “Absolute Knowledge”—that stage of consciousness in which the subject sees itself in its object, and objects appropriately reflect the subject that beholds them. Perspectives are constantly self-relating, self-interrogating, and, until the final stage, self-defeating.

What I wish to extract from Hegel’s conception of phenomenology is its sheer extension. There is no getting out of phenomenology in Hegel's sense, because any possible claim that can be made takes form as an aspect of a perspective of consciousness. Perhaps this point is clearest when one makes a general claim like, (1) “experience is in no way
constitutive of being” or (2) “there is truth independent of perspective.” Properly understood, there may be no problem with these claims. But the phenomenologist may always point out that these claims only take form as an aspect of a perspective, and that phenomenological concepts of experience and perspective are of an entirely different order than those operating in the claims. A necessary condition for a claim is a claimant who seeks to understand her world in issuing the claim. Uttering (1) is one way of dealing with the demands for intelligibility one finds in a situation. Claim (2) must be offered from within a perspective in experience capable of understanding the claim, and it is this perspective that phenomenology investigates.

The second strand must be more specific about how to proceed. I claim that we do not get a substantive concept of experience and its structure except by means of description. Description, as a way of defining a concept, is orientational and ostensive. We are engaged in pointing to finer and finer discriminations of experience and what “shows up” in it. Thus, descriptive language in the first instance is intended to orient interlocutors (e.g. writer and reader) in a shared frame of signification. Orienting descriptions situate and prepare an audience for the reception of some phenomenon, and can therefore be either “literal” or “metaphorical” so long as their primary purpose is served. The purpose is to elicit a frame of mind in the audience, which should be fulfilled by some concrete experience. Understood this way, orienting language can just as well include poetry as traditional argumentation, analogical reasoning, and contrastive examples, but now subsumed under a common purpose.\(^{34}\) It is a matter of putting you in a place to see what I

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\(^{34}\) I interpret Heidegger (cf. *Being and Time*) as doing precisely this in of his use of some traditional arguments, which should be understood as subservient to his overall project of delineating phenomena. To be responsive to reasons and arguments is to be affected by them in a way that alters our receptivity. This
see. A second ostensive act serves to name the phenomenon that shows up, assuming one is verified by the audience, as in for example the phenomena of shape, color, time, or melody. Description takes place in a communicative practice in which participants, gradually and collectively, scope out the full experienced structure of some domain. Phenomenology, I submit, is founded upon the most general kind of this descriptive practice, concerned with what experience and meaning is for us in our way of being.

Though the most general, phenomenology is not our most familiar descriptive practice. It can be further understood on analogy with the concept of “taste” and practices that revolve around developing particular kinds of taste. In wine-tasting, for example, practitioners together sample wine and develop a descriptive language to scope out its full, salient features. Primarily, this is a matter of descriptive investigation, rather than the expression of preferences—i.e. it is a matter of disclosing properties (almond bitter, blueberry sweet) and their relations, rather than expressing one’s “subjective” preference. The descriptions aim at being comprehensive in their domain (wine), but subject to revision when contested by experts or by the introduction of new samples (new wines). The practice achieves a degree of coherence to the extent that practitioners achieve a shared descriptive language and develop these standards of revision. Every practitioner is engaged in enhancing the adequacy and integrity of the descriptions through a suitable amount of practice and exposure to enough samples, in the course of which they enrich their understanding of wine and the possibility for wine “appreciation.”

is not to say that all arguments serve in this way, even for phenomenologists. But, for Heidegger, in his analyses, “the issue is one of seeing a primordial structure of Dasein’s Being—a structure in accordance with whose phenomenal content the concepts of Being must be Articulated” (81).

Thus, descriptive practice is only one condition for a full account of taste, cf. Hume.
We might say the phenomenologist pursues a taste for experience. Every concept in his descriptive canon refers to a possible concrete experience that verifies it and provides its sense. The concept is a gateway to the phenomenon, and a phenomenological account seeks the concepts to elucidate experience in general. Without the particular philosophically significant results and additional argumentation added by the primary strand of phenomenology, however, phenomenology may remain no more (and no less) than merely taste. But even without these philosophical additions we can note what this practice yields. First, even if merely a matter of taste, phenomenology need not be an individualistic enterprise in which anything goes. Practitioners must engage with each other collaboratively and critically; results are always fallible and subject to revision. Phenomenology shares this feature with other taste-practices as well as with science, in its own way. Second, given its subject matter, phenomenology retains a “humanistic” import even if it loses its philosophical significance. Even if philosophy and science discredit the concept of experience, experience cannot discredit itself. This humanistic import lends a characteristic literary quality to some classic phenomenological texts, which is not irrelevant to their goal of enriching our appreciation for the richness of experience.

But phenomenology is not a mere taste-practice. There is a danger of importing too much from the analogy to taste, including a purported purely introspective basis—a matter of reporting subjective takes on “what something is like” in which potentially anything

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36 In the philosophy of mind, Daniel Dennett seems to hold a merely-taste view. In ethics, Alasdair Maclntyre discounts phenomenology (and conceptual analysis) on grounds that their results are historically contingent, and thus, as I will put it here, a matter of the taste of the times.

37 Sartre is the most perspicuous example here, who sought to embed phenomenology in literary works.
Phenomenological description and analysis is a version of existential philosophy, rather than empirical psychology, insofar as it concerns the general structures and conditions for experience and meaning, and the ways in which things exist for us. Moreover, it is not an existential subjective philosophy, because it investigates the contributions of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and objects without prejudice of priority. Introspection is an operation already situated within experience generally, as one of its modes, which can introduce error precisely because of its quality of presentation to an internal perspective. Indeed, introspection introduces the philosophical error, which much phenomenology has been concerned to overcome: the bald distinctions between isolated subjects, other minds, and independent objects. The importance of the claim that experience is “like something” is found in the structure it helps demonstrate: experience is self-intimating (internally related to itself), and meanings are typically embedded relationally among other meanings (likenesses). Whether a comprehensive investigation of what some particular experience (color, pain, time) “is like” yields a philosophically relevant result depends on the particular phenomenon under scrutiny and what in general can be gleaned from it. But phenomenology diverges from taste-practices, if by such practices one means an endless indulgence in “likenesses.” Phenomenology investigates what it is to like (and not what it is like to like). Phenomenology is not merely a survey of all possible phenomena and all possible experienced meanings. Rather, its investigations are focused on the phenomena

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38 Cf. Nagel. I regard Nagel as making a genuine contribution to phenomenology, but one that is easily misunderstood to be a focus on transient phenomenal experience, rather than on the general structures of experience that are verified in experience.

39 For more elaborate defense and explication of philosophical phenomenology, see Merleau-Ponty (Phenomenology of Perception, Preface and pg. 66ff.) and Zahavi (Subjectivity and Selfhood, Introduction).
most shared between us and constitutive of experience generally—e.g. time, space, identity, consciousness, intentionality, and perception. I will add creativity to this list.

In my use of the word “existential,” I hold a non-standard position. I describe phenomenology as “existential” with due consideration of the differences between Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, and Merleau-Pontian or Sartrian existential phenomenology. I accept the criticism of Husserl’s notion of “bracketing” or neutralizing of “the natural attitude”—the dominant attitude of metaphysical realism, or of a real mind-independent reality, which conditions both science and daily thinking. The existential criticism is that the natural attitude is just as much an aspect of how we engage or live through experience as the neutralized attitude—and probably more prominent an aspect; thus, to exercise bracketing can be artificial. Yet what I call “existentialism,” stems much more from the Hegelian primary strand of phenomenology and its extension than from a figure like Sartre. Existential phenomenology marks an orientation toward how, in what way of being, do we experience as we do or does our experience make the demands on us it does. Efforts to analyze, to explain, to argue, and even to describe are always rooted in more basic efforts to cope. Hence none can be ignored, but none can be excised from the being so ordered to make use of them.

Thus I have been trying to orient us toward what creativity really demands from us in order to understand it. This understanding is not found in scattershot attempts at compensation or deprivation of understanding, in frantic or fixated analysis, in models and modes of creativity, or in starting from systematic philosophical positions. What is creativity? Each of these starting points conceal the background perspective that gives rise
to the question we care about in a flurry of presuppositions and busy-work. What we crave is the phenomenology of creativity, one that locates the heart of the phenomenon and holds onto it as long as possible. One must keep in mind that this basic orientation to the creativity question guides my work, sometimes in the background, and usually in the foreground.
CHAPTER 2
MEANING—CREATIVITY IN CHANGING OUR WORLD

Imagine four people arguing about a recent science fiction film. The first claims that the film is hackneyed and conventional, a copy of themes and plots about indigenous people, technology, and scarce resources found in earlier fiction, veiled by special effects. The second claims the film takes a conventional theme, but executes it with greater clarity and refinement than earlier fiction—it shows improvement. The third argues that, though rooted in convention, the film develops new implications from earlier premises or new depths of meaning—it shows progress. The fourth, however, claims some specific new insight achieved in the film, advancing connections between scarcity and power relations irreducible to previous efforts in the genre—it shows creativity. In this case, the defender of creativity is at a distinct disadvantage, for any description of a new insight must be made in terms familiar to her interlocutors, and from conventional terms usually come conventional insights.

But the situation is worse for creativity than a problem of communication. Recognizing something to be a creative achievement requires us to do something seemingly impossible. First, how could one even recognize something to be novel? If we assume that the meaning we experience in a situation is what we are familiar with, that we read a situation through the lens of what we have mastered in our past, then there is a puzzle about how anything could fall into cognition simultaneously outside our conventional means of cognition. Second, how could new things be anything other than discoveries—making what is implicit in one’s conventions explicit or drawing all the implications of
conventional premises? Even if we accept that some inquiry or progressive learning is possible, this progress must, it seems, be made fully on grounds of what we find familiar. Third, even if we could recognize something unfamiliar, disconnected from our mastered and conventional meanings, how could it be anything but nonsense, oddity, or aberration? Without this connection with past meaning, there could be no integration into the world of meaning we already have.

These problems can be put more precisely by considering Meno’s classic Paradox, as expressed by Socrates: “man cannot enquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he has no need to enquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about which he is to enquire.” On one hand, there is an equivocation in the paradox as it applies to a posteriori knowledge. A simple assertion like, “I don’t know whether the café is open past nine” denies the paradox in this sense. Sometimes one can know what one does not know, and can find out something new by following a method of investigation. However, both the assertion and the means one might use to gain knowledge are familiar and conventional; an unconventional question or hypothesis can strike us as creative precisely because the means to answering or proving it are equally unfamiliar. But this latter idea must be pursued cautiously. Even an unusual question like “supposing teleportation is possible, where is the first place you would go?” invites more plumbing into the meanings one already has than the creation of new meaning; it typically improves the explicit clarity of where one already stands. The question can take one to new places in one’s thinking, but does not for that reason introduce a new

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40 Meno (80d-e), Jowett translation. Plato’s solution to this problem, for example, is his Doctrine of Recollection—i.e. the denial that we “learn” anything, but rather recollect it.
way of thinking. On the other hand, Plato takes the paradox seriously as a threat to non-empirical knowledge. His Doctrine of Recollection is intended to defend _a priori_ knowledge, which is always available as an object or means of knowing, even if implicit or concealed. Even if Plato’s (or someone else’s) defense of _a priori_ knowledge is successful, however, this does nothing for creativity, because if what we mean by creativity is the uncovering of _a priori_ knowledge, then nothing new is actually created, but only progressively disclosed and articulated. The peculiar “knowledge” involved in creativity, by contrast, exists in a no-man’s-land between the _a posteriori_ and the _a priori_, allowing no reduction to previous experience or disclosure among some pre-existing ground of being, objective reality, or set of Forms. Meno’s Paradox finds its easiest victim in creativity, a phenomenon that, if it is thoroughly _a posteriori_, cannot seem to make the traditional rejoinder, and if it is thoroughly _a priori_, does not seem particularly different from _a priori_ intuition.

Despite these problems, I contend that through creative acts one introduces novel meaning for oneself and for others. _Meaning_, in this context, is the most basic, the most generic, medium for creative activity—in fact, the medium of all intelligible activity. Meaning is that about experience that is coherent, connected, intelligible, purposive, or identifiable. It includes all those things for which we can have positive concern and with which we may be involved. When we create genuinely new meaning, we create something different from previous meaning. My aim is to show how this can be. I describe how meaning is organized and limited in a world, and how certain kinds of meaningful change require creativity. Dealing in abstractions with the concept of meaning, however, will not do. I prioritize an investigation of changes in the way we relate to each other and our world, typically called social, historical, or cultural change. Such change is exemplified in change
resulting from the work of a figure like Martin Luther King Jr. or in the introduction of a new product or service that changes how we do and understand our everyday activities. It is necessary to focus on specific forms of change in order the understand how meaningful change can be understood to be continuous with our world while including a great deal of underlying discontinuity of a different kind, with which only creativity can deal.

2.1 THE ONTOLOGY OF WORLDS AT A MOMENT

Those who tend to focus on a world of largely practical and prudential concern—social, political, economic, or technological concerns, for example—will be sensitive to the claim that the world is changing and we contribute to this change. The experience of change reflects a shift in our involvement with familiar practices, objects, values, and each other. At any time, the deficiency of this involvement affects our sense of the world as something coherent, reliable, and meaningful. In encountering this deficiency in the working of our familiar world, we undertake a re-working of its elements, to change it. We initiate political causes, start businesses, and invent technology to solve problems of one kind or another. This change proceeds against a background of a meaningful world, which organizes meaning in ways one can easily miss either because it is so familiar that one takes it for granted or because one’s dominant concern is with unchanging principles. To appropriately recognize change, we need a set of distinctions that make the features of worlds and types of change more explicit. Here I present the ontology of worlds according to which we can build a sensitivity to creative change.

Heidegger’s account of “worldhood” in Being and Time roughly inspires my offering here, along with significant contributions from the work of Hubert Dreyfus in his
extensions of Heidegger’s work. However, I believe this account is sufficiently different to require its own direct exposition.

A world refers to a set of interrelated practices supporting a relatively coherent, self-standing way for one to cope with oneself, others, and things. Abstractly, worlds appear against a background of an environment—all those elements of experience that appear approximately to be useless, purposeless, or outside the range of human concern. The environment is not a nothing. It is relatively meaningless, in the sense that it means less and bears little relevance to our everyday ways of coping. The abstract picture of a background environment and foreground world, however, misses how we actually see an environment only through a world of concern. The concept of waste for example applies to those things we no longer have anything to do with; this is the environment appearing at the edges of our purposive activity.41 Nature, as an aspect of the environment, appears very differently than mere waste in most cases. It displays its “environmentality,” its separation and independence from human concern, even as we carve into it or encircle it with our worlds or express concern for preserving it. For example, we build farms and cities even while protecting parks, which gives us a sense of the environment in the midst of our worlds. But nature and waste share a status at the fringe of a world, providing its basic inputs and outputs.

Practices are the basic units of organization in a world, arranging resources, equipment, purposes, and skills into groups that reinforce and sustain themselves, while

41 I mean waste as a substantive noun here. Examples include the pile of waste scraps of lumber after a carpentry project or the toxic waste of a nuclear power plant. The waste a lumber company sees in not clear cutting a forest is an entirely different phenomenon. And calling scraps of wood one burns for fuel “waste” is conventional; in this case, the ashes are the waste. We do have to cope with waste, but not because we positively value it, but rather because we want to get rid of it—to have it not exist.
linking with other practices. To become an input, a world must coopt its environment into resources; and as an “input” waste and nature may be treated similarly, because both lose their environmentality by being coopted into a world—they adopt a human purpose. Equipment includes the tools and instruments with which we work. Purposes are the ends of our activities. And skill indicates the operations and abilities one must master and execute to link equipment with a purpose. For example, one may use an ax (a tool) to chop wood (a resource) in order to build a fire (a purpose), but skill is required to split the wood and spark the flame.

By engaging in a practice or practices that constitute a world, one embodies an identity or set of identities—e.g. a carpenter. These identities constitute one's meaningful relation to a world. In everyday language, worlds roughly approximate cultures, and subworlds roughly approximate subcultures. So we speak of the Western world, the business world, or the world of philosophy.

Everyday experience in a world is directly meaningful and solicits us to act in specific ways. First, for example, everyday identities do not normally first show up to be bundled properties, compositions, or mere stuff of some kind, only to be interpreted as a thing. I do not see an elongated mass of metal with a large end, then interpret it as a hammer. Rather, I directly encounter a hammer. Second, the identities we encounter solicit our involvement with them in contextually-sensitive ways. The hammer appears to be the tool for the job of pounding in a nail. The long sidewalk appears to be a place to walk to a park. Something is meaningful in this way when it is part of the arrangement of a

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42 I do not deny that a “thing”—a mass of metal—is meaningful. The point is that we do not experience an intermediate act of interpretation on masses of metal to compose the meaning of a hammer.
practice. That is, the character of one’s encounter with a thing and the relations we expect between identities depend on the practices we engage in and bring to bear on a situation. Everyday carpentry practice enables an assortment of equipment and resources to show up as the things they are, related to specific tasks and purposes, and requiring skill in their use. To someone without carpentry experience, however, objects like custom jigs or planes, or the difference between walnut and hickory, are insufficiently understood. The carpenter encounters that wood, in a tree, to be a resource for a table; for an ecologist, it may be an element in a complex system showing up within scientific practice. Hence, what we encounter depends on the practices we engage in, whether carpentry or ecology. We live in concrete worlds of meaning delivered to us by the developments of the past. Even a custom jig does not appear to be a waste, so much as someone else’s equipment. We normally have enough mastered sense of our world to cope with a huge variety of situations and achieve sufficient coherence and meaning within them.

People, too, are typically encountered on the basis of our practices. People show up in specific roles, which mediate the ways in which one relates to them, whether it is a teacher, parent, or salesperson. Personal relationships with individuals are no doubt more complicated to characterize. But under normal conditions, even our most valued personal relationships depend on a complex of practical involvements. Friends labor or play together in shared activities. Romantic relationships follow certain patterns if they are to count as romance.

One may object to this account so far on grounds that it exhibits a questionable cause for meaning--cum hoc ergo propter hoc. Meaning on my view, one might charge, spontaneously accompanies organized practices; love or friendship is merely the result of
organized behavior. Were this view correct, then meaning would be fixed in place by the practices we happen to have. For example, a wrench could sensibly be used for nothing but turning nuts were that the only possible meaning for the object as dictated by a mechanic’s practice. But I am not contending for a view that makes practices sufficient for meaning. Rather, though practices are necessary for ordering meaning into mutually shared, relatively stable meanings, they do not constitute meaning itself. Indeed the fact that an object may be taken up in a new, creative specification depends on a background of involvement richer than the foreground of practical ordering and a capacity to introduce new meaning. When a wrench becomes a hammer, a toilet an artwork, or a salesperson a friend, we see changes to the typical ordering enforced by a practice. Practices set constraints on meaning, channels for everyday shared intelligibility, but these constraints may be broken. They are like the heuristics of chess, rather than its rules.

We further see the separation between meaning and practice by recognizing that worlds can be systematically analyzed into two aspects, their effective or instrumental aspect and their meaningful or valuable aspect. Imagine a quasi-world inhabited only by robots that, by hypothesis, lack meaningful experience. Following their programming, they might gather and consume resources, reproduce, and perpetuate their existence indefinitely. This world includes tools, resources, tasks, skills, and identities, but each in only an effective arrangement. A factory full of robots manufacturing car parts is a more

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43 I contrast my view here, for example, with Dreyfus, et al. (1997, pg. 29; henceforth DNW): ‘What gets covered up [by] common sense in everyday understanding is that the ultimate “ground” of intelligibility is simply shared practices—that there is no right way of doing things.’ In many cases, I would agree that that there is no one right way of doing things, but I do not agree that existence offers nothing by way of basic constraints, which may even be winnowed to a single “right” way of doing or thinking something in some cases.

44 See worthwhile discussions on meaning from Mark Johnson (2007) and Eugene Gendlin (1962).
familiar example; here the activity within the factory achieves meaning only in relation to
the human world. A quasi-world including meaning and value, but lacking effectiveness, is
harder to imagine. A world that consumes all its resources, for example, still has an
instrumental arrangement, even if in-effective. Perhaps religious conceptions of Heaven or
Nirvana offer the best representation, in being undifferentiated and static in their
arrangement of what exists, in which actions no longer have consequences and objects no
longer have constraints in the way they do for us. Conspiracy theories serve as more
familiar examples, at least on analogy. As theoretical constructions, conspiracy theories
purport to offer explanations for experience based on general principles, but since the
theories are typically so constructed to be unfalsifiable by any possible evidence, they need
never adapt to a new situation or develop new sensitivities to experience. The effective
organization of a world is in direct intercourse with the concrete resistance offered by
existence; the quasi-world of meaning untethered to any effective organization lacks any
resistance to the meanings it perpetuates. In a world, therefore, both the effective and
meaningful aspects must be considered jointly.

Practices relate to each other in the way they are effectively organized or
meaningfully coordinated. The organization and coordination of a world are
interdependent, in the simple sense that each requires the other. But, first, organizations
typically afford multiple meanings and, second, meaningful engagement can remain
constant across effective organizations. Take the first case. Driving practices require
drivers, cars, roads, and rules—i.e. an organization. But, as Dreyfus, et al. point out in
*Disclosing New Worlds* (henceforth, “DNW”), the way we drive can vary from aggressive
driving to defensive or leisurely driving. Driving varies in its meaning. What one notices and cares about as an aggressive driver is how one can pass the next car. A leisurely driver notices and cares about the surrounding landscape, say, the new house being built in one’s neighborhood. In the second case, changing driving laws so that everyone must drive on the left-hand side (in the United States) would change the organization of driving practices considerably without changing its meaning. There would still be aggressive and leisurely drivers under this new arrangement.

Let’s extend this example. The addition of self-driving cars to the road would likely lead to a change in the meaning of driving. One way to understand the claim that the meaning of driving could change recognizes the change as a shift in the way the practice is coordinated with other practices. Following DNW, I refer to the different ways practices in a world fit together as styles. That is, practices are coordinated on the basis of a style, which provides one kind of continuity between many practices. For example, the aggressive style finds a focus equally well in driving and in playing basketball, and different situations become familiar on the basis of a style. A competitive athlete will find the elements of competition and teamwork involved in business familiar. By contrast, a writer without the significant development of a competitive style may find the cutthroat competition involved in publishing foreign and jarring. Style, on this view, provides the basis for a shift in the meaning of a practice. The overall style typical of transportation with a horse was regulation—one had to participate with a horse as an independent creature in order to travel successfully. The overall style relevant for driving a car has been one of control, where a vehicle responds immediately to one’s direction. The style of automation so far has

45 DNW, 21
been marginal with respect to driving (e.g. automated climate control). To make this style central to driving would affect not only the organization of driving, but also how one meaningfully engages in the activity. Just as nurturing a relationship no longer made much sense in the shift from horses to vehicles, aggressive driving could no longer make much sense with automated vehicles, because, by hypothesis, it would find no outlet but in the marginal act of honking a horn.

A snapshot of a world, as specified so far, looks as follows (Figure 1):
Figure 1
I intend the difference in relative size between practices to indicate the centrality or marginality of a practice. The centrality of a practice may be taken in two ways. First, a practice may be central if it is shared by many people in a world, organizing a large amount of shared activity. Voting in a democratic culture, for example, periodically becomes central; dining practice using a fork and spoon is pervasive in the Western world, though not completely dominant. I call this kind of centrality *shared centrality*. Second, a practice may be central for a single person or group of people if it organizes much of their personal activity. For example, the carpenter’s central practice of carpentry is not shared with many others, but it is central for her. Call this *personal centrality*. The marginality of a practice has similar variation, and indeed a practice like eating with chopsticks may be simultaneously personally central and marginally shared. Nonetheless, one’s facility in navigating a world normally gives one an additional global sensitivity to how one’s practices stand in relation to others. The carpenter does not expect everyone to practice carpentry, and conventional Western diners do not expect everyone to eat with a fork and spoon.

Styles, as we see, provide a network of additional organization for navigating practices. Some groups of practices, like driving, can accommodate multiple styles. Other groups resist meaningful engagement on the basis of some styles. A style of egalitarianism, for example, meets resistance in extending driving privileges to pre-teens. In most cases, it will not even occur to one to direct this style toward resistant practices; ‘driving for all’ will not show up in experience to be a central example of what one means by egalitarianism.

In principle, one might live one’s entire life within one snapshot of a world. If the world is relatively simple, with many shared practices meeting a group’s extant concerns, ways for channeling all the available styles into these practices, few environmental
challenges, and little conflict with other worlds—one’s life is a continuous circuit of conventionality, of “what one does,” with all its coherence and shared meaning.

The key phenomenon that drives one’s integration into such a world is familiarity. One is familiar with the everyday practices one engages in and their accompanying styles. And in encountering a new situation, one draws on familiar styles to help coordinate practices, to make sense of them. Because others are like us on average, with most of the same familiarities, whether marginal or central, we can make shared sense of our experience. In general, I call such familiarity positive familiarity, because it is a familiarity that presupposes the contribution of past experience, mastered skills, values, purposes, and other forms of meaningful engagement to make sense of how one copes in the world.

2.2 THE ELEMENTS OF FAMILIARITY

To enrich this picture, and give some initial indication of its limitations, we need to understand the limits of familiarity of the kind already described. Positive familiarity, I contend, comes of different kinds, one general kind, and one requiring a consecutive development to achieve. Moreover, I contend for the phenomenon of negative familiarity, which is crucial to understanding creative change.

Things are familiar either implicitly or explicitly. The difference is captured well in the difference between taking one’s form of life for granted versus not taking it for granted. For example, one can take one’s home or a garbage service for granted, but these elements of one’s life typically become more explicit during a house fire or worker strike. Reflection, reading science fiction novels, or visiting foreign countries can also induce an explicit sense of one’s own practices, as when one returns home from abroad and notices, for the first
time, that one has been living differently from others elsewhere—in everything from the
design of homes and cars to how one shows respect or concern for others. But in less
totalizing circumstances, something is more explicit when one just looks for or at it, like
when one looks for a hammer rather than just using a hammer.

A second distinction appears in our familiarity with the effective and meaningful
aspects of our world. I have already described practices as arrangements of purposes,
equipment, and skills, but clearly we do not enter into this world already immersed in
practices—we require a period of development into them, which reveals alternative kinds
of familiarity. I use Alasdair MacIntyre’s definitions of a practice as a starting point for
making this claim:

By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially
established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that
form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards
of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of
activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human
conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.\textsuperscript{46}

The crucial elements of this definition are clear: cooperation, internal goods, standards of
excellence, and the extension of human powers are all necessary for practices. Practices
develop over time with changing goals and standards in the interactions of many
individuals who contribute to them. This rules out solitary or individual pursuits or
activities in which there is no social context in which the individual is accountable. Also, the
requirement that human ends and powers be extended rules out merely technical skills
counting as practices, though these will certainly be incorporated into them.

\textsuperscript{46} MacIntyre, 187
On this account, activity is regulated by the motivating power of two kinds of goods, external and internal. External goods are intelligible and desirable across a wide variety of practices, without reference to any one in particular, and include such things as money, power, influence, prestige, and material wealth. Simple sustenance—a full belly—can count among external goods. Such goods are often defined by scarcity, and are thus necessarily differentially distributed among persons—i.e. being famous or rich depends in part on the existence of non-famous and poor people. Internal goods, by contrast, arise only within a specific practice, through one’s engagement in it, and are typically inclusive rather than exclusive. For example, a child first learning to play chess may be motivated by the prospects of receiving candy (an external good) for his participation. Through a long development in the practice, however, he is likely to develop a commitment to chess that no longer requires the external motivation. Instead, the child enjoys the game itself. Note that the instrumental or effective aspects of his engagement in the practice do not change in this transition, but only his sense of what makes the activity important.

Positive familiarity, then, has a common basis for many practices in the external goods in which all practices trade, and on which they depend. In pursuit of money or a full belly, an inexhaustible number of behaviors can make limited sense in a world. Nonetheless, there is a richer familiarity that is not so easily generalized, intrinsic to the practices in which we engage. It would be easy to dismiss the internal goods of portrait painting (MacIntyre’s example) for lack of the development required to achieve them. It is easy not to “get” what others get from golf or philosophy or accounting for lack of serious exposure to the practices. Internal goods, therefore, are less accessible to those outside the practices that embody them.
Importantly, however, one’s identity can only be formed on the basis of internal goods. This is because, first, only internal goods are self-sufficient and satisfying in themselves in a way that can sustain a robust sense of self. Internal goods are experienced immediately in one’s activity, to be directly embodied aspects of an achieved identity. External goods, by contrast, are mediated by an extra relation of possession or desire. A person realizes internal goods, and only possesses external goods; internal goods contribute to self-worth, while external goods contribute to external wealth. External goods serve as a specific desired goal in a way internal goods cannot, because internal goods are not actually appreciated unless they are attained. One can strive for more internal goods, but this striving takes the form of more, deeper, and increasingly masterful engagement in the practice. Second, external goods are essentially instrumental, and are often general in their application to many possible practices.\textsuperscript{47} Internal goods, by contrast, are specific, concrete, and intelligible achievements in the context of a practice. Thus internal goods are local and actual, while external goods relate only to further possibilities among which one must select. Hence, while positive familiarity ranges across both internal and external goods, only internal goods contribute to one’s identity.

This account is complicated by the fact that one can form an identity, with its internal goods, while working with typical external goods. Examples of this phenomenon include investors and administrators. A less complimentary example is a miser. The point here is that external resources like money can be involved in a practice, not just as an enabling condition, but also as the medium for a practice. An investor experiences loss in

\textsuperscript{47} Whether or not an external good has broad application depends on its particular features. Currency, for instance, is general by design to serve in the exchange of many resources; candy, on the other hand, is typically used in one way.
bad deal in roughly the same way as a chess grandmaster losing a game—a personal, rather than monetary, loss. For the consummate investor, wealth simply means something different than it does for others.

To give them proper names, let us call the kinds of positive familiarity one can have with respect to external and internal goods external familiarity and internal familiarity. These goods identify the way one finds one’s familiar activities valuable. But the difference in types of familiarity also indicates important aspects of how we deal with the effective organization of our activities. Take bicycling as an example. One biker might ride a bike to get to work, and another might ride a bike for the love of biking. Both bikers are fully competent and they basically share the same instrumental arrangement in a world. But one engages externally and the other internally. And we can make two points based on this difference. First, both may be inventive in bicycling based on their engagement, though the meaning of invention differs. Suppose each invents a gear system to increase speed. One does so primarily to get to work faster—and if it is not fast enough, he may find a moped to substitute for biking. The other invents primarily to further develop and refine the internal goods of biking. Second, the epistemological status of these bikers differs in ways that cut across typical distinctions between implicit and explicit knowledge or (a different distinction) knowledge-that and knowledge-how. One biker’s way of knowing his activity includes its instrumental relations to other activities and its substitutability among the constitutive features of the activity. The other biker holds these features to be accidental. I mark this difference with a nonstandard distinction between extrinsic knowledge and intrinsic knowledge. The possession of this knowledge is not exclusive for single person, but intrinsic knowledge is typically prioritized when it is achieved—that is, one typically acts
for the sake of the activity and its goods, understanding its features to be non-substitutable, when that way of relating to the activity is possible.

In the snapshot world in which one can live one’s entire life, we must posit a great deal of shared internal familiarity. Identities, though variegated to some extent, nonetheless include enough overlap within such a world that members of the world can appreciate the value of different identities. If we imagine a tribal world, for example, we need not posit an impassible gulf of understanding between the novice hunter and the chief. And even in a world like ours, we can point to an extraordinary amount of internal familiarity. We find ourselves concerned with many of the same things and sharing a recognition of what counts as excellence and achievement. For example, the extreme devotion of a practitioner to her practice can often provide the material for a cultural icon—an exemplar for how the possibilities of a practice are enlarged, who serves as a model for others. The master carpenter shows how some simple tools and an unpromising pile of scraps can be worked into a functional object; the master football quarterback develops a distinctive way to play the game, which stimulates the admiration of football enthusiasts.

There are limits to internal familiarity, however, even within a shared world. One has already been mentioned in the inaccessibility of internal goods. In this respect I note that, regardless of the appreciation involved in recognizing a cultural icon, there is nonetheless a difference between the goods realized by the icon and the goods recognized by voyeurs. Football enthusiasts and spectators achieve only a limited understanding of their heroes, or, at least, they achieve an understanding on the basis of their distinct practice of voyeurism.

But I must also turn attention more directly to the styles that coordinate practices and enable a transfer of meaning from one situation to another. The simple picture of
entering a situation and finding it familiar on the basis of a style is typically far more complicated. First, the familiar expression of a style in a situation or group of practices often itself depends on one’s development within the practice. A competitive athlete, for example, may easily miss the competitiveness involved in a spirited intellectual debate, or especially the trading of blows in academic journals. Even if necessary, the possession of a shared style is rarely sufficient for enabling familiarity in any but the most everyday situations.

But positive familiarity with a specific style is often even unnecessary. Consider a singular or genuinely new style as seen in something like contemporary social media. The style afforded by social media is extremely complex, but includes the amplification, minimally, of constant contact with others, control of one’s image and the possibility of anonymity (in one sense), the constant risk of losing control of one’s image and increasing the disclosure of “private” information (in another sense), the possibility and expectation of instant information, and the reduction of the importance of physical proximity, contact, and shared activity.\footnote{By “shared activity” I mean mutually enacted activity—e.g. friends building a cabin together—rather than sharing information (e.g. sending my friend a picture of me building a cabin).} We see the difference this style makes when a person expects constant updates from some friend on a trip, who does not sit through a meeting without checking communications irrelevant to the meeting, or who no longer cares to conceal a “personal” life from observation by strangers; this style is then focused through an invention like a smartphone, which becomes an object of great concern, because, if lost or broken, the goods afforded by social media practice are unattainable.
Now we should note that this social media style is singular. It bears no reduction to earlier styles without remainder—it is a synthesis. We know this because it is not possible to understand, to “get,” the style, based on any one traditional style. From the outside, one may have no idea what satisfaction a person gets from broadcasting his evening meal over social media, as if anyone cares. Even someone who grasps this sharing element of the social media style in a traditional way can nonetheless largely misunderstand its nuances—corporate culture, for example, misread social media to be a way to share “information” about products and services, and few people cared because this is not what sharing means in social media. If one enters into the practice of social media rigidly on the basis of only those styles with which one already has some development, however remote, one will never find one’s way to embodying or appreciating the new social style, because it is not completely adoptable on the basis of any of these specific styles. One can encounter social media on the basis of some style or other, but must be ready to abort or modify it in response to new demands. The experience of adopting this style is much more like that of achieving goods internal to a practice. One begins by mimicking behavior, doing what others do, developing ever finer discriminations of appropriate behavior; remaining open to additional opportunities to act on one’s developing skills, gradually fleshing out the coherence and integration of one’s new style in fuller life. One moves, in this case, from an external relation to the practice (“my boss is making me use social media”) to a deft execution of skill and achievement supportive of internal goods. One’s continued reliance on external goods or the insistence that earlier styles make sense of the new social media style will only distort and undermine one’s achievement of internal goods and full integration into the practice. In this case, previous styles are only heuristics and scaffolding;
they do not provide any constitutive basis for familiarity. Familiarity of this kind lies above the person, to be achieved, not below in the spent developments of a past.

What, then, is the difference between a singular style and the internal goods of a practice? One might argue that they converge at a point, and are inseparable. But this is not the case. Though one gets distinctive internal goods from participating in social media, for example, the style one develops has a new broader application. The style is precisely what becomes transferable to a new situation. One with a dominant style of social media may be less sensitive to corporate collections of personal data that others see to be violations of privacy; the act of data-collection does not show up to be a relevant example of violation. The Modernist style in art, to take another example, brings a high-level coherence to a broad range of artwork. Picasso and Frank Lloyd Wright, for instance, both participate in a style of geometrical clarity. But one would not confuse the specific practices of painting with those of architecture. The point, then, is not that such singular styles remain permanently bound only within a narrow set of practices, like internal goods, but rather that some sets of practices afford newly minted styles, newly available for coordinating other practices.

By acknowledging such singular styles, we get the first hint of the necessity for creativity in understanding change in a world. Such new styles, I argue, typically develop, not on the basis of shared coherence, but rather in response to shared incoherence. We must invert the world of positive familiarity to recognize the phenomenon of negative familiarity.

Our practices are often poorly organized and coordinated. First, practices exist with genuine dependencies on the material world. Because of this, they compete with each other.
They break down. They conflict. Their resources run out. Skillful manipulations of resources lead in opposed directions. Second, our values often seek a middle ground that does not necessarily exist or has not been realized. Third, the intelligibility of an object, a practice, or a world remains inaccessible to any of the styles one brings to them. So, for example, some practices consume inordinate amounts of resources (fossil-fuel consumption), and are therefore unsustainable; some high-risk practices (derivatives trading) are destructive to other practices; and some practices are simply contradictory (democratic versus technocratic rule) at the level of functionality. Many of the styles by which we coordinate our lives lead us to face difficult choices in contingent circumstances, for instance a simultaneous allegiance to pacifism and patriotism in a time of war. In yet other cases, our environment challenges us with its destructive power or with the waste we have produced.

Those are major cases. The more minor, everyday cases occur with greater or lesser explicit articulation. One’s relationship with old friends sours. One cannot find enough time to get all one’s work done. One cannot find a way to mince garlic efficiently. One keeps cutting oneself shaving. The air in one’s city is noxious with pollution. One cannot get a good cell phone signal in the country. This generalized *one* indicates that these might be problems for anybody. But such problems could also be intensely personal, singularly appearing in one person’s life.

Such problems mark the limits of our well-organized, well-coordinated world. We possess a negative familiarity with problems every bit as rich as our positive familiarity—central and marginal, personal and shared, implicit and explicit, internal and external. To clarify, I focus on the simple distinction between positive and negative familiarity.
When one copes on the basis of positive familiarity, one draws on one’s past experience. Skills, values, and knowledge are brought to bear on occurrent experience flexibly, to recognize variations in situations and adapt to them. When problems appear, we typically draw on our background of familiarity to help us find a solution. Take a simple puzzle:

What word, when pronounced **right** is wrong, and when pronounced **wrong** is right.

With some thought, one will likely provide the solution, “wrong.” And if I stipulate that “wrong” is not the correct answer—or that there is another correct answer—one will likely arrive at another solution, “left.” In addressing this kind of puzzle, one draws on the knowledge and sensitivities to meaning developed in the past to address the present. *Wrong*, as used in the sentence, gets quite a different sense, depending on whether one navigates to the first or the second solution. But most people will see a way for each solution to bring its own kind of resolution to the puzzle. In everyday life, though there is a diversity of styles, skills, and values, the generic way we deal with new situations is not much different from how we solve the puzzle. We take up a situation initially on the basis of the most perspicuous meanings, and if something from our mastered past contributes to coping in the situation, and we are able to call on it, then we bring this past familiarity into the situation.

Most everyday problems we encounter are easily solvable on the basis of this positive familiarity. Even the puzzle above just loses its puzzling quality as we dig in, so to speak, to meanings we already know. As a problem becomes explicit, we typically have an immediate sense of a solution and move toward it in the most promising direction. If there is no milk in the fridge, we go to the store or make a list. If there is no more milk at the
store, the proprietor places an order from a supplier, and we temporarily do without. This is the everyday working of a familiar world, in all its complexity, which we typically just take for granted. And these are not the problems I mean to indicate with negative familiarity.

Suppose I ask whether the words in bold in the puzzle above are used or mentioned, assuming the technical use/mention distinction. The question is a bit nettlesome, as indicated, for example, by the deficiencies of any of the sentences:

1. ‘Right’ is pronounced ‘right’.
2. Right is pronounced right.
3. Right is pronounced ‘right’.
4. ‘Right’ is pronounced right.

The first and second fail to indicate the different meanings in the terms; the third and fourth make odd claims using the referent of ‘right.’ Perhaps a fully satisfying analysis is possible, but the point is that, in addressing this new question, one senses the inadequacy of what one takes for granted about grammar or the simple use/mention distinction—by digging into the meanings, one encounters a disconnect between them. One detects that some modification to how we think will have to be achieved—a new thought or distinction or notation. Some work has to be done, and some change has to be made. In this case, we have to think the thought that some uses of a word are self-referential (i.e. the word-as-pronounced), or perhaps that we use some mentions or mention some uses.

Again, despite the variety of forms of life in a world, there is a generic description for sensitivity to these kinds of problems, which I call negative familiarity, a sensitivity to the limits of our everyday world. So, when using a garlic press, one might detect that there must be a better way, or at least want a better way. Or many might want fast, cheap, sustainable transportation from Los Angeles to New York, but have little idea how that
might be achieved with what we have invented so far. At one time, we had little idea how to explain micro-physical behavior, because Newtonian physics could not do the job. The key point is that limitations to our meaningful experience and disconnects between meanings circumscribe our world, and indeed cut right through it, and that we are often sensitive to these limitations. Only the most conventional people—or, in another sense, people in the most self-contained worlds—fail to see at least some of the limitations of the worlds they inhabit.

Negative familiarity is formed on the basis of our positive familiarity. It is the detection of limits. Thus, negative familiarity is not identical with unfamiliarity. To be unfamiliar with a text, for example, is to have never read it before; to be positively familiar with a text is to have read it; to be negatively familiar with a text is to have read it and discovered where it makes little sense. When one encounters an interpretation, however, that makes new sense of the text, which establishes connections previously unappreciated, one moves from unfamiliarity to familiarity with the interpretation, while losing one’s negative familiarity with the original text. In this way, one’s way of thinking about the text is changed. This is the basic structure I propose for how creative change is introduced, at once different from the positive familiarity and continuously addressing shared negative familiarity. I turn now to a closer examination of change.

2.3 CHANGE IN A WORLD

A world of stability and unchanging coherence is rare. Such a world represents a strong integration of practices and styles, little provocation from other worlds, and little sensitivity to problems one might work to correct. Most worlds, by contrast, have a history
of change. Indeed, worlds are the proper subject of historical change, where a history is neither a record of events in sequence—“one damn thing after another”—nor an unchanging state of affairs, even if internally dynamic—“same thing, different day.” History records the changes in a world as it copes with new kinds of resistance, flexes its periphery in an environment, revises the centrality of its practices, or encounters other worlds—often all at the same time.

We recognize historical change as different ways of relating to ourselves, others, and our world become dominant. This change is concrete in that it changes meaningful behavior. One may pithily reply that even a minor physical change in fact meets these conditions. Suppose I move the couch in my living room so people must now walk around it in a different way—don’t we now “relate” to it differently? Of course, but this change in effective organization implies no difference in meaningful behavior. We can see this in two ways. First, contrast two rooms, one with delicate Victorian furniture and one with sturdy rough-cut furniture. If one is sensitive to this difference, then the way one deals with the furniture will vary considerably. In the first case, one sits tensely and with as little shifting as possible; in the second case, one easily leans back and sets muddy feet on the table. The difference in these cases derives both from the styles one can marshal in a situation and the styles the effective organization can afford. Lean back in a Victorian chair, and it breaks. To satisfy a rough-cut style in a Victorian home, one must change one’s home. More significantly, if one is to satisfy a Christian style of brotherly love that includes African Americans, one must change one’s world as MLK and his followers did. This kind of change changes both the meaning of behavior and actual observed behavior. But, second, the meaning of behavior can change without much observed difference. Suppose that I, after a
trip to Germany, adopt a preference for German beer. Upon my return, I may continue to
drink the only beer available, a cheap pilsner, but now I experience it differently, as
unsatisfying. In such a case, only a specific situation would elicit a difference in observed
behavior. A more dramatic case occurs in a personal conversion to new values; one can
continue unabated in one’s family and work, but with a completely different appreciation
for it.49 With respect to historical change, examples like JFK’s call to reach the moon or 9/11
illustrate both kinds of change in different ways. In both examples, major effective changes
ensued—allocations of resources, the priority of problems to be solved—but in the
everyday lives of most people, nothing changed but some rekindled sense of the pioneering
spirit, or patriotism, or dread, as the case may be. For many people, their behavior does not
change, but what their behavior means does change. None of this happens when one moves
a little furniture.

How do those with sensitivity to change change their world?

I want to formulate my answer in precise terms. By a real world, I mean the snapshot
of a world with its specific practices and styles at a moment. By a possible world, I mean
some possible shift in the arrangement of a real world based on its positive familiarity. And
by an actual world, I mean the real world in aggregate with all its possible worlds. By a new
world, I mean a change in the actual world—i.e. a change in meaning in the real world, with
its implied changes in possibilities. A real world churns within its de facto practices along
one possibility for that world—this internal “churning” is conventional change. In disclosive

49 It would take us too far afield to discuss these cases in detail. On the one hand, clearly there are limits to the
claim that nothing “observable” changes in these cases. Minor differences are bound to be noticed, but only
if one has a precise-enough descriptive apparatus. On the other hand, we need not assume that our only, or
even our primary, way of relating to others is through observing and interpreting behavioral cues.
change, however, a world shifts to proceed down a different possibility. But I argue in addition for creative change at the inception of new worlds, or new aspects of worlds, which are nonetheless continuous with earlier worlds. Non-creative forms of change initiate change only on the basis of positive familiarity.

To make my case, I focus largely, though not exclusively, on the form of change initiated in entrepreneurial activity, because each type of change can be clearly seen operating in this domain. To appreciate this focus, two points should be made.

First, entrepreneurship should not be misunderstood to be a purely economic activity. Contemporary scholarship acknowledges the analysis of non-economic factors in entrepreneurship as it ranges over many kinds of human involvements, rather than strictly economic categories of utility or well-being. For example, Peter Drucker argues (1) that entrepreneurship occurs in social and cultural activity, beyond strictly economic activity, and (2) that it affects cultural life beyond our economic well-being. In its role in a capitalist economy, entrepreneurship engages deeply with "the dignity or intensity or pleasantness of human life," which refers to what is, for Joseph Schumpeter, 'the true "output" of capitalist production.' Drucker may yet be short-sighted when he claims that entrepreneurship pertains to all activities of human beings other than those one might term "existential" rather than "social", if it provides or transforms the values available for humans to understand themselves and lead meaningful lives.

Second, the definitions offered by contemporary scholars of entrepreneurship imply the acceptance of some kind of radical change, because nothing less can explain the

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50 Drucker (1985)
51 Schumpeter, 66
52 Drucker, 27
differences in type between entrepreneurial and ordinary practice they embrace. Drucker, for example, develops the concept of innovation to distinguish ordinary practice from entrepreneurship: ordinary practice adapts familiar organizational models to a particular context to supply well-understood products and services; through innovation, entrepreneurs introduce novel organizational models for products and services. In a refinement of this view, Shane defines entrepreneurship as "an activity that involves the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to introduce new goods and services, ways of organizing, markets, processes, and raw materials through organizing efforts that previously had not existed." Like me, Dreyfus, Flores, and Spinosa offer a descriptive account of entrepreneurship. On their view, the meaning of an entrepreneurial act derives from the way it makes history, where “something that makes history...changes the way in which we understand and deal with ourselves and with things." Each definition appeals to something revolutionary, rather than merely evolutionary, in its characterization of entrepreneurial change. For example, Drucker seeks a view to explain how

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53 Shane (2004)
54 DNW, 2
55 The metaphor of evolution, taken from biology, refers to change that arises from the continuous working of dynamic, “blind” processes. In a world, every change of this kind is made intelligible by understanding the features of the processes at work in the environment—hence the processes are “blind” only with respect (1) to our ignorance of their workings and (2) insofar as they contradict an aim or telos we might insist exists to regulate change. The metaphor of revolution, taken from politics, refers to a more complete reconfiguration of processes, which resists a reduction to earlier forms of activity and intelligibility. Evolutionary theory, though offered as an account of biological continuity, depends on the concept of reproductive viability to provide its continuity. Natural selection operates on reproducible variations in an environment. Some of this variation is systematically expressed through normal genetic processes and recombinations in sexual reproduction. Some of this variation is introduced through “mutation.” As far as an analogy goes with evolutionary change in a world, only some aspects of mutation can be accepted. In biology, examples of mutation typically include replication errors and damage from mutagens. “Damage” to a world, which it is unable to repair, would represent a discontinuity—a breakdown in the systems of meanings from which it is unable to recover its previous state. And replication errors, it seems, bear at least two interpretations. First, because the reliability of a replication system can be higher or lower—i.e. express variability—such systems may well themselves be subject to natural selection. In this case, it would be imprecise to call these inexact replications “errors,” because they are theoretically coordinated by well-functioning systematic processes (i.e. species may be naturally selected based on their rate of
entrepreneurial activity can “transmute” values; and in its rejection of Drucker’s account, DNW itself claims to adequately describe how we transmute values. But if what we mean by the transmutation of value is the production of a genuinely new value out of old values, I deny that either of their views can account for it. Finally, the more distant and influential economist Joseph Schumpeter spoke of entrepreneurship most boldly. Entrepreneurs yield creative destruction; their function is to “reform or revolutionize the pattern of production”\textsuperscript{56} and to turn dormant materials into resources for the first time. Yet Schumpeter himself failed to distinguish between those elements of his vision that were evolutionary and those that were revolutionary, using the concepts interchangeably. Evolutionary change is significant, and can indeed lead to massive change in a world; but revolution is of a different kind, and lies on the side of his vision that is genuinely creative.

With entrepreneurship as a primary example, I turn now to the investigation of convention, reason, disclosure, and creativity in producing change. Reason, I note, does not fall neatly into conventional or creative change; because it operates in its own distinctive way, and because it can involve creativity, reason must be examined separately.

2.3.1 Convention

There are at least three kinds of conventional change, one completely conventional, one featuring the relocation of a practice into new parts of a world, and one featuring the

\textsuperscript{56} Schumpeter, 132
hyper-development of a practice. Pure conventional change, in each case, depends on the execution or improvement of previously existing positive familiarities of practice and style. The cases are occasionally complicated by the fact that some elements of a single situation may be conventional, while other elements illustrate disclosure or creativity. So I try to indicate these differences along the way.

The first kind of conventional change is easy to see. The simple execution of our familiar practices have an effect on our world, we often initiate familiar practices in new locations, and we often reorganize elements of our world on the basis of familiar styles, methods, patterns, and so on. In entrepreneurial activity, this is the simple act of starting a new garden-variety business. One might recognize that the demand for some widget or service exceeds supply, and start a business to fill the gap. The success of this enterprise depends on how well one has judged the opportunity according to typical standards—how large is the actual need or market, how strong is the competition, etc. Starting a new diner in a town, for example, typically requires no creativity; one need only copy the methods previously established elsewhere, adapt it to the local conditions (following regular rules for adaptation), and rely on the local community to understand exactly what one is doing and trying to accomplish. Everything is conventional, and nothing world-changing typically results from these activities. Indeed, such activities simply reproduce the world as it is.

The second case of conventional change involves the relocation of a practice familiar in one context to a location with less familiarity. So, for example, one might open an Ethiopian restaurant in a small rural community with little exposure to ethnic cuisine. In this case, the success of the venture depends on whether a latent demand for this food can be realized in the community. Such cases bear an analogy to an invasive species in biology,
where the conditions in an environment support the invasive species extremely well, though there is no special adaptation required on the part of the species to the new environment. A community may well be receptive to a practice it did not come up with on its own.

To really understand this case, it is important to distinguish the familiarity of the actor (the restaurant owner) from that of the audience (customers, in this case). We need not assume any creative work or specific new insight on the part of the actor in initiating a venture in an unusual setting. This is why the change is conventional. On the side of the audience, however, there are three possibilities. First, a community may well have mounted a strong, explicit demand for the new practice. This case collapses into the pure conventional change described above, because then it is simply a matter for some business-starter to recognize the opportunity and act in conventional ways. Second, a community may have marginal positive familiarity with the new practice, which the practice helps to make more central. Most people have some familiarity with ethnic cuisine, for example, and a new restaurant in their community would simply help make this kind of dining more central. This case then involves some disclosive change as described below. Third, however, a community may well lack familiarity with the new practice, and have little success in coping with it on the basis of their conventional styles. In this case the audience must engage with the new venture in a way that escapes mere convention and involves creativity.

I have already noted some examples of what I mean by the third kind of conventional change, which develops and refines previously existing styles and practices. Call this hyper-conventional change. For example, the exemplar of a practice can expand what we recognize to be the limits of a practice or set of practices by achieving new degrees
of excellence. This is the athlete who advances her sport by mastering and refining its required skills or the businesswoman who builds new levels of profitability in a company through excellence in management. This kind of change is conventional because it draws on skills and values shared with and completely familiar to others, but develops and enacts them to new extremes. The old chestnut “new and improved,” as applied to a product, captures this sense of hyper-conventional change. A product of this kind satisfies a need or desire with greater precision and consistency; it hones a satisfaction to a sharper point.

We see the most penetrating version of this form of change in the work of economist Don Lavoie, in his effort to express the insights of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in economic theory. In his own terms, Lavoie acknowledges the requirements for understanding changes in meaning and for recognizing the genuine creativity underwriting much of this change. “…[C]ulture is to be understood broadly as the complex of meanings that allows us to comprehend human action: it is the background context that renders purposeful action intelligible.”57 Yet social scientists, and especially economists, have failed to study genuine cultural change—its conditions, features, and importance—focusing instead on static snapshots of a culture at a moment or on optimizations over time of current or past conditions. “Change usually appears in the economists’ models only as deterministic tendencies toward a fixed equilibrium, like the movements of a clockwork mechanism, not as a truly creative process. Thus economists usually explain entrepreneurial action as maximizing an objective function according to given constraints.”58 Here we can see Lavoie criticizing the normal kinds of conventional change.

57 Lavoie, 34
58 Lavoie, 35
Operating in this way, economic theory cannot grasp entrepreneurial transformations of cultural meaning effectively, because, to put it my own way, they tend to study only the process of optimization rather than changes in what is optimized. What we need to understand, according to Lavoie, are the properties of entrepreneurship “connoted” by the terms *discovery* and *interpretation*:

Discovery suggests an element of radical change, a surprising find, an unanticipated break with past patterns. … Entrepreneurship should include genuine novelty and creativity and should not be rendered as a mechanical search for pre-existing profit opportunities. … Interpretation suggests the point that the profit opportunities entrepreneurs discover are not a matter of objective observations of quantities, but a matter of perspectival interpretation, a discerning of the intersubjective meaning of a qualitative situation. Profits are not measured; they are “read.”

I agree with Lavoie’s basic setup and with the emphasis on “discovery,” but the attempt to understand world-changing action on the basis of interpretation leads to either (1) the inability to escape positive familiarity to something genuinely new or (2) an implicit assumption of more radical creativity in his view that he incorrectly attributes to interpretation.

We should note two constraints operating on an adequate conception of transformative or revolutionary change, to which Lavoie is sensitive. First, we note that change on the basis of implementing or optimizing well-understood models cannot generate the kind of change associated with entrepreneurial action, as already mentioned. But, second, the entrepreneur’s action cannot be completely spontaneous or impulsive in a way that removes any possibility of intelligible connections to preexisting conditions.

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59 Lavoie, 36 ff. Note that Lavoie is careful to remove further unwanted connotations. Discovery is not merely a process of uncovering what was already there, and interpretation is not merely a subjective projection without constraints on meaning.
Navigating these two constraints can be difficult, because they seem mutually exclusive and exhaustive. As Lavoie puts it, “to many economists, explanations that are not fully mechanistic are necessarily unintelligible.” The theoretical fear, so to speak, of the latter unintelligibility leads many theorists to distort creative change by subjecting it to the stamp of rationalism or mechanism. Lavoie, I argue, goes as far as one can in the middle without actually reaching creativity. His view is not rationalist in the sense he criticizes, but neither does it explain any more than conventional change.

On Lavoie’s view, a true entrepreneur develops a hyper-sensitivity to his culture, enabling him to offer a “new reading” on the complexity, like someone reading a complicated book and offering a new interpretation. The entrepreneur is not an isolated rational agent and cannot be understood on the principle of methodological individualism. Rather, he is so deeply embedded in his culture that he identifies previously unrealized possibilities:

[H]is ability to read new things into a situation is not primarily due to his separateness from others but, indeed, to his higher degree of sensitivity to what others are looking for. The really successful entrepreneurs we know are not unusually separate from others; on the contrary, they are especially well plugged into the culture. ... They can pick up the sense of where their fellows in the culture stand, what values they adhere to, what purposes they pursue, what they consider beautiful, and what they deem profane.

For Lavoie, then, the most important aspect of the entrepreneur is his rich sensitivity to the features of the world of which he is a part. On the basis of this sensitivity, he can accelerate development of practices, anticipate what others want and need, and, through a shared positive familiarity, communicate his new discoveries to others, bringing them into the fold.

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60 Lavoie, 41
61 Lavoie, 50-51
of a new discovery. None of this is rational, in an abstract mechanical sense; entrepreneurial actions result from intense practical engagement, rather than reason.

Nonetheless, first, there can be nothing genuinely new introduced or recognized by such an entrepreneur, except insofar as creativity of a stronger form is implicitly assumed as an aspect of interpretation. Both the process by which an entrepreneur acts and the means by which it is intelligible and communicable for him and others remains fully conditioned by previous practices and styles. It is as though one increased the resolution of photograph, making a once blurry image clearer. To claim that, by clarifying the image, one sees something new in the picture requires a completely different claim to realizing a new way of seeing things or the creation of a new object in the picture, both of which call for something new to be recognized in the picture. And this is the heart of the matter. No position that depends entirely on positive familiarity to ensure continuity, connectedness, and intelligibility can make a claim to novelty in the sense required for creative, transformative, or revolutionary change, because identifying this kind of change is precisely to identify something unlike what one has experienced before. Hence, hyper-sensitivity to the features of one’s world, and initiating change on this basis, remains conventional.

Second, hyper-conventional change is singular and specific to a fault. The consultant who more perfectly identifies the needs of her client, the marketer who achieves the ideal communication of the value of a product, or the analyst who uncovers a trend in consumption with meticulous precision—each makes a hyper-conventional contribution to its practice that lacks extension or generality beyond a specific case. In a word, hyper-conventional change does not introduce a new style. In this sense, the analogy to interpreting a complex text is apt, because a rich, detailed, and persuasive interpretation of
a text typically remains wholly absorbed in that text. Based only on one’s hypersensitivity to the text one can point out only what others had failed to notice, rather than motivate or envision a new way to read the text. For example the most erudite and sophisticated reading of Nietzsche as an existentialist, even if persuasive, would still just coordinate his texts on the basis of familiar style. A genuinely new way of reading Nietzsche, however, could actually be quite clumsy and underdeveloped—even unpersuasive—even while its importance as a creative contribution is recognized.

Each of these kinds of conventional change is important. Ordinary conventional change affects the material conditions supporting our practices and the continuity of meaning on which we depend. Relocating practices spreads the diversity of practices. And hypersensitivity is often important in locating negative familiarity with precision. Yet no conventional change can modify our background understanding of things, each other, and ourselves in a way that revolutionary change suggests we can do. To understand history-making, we must look elsewhere.

2.3.2 Reason

Another way of trying to understand how we change our world focuses on rationality and theory. Theoretical or rational accounts of change seek a rational model for practical activity. Such a model typically has two components, one ontological and one epistemological. First, ontologically, a theorist claims we can understand the nature of a complex practical phenomenon by reducing it to simple, theoretical units and their relations—this reduction constitutes an explanation for the phenomenon in simpler terms. A full explanation then permits the construction of new things from the simple units by altering their relations. Science is the ideal here, and especially physics, in which an
understanding of fundamental particles and the laws governing them constitutes an explanation of physical phenomena and endows us with new technical capacities. Second, epistemologically, a theorist insists that our intentional human production proceeds according to a set of basic operations on knowledge, that our knowledge can be systematically and explicitly articulated, and that theoretical rules may be supplied allowing us to exploit our knowledge to produce new things. On this view, humans are theorists; our productive activity, when competent, takes place on the basis of an abstract, theoretical understanding of our situation according to which we modify our environment.

Drawing separately on DNW and Lavoie, I offer two separate lines of criticism of this rationalist view. Yet, as with the hyper-conventional view, I propose that reason can bring us close to creating new worlds in important ways—ways denied by its critics.

The first criticism is acute. Creativity is necessary, rather than practical reason and decision-making, because practical reason itself cannot make a new choice.

Following Lavoie (himself following the work of Israel Kirzner), consider the case of Robinson Crusoe using a vine to construct a net and catch fish. First, Lavoie mentions a rationalist construction of the case. On a typical rationalist view, Crusoe is hungry and does not have the equipment to catch a fish. Seeing the vine, he chooses to innovate—to make the vine into a net. That is, among the many choices Crusoe has for proceeding in his situation, making something new, for new use, is among them, and, all things considered, that is the best option.

This quick characterization doggedly mis-describes the case. First, in Crusoe’s initial experience, the vine is simply an element of his environment—not a resource, but a nuisance or something to hold onto. There is no rational way of overcoming this prejudiced
familiarity with the vine; he must achieve a quite different way of seeing the vines—as a resource for his use. Only then can he choose this course of action. As Lavoie puts it:

According to mainstream economics, individual choice takes place within a given interpretation of opportunities and constraints. [But] Discovery … necessitates the transcending of the prior interpretive framework and the emergence of a new one. Thus, Crusoe interprets his world in a fundamentally different way after he discovers the possibility of producing fishnet out of vine. Where before he had seen the vine only as an obstacle, as something to avoid getting tangled up in, he now sees it as an opportunity to make psychic profits.62

The rational view begs the question. It implicitly assumes creative work one has already done in order to account for its “rational” results. “Choosing to innovate” makes no sense. One can want to innovate, just as one can want milk from the store. But this desire makes no concrete contribution to the innovative achievement, except, in my terms, to delineate negative familiarity.

While I agree with this argument, there is some weakness in the specific example. One may object that the rational power of abstraction easily handles this case. If my door will not stay open, and I do not have a standard doorstop, I can easily abstract to “something heavy” as a solution to the problem. This chair is heavy, so it is my new doorstop. Similarly, Crusoe’s familiarity with fishnets can enable an abstract scheme for approximate replication—what he needs is something rope-like, long, and strong-enough. Looking around with these criteria, the vine fits the bill. While this response has its own puzzles about how and why one selects abstract criteria and how one applies them in perception, it mounts, I think, a worthwhile objection to Lavoie’s key example. So let’s consider it.

62 Lavoie, 41
In my terms, on this objection, Crusoe encounters a problem he can solve on the basis of his positive familiarity. With enough previous familiarity with fishnets and what makes them work, I see no problem with the idea that he could, while perceiving his world on the basis of an abstraction, see the vines as net-material (and therefore no longer just as vines). Abstraction is a powerful way of clarifying the essential elements of a situation for transfer to another situation, finding something familiar in it that one overlooked before. In this case, however, Crusoe does not invent or innovate; he makes a fishnet satisfying its essential properties, but with different accidental properties (vine rather than rope).

However, we recover the initial argument by pointing to or imagining cases where there is not this positive familiarity. There was a time when fishnets had not yet been invented, for example. If, by hypothesis, Crusoe lacks familiarity with nets and principles of catching game, then there is no basis in experience from which to abstract, and he finds himself in the “original position” of a world without fishnets. He certainly has the negative familiarity with limitations on familiar ways to catch fish—and he is hungry—but to catch his meal, he must create something new.

Yet one might want to build a protracted chain of reasoning, rigging cases of analogies or abstractions that solve the problem non-creatively—based entirely on a continuous extension from familiar experience. Imagine, for example, that Crusoe tries to catch fish with his hands and fails. But he realizes that bigger hands in a net-like formation would work, and so on, until he arrives at the vine fishnet. This approach will not work, because both analogical reasoning and abstraction require creative syntheses to extend one’s familiarity, to build a new purpose that something familiar can be for. Because analogies are, in this context, relations among abstractions, we need only consider
abstraction. First, there is a problem of motivating abstract reasoning. The thing from which he abstracts (his hands) has already failed; hence he has no positive familiarity with a success that would suggest he is on the right track. He has only the negative familiarity that what he has does not work. Second, the notion that “bigger hands” would help is already a synthesis of meaning. He does not get the notion of “bigger” from his hands.

Third, abstraction, on its own, is just a lack of detail. There are two important points about this. One, abstraction from a fishnet is just a less detailed fishnet; abstraction from one’s hands is a skeleton—or a color, or a shape. For the abstraction to mean anything else, one must relate it to other frameworks of meaning—strength and tensile qualities or weaves, for instance. Relatedly, two, the selection of what to abstract— which features of the fishnet (or hands) to retain—is guided by a purpose. This is the aspect of abstraction that guides it to produce a new, independent abstract object, a bundle of properties each relating to a specific value or purpose. But note that the purpose must be presupposed in detail for the act of abstraction—the purpose of “capturing” a fish is too general where the purpose of “netting” a fish is required. In general, one must achieve a sense of what would satisfy a problem before developing a useful abstraction, and one must therefore depart from one’s familiarity. Abstraction that generates an innovative difference from past familiarities must always presuppose some creativity. Otherwise, the abstraction would just tell us what we already know, but with less detail.

We see this kind of criticism borne out differently in a direct discussion of changing a world. A descriptive account like that offered in DNW denies both that competent, human practice can be theoretically explained and that human production is entirely theory-driven, because both theses entail a denial of many of the concrete, particular relations and
local, implicit knowledge that constitutes meaning in an historical moment. The ideal of theory is absolute, universal knowledge, true at all times and places, and is therefore “profoundly anti-historical.”

According to DNW, the capacity most enshrined in the theoretical stance, which makes it possible, is *detachment*. Detachment from our engaged, practical situation to a theoretical stance occurs in stages. First, like a military general moving to higher ground on a battlefield, we detach to remove ourselves from immediate pressures and demands of situations and gain a larger perspective on a whole. Second, we detach from the passions of a situation, which seem to distort clear thinking. We remove affect, because it seems accidental, rather than essential, to the objects we try to understand. Third, we detach from traditions and habits that inform our regular activity, enabling us to see the instrumental, or means-end, structure of our practices. Detaching to an instrumental perspective enables us to cope with the experience and mimic those around us. Fourth, because the instrumental perspective enables us to cope in multiple situations, we privilege the features of things that serve in their instrumental function. Finally, fifth, we achieve a theoretical stance, in which relations of de-contextualized elements constitute the nature of a phenomenon. From this stance, we try to account for empirical regularities in terms of a theory, and count our theories as truer the better they meet with predictive success. A theorist offers, for example, atomic particles, profit, or teaching as basic elements of physical reality, business, and education, respectively. A military general comes to think of soldiers and supplies in largely quantitative and instrumental terms, rather than qualitative

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63 DNW, 38
64 DNW, 6-7
or personal terms, and develops strategies for deploying troops according to an overall
theory of warcraft.

Whatever the benefits of the theoretical stance in physical science, it suffers from an
acute problem in the domain of history: it is unable to adapt to and explain historical
change. Historical change consists of a modification to our background understanding of
what things and people are. The theoretical stance is inadequate because what it posits as
basic elements is extracted from, rather than constitutive of, these background
understandings. Its abstract units are derivative. When the background understanding
changes, “what counts as facts” change with it.⁶⁵ Thus, new theories of practical activity are
always responses to changes that have already occurred.

According to DNW, Peter Drucker’s account of entrepreneurship is a perfect example
of the theoretical stance and its deficiencies. Drucker argues that entrepreneurial
innovation is a process amenable to rational ordering, and that management can stimulate
innovation by learning its law-like principles. “Innovation is … organized, systematic,
rational work.”⁶⁶ Such rational innovation makes sense, on Drucker’s account, because of
his understanding of change. Change seems itself to be a basic fact of a world, conforming to
its own order, definable in terms of the dynamic interactions of practices and knowledge.
These interactions supply data for the observant theorist, who then works to exploit the
change to his benefit. “Usually,” writes Drucker, “[entrepreneurs] do not bring about
[change] themselves. But … the entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it, and
exploits it as an opportunity.”⁶⁷ As long as change is a datum for theorizing, it makes sense to

⁶⁵ DNW, 10
⁶⁶ Drucker, 50
⁶⁷ Drucker, 27-28, his emphasis
suggest that particular rational procedures can empower an entrepreneur to more effectively deal with change. Such procedures give one an ideally permanent theoretical stance outside of change, and thus a stance outside of history.

The critical response from the descriptive account is that Drucker largely misunderstands the phenomenon of change, and thus misses the necessary role of the entrepreneur in making change happen. A theoretical stance neuters the nature of change by dictating the kinds of change that can intelligibly show up as a function of the theory. All change, from the theoretical perspective, is then only intelligible as evolutionary change, which we can understand through an adequate theory of cultural evolution. Changes that do not conform to the theory are merely aberrations or results of random events, if they are recognized at all. Theory finds such change unintelligible, and thus negligible. The kinds of change to which theory can be responsive, and which rational procedures can help understand, are only those internal to a dominant historical way of understanding people and things; it only serves to represent, extrapolate, or expand the typical values and assumptions of an historical era. Entrepreneurship, on this understanding, can never introduce a new practice, establish a new value, or “open up a new space for human action.”

To illustrate this point, consider the case of Citibank. On Drucker’s account, Citibank recognized the changing cultural perceptions of women in the work place through the 1960s and 1970s, and sought to exploit this change by recruiting the most competent

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68 Drucker seems to recognize such change intermittently in his discussion of “bright ideas” (Chapter 10) resulting in interesting but unpredictable inventions, or “flashes of genius” that result in interesting, but unrealized ideas (Da Vinci’s notebooks are exemplary). We see the effect of theory dictating intelligibility here. The “romance of invention and innovation” is constrained by the theory, because it does not agree with the thesis of entrepreneurship as “hard, organized, purposeful work” (Drucker, 133).

69 DNW, 37
women to the firm. Many firms equipped with the same fact—that many of the best college graduates were women—rejected the change and simply tried harder to recruit the best men. The change in perception, therefore, was inevitable on Drucker’s account; the question regarding entrepreneurship is who recognizes and exploits the change first.\textsuperscript{70} The DNW disclosure account, on the other hand, takes neither the change in the perception of women nor its particular features for granted. The change might have occurred a different way, through political or legal channels, or been stifled altogether by a reassertion of chauvinism or an alternative cultural movement. The main point is that Citibank “played a leading role in making the change occur \textit{as it did}” through its acts, and is for this reason entrepreneurial.\textsuperscript{71} Citibank did not simply respond to determined changes in perception, but helped generate this basic change through its entrepreneurial activity. It did not simply respond to facts, but helped dictate what would count as facts about people and things in the new practical world. Thus, on the disclosure view, Citibank helped to enact revolutionary change—change that is (1) underdetermined by antecedent conditions and (2) history-making. But it did not and could not do this on the basis of a rational understanding of change. On the disclosure view, then, the point of an account of entrepreneurship is to develop sensitivities to our practical world and describe the ways an entrepreneur typically acts to initiate revolutionary change, rather than to convey knowledge and rational procedures for responding to evolutionary change.

Nonetheless, I think Lavoie and DNW miss some key features in their descriptions, which enable a role for abstraction or detachment in generating change. They generate

\textsuperscript{70} Drucker, 106-107
\textsuperscript{71} DNW, 37
change, even if they do not understand it. I cannot be exhaustive in pursuing this claim, but I will give some indication of what I mean.

First, rational action can change the parameters for a practice that affect the meaningful experience of practitioners. Take, for example, the problem that chess games just take too long. The introduction of timers to solve that problem can be understood as a rational solution, because, at a suitable level of abstraction, any event can be delimited by a timer. Though a rational solution to the problem, the solution has a series of unintended consequences—consequences not represented in the abstract problematic—like the shift in the style of competition. The rational solution actually makes the style of time-efficiency coordinate more of the game in practice, and many would experience some disorientation in becoming familiar with this new way of playing the game. To take a contemporary example, suppose someone was so fed up with copious emails that he built a system to time emails—one minute to read and one minute to write. Such a system would seem to violate the integrity of written communication for many. But if adopted, the system of constraints would engender a new style of writing. In such cases, one simply acts on the basis of what counts as “facts” at a certain level of description, without regard for implicit and contextually sensitive knowledge, but the act still opens up “new action.” Whether or not these cases are considered cases of creativity in reason, so to speak, again depends on the familiarity of those involved with the facts with which they work and their relations.

Second, DNW mistakenly contrasts detachment and engagement. Detachment neither undermines familiarity nor engagement, but rather changes its parameters. The phenomenology here is fairly complex.
To understand this point, it is helpful to note the difference between detachment and abstraction. In detachment one suppresses elements of one's experience in situation, rather than removing (what are taken to be) accidental elements of a situation. Detachment acts on the experiencing person; abstraction acts on the experienced object. Detachment changes how one attends to objects; abstraction changes what in an object one attends to. Both are cases modifying one's sense-making in a situation, but in different ways.

Put schematically, therefore, another form of detachment is to suppress clear thinking in favor of only the affective elements of a situation, rather than detaching to functional relationships between parts. Imagine having an engaged conversation with a loved one. In abstraction, one removes accidental elements of the situation—the restaurant setting and food, say—to try to get at a core of what makes the moment special. In theoretical detachment, by contrast, one suppresses some of the affective elements that make the moment special in favor of conceptual exchanges of meaning. Or in “emotional detachment,” one focuses on the affective qualities of the situation, while suppressing the actual communication in which it inheres. To draw the distinction figuratively, theoretical detachment is bad acting with a good script; emotional detachment is good acting with a bad script. Technically, then, detachment is unnecessary for abstraction, but sufficient for it, because every act of detachment removes details involved in the suppressed aspects of experience. But this abstraction is an effect of detachment, rather than its function. Both abstraction and detachment can equip one with familiar transportable experience—a concept to apply in another situation or a way of attending to a situation. So, for example, someone who has been hurt by those he trusts may carry an “anti-historical” distrust with
him into new relationships or someone who adopts an evolutionary theory connects behaviors meaningfully on the basis of the theory.

In the DNW description of detachment, we actually see a ratcheting of intellectual detachment and abstraction. Contrast the tutor working day to day with individual students, addressing their needs with exacting attention, with the university administrator maximizing metrics for enrollment and retention. The path from tutor to administrator includes a detachment from the immediate pressures to respond to any specific student and an abstraction to what needs they hold in common, followed by a detachment from affective and traditional aspects of the situation and an abstraction to the instrumental relations between certain events and desired outcomes. This process can undermine one’s internal familiarity in favor of external familiarity. DNW correctly recognizes that movement, but fails to see how one can establish new internal familiarity, new internal goods, and therefore a new identity. In other words, the tutor who becomes an administrator gradually changes his identity. And the administrator achieves a new engagement with the content of his practice—no longer people, but “numbers,” as we say—by gradually moving from working with people to working with numbers. DNW represents the scientist or the military general as “detached” rather than “engaged” in a situation. But the best scientists and generals are actually fully engaged; they just engage with objects that no longer fully represent the familiarity with which they began their development. Consequently, (1) modifications on the basis of a “theory” can and do imply effects at the level of meaning, though they do not necessarily understand their own effects, and (2) creative work can and does proceed throughout all areas of human involvement, whether
“detached” or not. Or, rather, the fact that one is detached, on a certain description, is no argument against the possibility of creativity.

2.3.3 Disclosure

From what has been said, the explication and criticism of the disclosure account proceeds relatively briskly. Disclosing requires, most generally, two kinds of skills: first, one must be able to detect and work with disharmonies in one’s practical world; second, one must skillfully change practices to remove disharmonies.\textsuperscript{72} The former sensitivity allows one to grasp the requirements for change; the latter enables one to initiate a change. I will take each skill in turn.

A disharmony is the experience of a poor coordination of practices in our lives on the basis of one’s style. When one is frustrated or stymied in the course of everyday life, there is a disharmony—a lack of seamless integration in the practices in which we live. We might overlook these disharmonies through inattention, struggle through them on the assumption that “this is just how things are,” or detach to a theoretical stance in an attempt to solve the disharmony as an intellectual problem. But none of these strategies is likely to be successful for a disharmony that requires an underlying change to the way practices are coordinated. One may easily detect disharmonies by carrying an uncommon style into a set of practices, when an office manager takes his style home to his family or a teacher takes his professorial style to a weekend with high school buddies. But normally disharmonies are harder to spot, because one does not easily notice that one’s style has changed or that the practices one engages in resist the style. DNW offers the example of a romantic relationship that falls into a disharmony, because partners begin to feel out of step with each other and

\textsuperscript{72} DNW, 22
unable to sustain what was once vitalizing. To deal with the disharmony, they must intensify, rather than abstract from, their practical engagement. This active intensification constitutes the first skill of disclosing by more fully developing and situating a disharmony within the particular, local features of one’s everyday living. Rather than an abstract inspection of their relationship, the partners work vigorously to bring the disharmony to perspicuous relief and search for a new arrangement of practices or emphasis in their relationship that resolves the tension. For example, by exacerbating and holding on to the disharmony actively, the partners may discover a situation in which the tension is relieved in the presence of children, enabling them to recognize a mutual affection and desire for children that had not been prominent. Thus they resolve the disharmony by having children. Disharmonies, therefore, are best explored through an “involved experimentation” that remains ever-engaged in the particular features of a situation.

Naturally, on my view, “disharmonies” are most closely related to negative familiarity. But two points about the example should be kept in mind before proceeding. First, the DNW account of disharmony here implies that disharmonies arise on the background of changes that are already taking place—the changes in one’s background sense of what a family should be. Second, the solution to the disharmony is a readily available and familiar form of life. Thus, the local history of a romantic couple changes toward a different possibility, but not one that did not already exist within the purview of their familiar world. This is even clearer in the DNW description of the second skill of disclosing.

The second skill involves changing a style that coordinates our meaningful engagement in practices. We do this by being sensitive to the disharmonies showing up in
our everyday lives, and working to reorder our practices until the disharmony is resolved.

In order to make this change meaningful and intelligible, any change to the ordering of our practices must be experienced as continuous with earlier orderings:

The continuity [of history] is provided by the fact that change is organized around taking a practice with which people have some familiarity and making it more important.\textsuperscript{73}

Without this continuity, according to DNW, change is experienced as unhistorical; this condition is therefore essential to the disclosure account. And as a result, history disclosing skills may take only three logical forms, each assuming familiarity with some practice that is given a more pronounced role in the coordination of practices. First, \textit{articulation}: in this form, one recovers, revives, or emphasizes a particular ignored or implicit practice in order to give it greater importance. For example, a jack-of-all-trades may refine his diverse interests in favor of one particular trade that gives him the greatest satisfaction, leaving behind many hobbies. Or, on the DNW description, Martin Luther King Jr. articulated Christian charity in a way that gave social inclusiveness a more pronounced meaning in the lives of citizens, undermining competing styles of exclusion. Articulation typically enhances one's sense of integrity, focus, and coherence. Second, \textit{cross-appropriation}: in this form, a practice otherwise alien to a coordinated set of practices is introduced to resolve a disharmony and effect a change in style. For example, the practice of using the Internet, developed originally for the efficient transmission of scientific data, has been appropriated into everyday social life to change the style of social interactions; the feminist cross-appropriation of masculine practices effected a change in the meaning of gender identity. This is the reverse case of conventional relocation described above. An experience of

\textsuperscript{73} DNW, 168
enhancement, I claim, typically accompanies cross-appropriation, like a spice used to enhance the dormant flavors of a meal. Third, *reconfiguration*: in this form, some marginal practice coordinated by a style is made dominant, again changing the dominant style. For example, the style of disposable objects was given greater dominance with Gillette’s introduction of the disposable razor blade, which largely dismantled the centuries-old use of straight razors and contributed to the demise of a style of care and maintenance for one’s objects. As experienced, reconfiguration initially enhances one’s sense of fecundity or possibility. According to DNW, no other form of history-making is possible because there are no other ways in which our practices can be reorganized on the basis of a previous familiarity.

Important as it is for changing the overall organization of a world, however, disclosure can never actually open up “new spaces” of action, transmute values, or disclose a new world any more than the non-creative theoretical position it criticizes. The disclosure account does not give us the resources to account for revolutions in our culture or everyday lives that do not have their basis fully in features of our world, internally variable and fertile though they may be. This position is forced by the principle of familiarity, in virtue of which only practices with which we already have some familiarity can be admitted into continuous historical change. As a consequence, it has no resources for explaining the introduction of genuinely new practices or styles or how they can be experienced as continuous with world change. The enhancement of sensitivity and history-making skills of articulation, cross-appropriation, and reconfiguration are merely ways of making us more attuned to the dormant features and possibilities of our world. The promise of granting more prominence to the role of entrepreneurs in shaping the specific course of history is
met only in the restricted sense that they help select one of the many possibilities our
culture offers to us. Citibank helped shape the history of feminism, but any other historical
path, even one denying feminism altogether, would have been historically continuous in
equal measure.

The history of a world, on this view, is a closed system, a system of shuffling and
reshuffling the inheritance of practices we already have. To disclose a world is to develop an
old world, where the only new aspect of that world is the pursuit of its different extant
possibilities. Hence, the introduction of a new practice from an historically unrelated
culture, the accidental production of a practice, or the creation of a new practice within a
culture can only be experienced as non-historical, as a break in the familiar ways of acting
in and understanding one’s world, and thus frequently as a source of anxiety. Disclosure,
therefore, is a powerful simulacrum of genuine creativity, but it is not creativity. Disclosure
is a motor for change between possibilities in a world, but not for change of the total set of
possibilities of a world.

Moreover, were disclosure the most we could do, then we would have no way of
making sense of genuine historical discontinuities, nor a way of coping with them. For
example, the Roman conquest of Germania interrupted the histories of numerous tribal
regions, enforcing a new regime with different values and different concrete practices.
American Manifest Destiny undermined and destroyed the centuries-old historical
continuity of Native Americans. In a more local case, eminent domain can strip a family of
land owned and continuously developed for generations. First, the disclosure view cannot
represent these historical discontinuities as genuine, because it has no grounds for showing
how genuine difference could ever originate in the first place. Disclosure makes no new
practices or styles that could constitute such a radical difference. As long as a world proceeds through continuous transformation on the basis of familiar practices, nothing like a different, new world could emerge, because worlds cannot diverge in any essential sense. Different histories, or different worlds, on this view, can only be represented as alternative realizations of original possibilities. On the one hand, were this the case, then it must then be possible to overcome apparent incompatibilities between resulting histories through the history-making skills DNW describes, by reorganizing practices and their priority until a shared world is realized and continuity reestablished. But Native Americans did not experience a disorientation, followed by a gradual retrieval and reorganization of practices and the familiar styles they afford in order to recover a continuous history; their history was broken in many ways; a new history began that refers to the impact of a radically different world. On the other hand, assuming that such different worlds do exist, the disclosure view can make little contribution to the ability to mend historical discontinuities or to adopt a different world. Of course, this is not the intent of history-making skills. But acclimation is possible. This process of acclimation, of coming to understand a new world, is much like the adoption of a new style. One does the things one normally does in that world, gradually grasping the links in the effective arrangement of practices, seeing how it enables a form of life. One becomes sensitive to problems that this arrangement answers to and develops an identity that makes sense in new terms.

2.3.4 Creativity

Through creative acts, one introduces novel meaning into a world, simultaneously unfamiliar and historically continuous. How can this be?
I explore novelty in greater detail in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that, for something to be novel, it must necessarily be unfamiliar in a specific way. This does not mean a novelty is unintelligible, weird, or uncognizable. But if something is encountered (in the third-person) or produced (in the first-person) without some unfamiliarity, then one’s range of responses to it or uses of it are limited to past responses and uses. Novelties are discontinuous with one’s past. One recognizes that in the creation there is a divergence in meaning from the past, rather than a mere reproduction or re-coordination of meaning. The variations in how we encounter new things are subtle, and it is worth exploring through some examples before summarizing.

The unfamiliarity we typically experience in a creative novelty lies at threshold of our current meaningful world, advancing beyond it. If one sees an old farm implement rusting in a yard, it may be largely unfamiliar. One may not even know what it was used for, let alone how to use it. One nonetheless has a general, contextual familiarity with the kind of thing it is—though there is of course room for reasonable doubt about the accuracy of any judgments one makes. More importantly, though, one perceives the implement as a thing of the past. This is not a matter of interpreting the rust to place it in the past. Rather the *problems* to which it was a solution are no longer our problems. We recognize that it was a part of our world we have superseded. Toilets, on the other hand, have not changed much in decades. Even a broken old toilet, sitting in an abandoned lot, is immediately recognized as a current element of our world. Here we have not realized problems with the toilet, or we have not yet introduced something that seeks to change our lavatory practice.

What we have is a Goldilocks problem, where creations must be neither too soon nor too late, and neither reduced to old familiarities nor so radical that they are disconnected
from familiar meanings. This fit is a function of both the new thing and the context into which it is introduced. Furthermore, the creativity can even lie on the side of consumers, rather than producers. The appropriation of social media by the masses, for example, far outstrips the initial vision of a site for college students, and several social media platforms had to fail before one finally succeeded.

When something achieves this fit, we often observe conflict and disruption—Schumpeter’s creative destruction—in the meanings we take for granted. Take the advent of crowd-sourced encyclopedias. Historically, the encyclopedia—itself an exceptional innovation—has been the work of expert scholars. One way to treat an online, non-peer-reviewed encyclopedia (e.g. Wikipedia) enforces the same expectations one developed for the past. One wants to use the encyclopedia in exactly the same way one has always used an encyclopedia, and in fact levies criticisms based precisely on what is innovative about the new encyclopedia. One’s familiarity with past encyclopedias includes a style of authority, confidence, and integrity that the new encyclopedia cannot accommodate. The new encyclopedia requires a style that sees knowledge as the responsibility of many people, ever-changing in response to new developments, and rife with disagreements that require mediation. We find other examples in the transition from books to electronic readers or, in the past, from typewriters to word processors, or horses to cars, or transcribers to printing presses. In music, consider the disruptive shift from hearing noise to hearing atonal composition.

The crucial condition for meaningful creative change is negative familiarity with the problematic limits of meaning in a world. A world familiar with the limits and contradictions implicit in its meaningful practices can embrace those new creations that
expand or reconcile meaning, because, however discontinuous or radically novel a creation is with antecedent conditions, it nonetheless offers a fit with the historical development of a world that preserves the continuity of meaning. The creation itself is unfamiliar, a novel achievement, but the problems to which it responds are familiar. And when a creation resolves a problem, it instances continuity with our history that needs no reduction to positive familiarity. Creativity can transmute values and introduce new meaning precisely because its results are unlike anything that preceded them; but these results remain accessible to those who would make use of them. The function of disclosure and the historical continuity it provides are therefore entirely different from the function of creativity and its historical continuity. Creativity introduces new possibilities for a world.

This emphasis on negative familiarity helps explain puzzling features of change in a world. For example, first, whether or not someone recognizes a creation depends on one’s negative familiarity. Someone who does not share a sensitivity to the problem of expressing a certain style in music will not find atonal music newly meaningful; failing to satisfy familiar ways of appreciating music, it is noise. One will typically not recognize the creativity of a new financial instrument like a credit default swap, because the creative act is situated in the minutiae of a financial analysis. Similarly, one will not recognize the creativity involved in a film, a philosophical account, or a scientific hypothesis, if one has not mastered a sensitivity to the problems it ultimately addresses. Without specific negative familiarity, one either misses what is new about a creation by reducing it to what is positively familiar or one finds the creation unintelligible. Second, history often records the independent invention of nearly identical things at around the same point in history—the invention of calculus by Leibniz and Newton or evolution by Darwin and Wallace, for
example. This fact is sometimes interpreted to represent the rational conditions of a world undergoing its necessary development, as if the specific contextual arrangement of practices and ideas determined what would come next. Once a creation is introduced and understood, especially in practical or rational work, it is tempting to see the creation as a necessary development of what came before it. There is some truth in this idea of cultural “ripeness,” because meaningful creative acts respond to specific contexts. But ripeness should not be understood to undermine irreducible creativity. Negative familiarity can be pervasive in a world or sub-world; specific problems get their focus in a particular historical era. But resolving these problems still requires an act of creativity that supersedes past familiarity. Two or more independent thinkers, working on shared negative familiarity, are more likely to create similar solutions—but this is still just historical accident. On the other hand, the underlying elements for the theory of relativity, for example, existed for a half-century before Einstein made the necessary creative connections. There is no necessity that creative work be done, only the necessity that it be done to overcome certain problems. Creativity deals meaningfully with the problems we have. Third, the possibility of pervasive negative familiarity explains the quick adoption of some creations. We quickly adopt a new object like a smartphone because of resolution to many problems apparently implicit in the coordination of our practices. We observe that possession of this device enables new ways of acting for those who possess it, and we seek to learn mastery of it ourselves. Those who resist, in certain contexts, soon find themselves in a world increasingly made difficult by their neglect of change.

But how do we learn from others’ creations—how do we move from unfamiliarity to familiarity? Learning takes a variety of forms. Take rote memorization as a contrast to
genuine learning. Here one masters one skill of recording and reproducing representations—the times tables, say, or a sonnet. The problem, however, is that memorization lacks understanding and adaptability to new situations. It does not equip one with a new way of thinking or doing. Recall now the first time one really grasped a delta-epsilon proof or understood the meaning of a sonnet. A master teacher takes one as close as to the limits of one’s available meaning in a domain as possible, and provides the path to an answer, but one must always make the final connection on one’s own through a creative act. The teacher senses when the creative act has failed when a student cannot apply the new way of thinking in a different context. (This method is complicated in mathematics by the fact that routines can be memorized, and not just statements). Creators are the first to make these connections. Successful transmission of a creative work, however, requires drawing others in close to the meanings the work supersedes, and letting them create the connection themselves. There are of course other kinds of learning—those offered through hyper-conventional exploration, rational problem-solving, or disclosure. But learning that opens up new meaning is creative learning. When a teacher offers a “path to an answer,” the teacher offers something with which a student is externally familiar—a set of behaviors that can be copied to achieve a desired result in specific case. The hope of a teacher is that a student make the required connections—whether in math, or poetry, or chess, or bicycling—to achieve skillfulness in the domain, and creativity is often necessary in this process for achieving even competent extrinsic knowledge—useful, but perhaps substitutable knowledge. Intrinsic knowledge and internal goods, by contrast, always require a more robust integration into meaningful identity, and where learning is creative, this integration must be too.
Hence, when we think about discontinuity between worlds, and the destruction of one world by another, the problem is not simply one of unfamiliarity or discontinuity between practices. A world, in becoming new, or a person, in creatively learning, regularly deals with unfamiliarity and discontinuity. The problem is more precise. First, the difference between two worlds often reflects a history of differing creative resolutions to problems. Many of these problems are meaningful, but non-rational; therefore, even if rationality provided a common basis for mediation of some things (knowledge of physics, perhaps), it would provide no guidance for mediating other meaningful differences in styles and practices. Second, because of the underlying differences in world history, the negative familiarity detected in one world can vary widely from another world. What even counts as an important problem or a valuable solution cannot be easily communicated. One world can care about whether one works on Saturday and another world can care about building pyramids for their dead—the problems that occupy them and the creative solutions they generate will not necessarily coincide. Third, in every world, what is often most at stake in confronting difference is the possibility of preserving one’s meaningful identity. A self need not be thought of as fragile, inflexible, and fixed. But when the conditions for one’s most central and most shared practices are undermined, one is unmoored from a meaningful life. This is what we see in cases like Manifest Destiny: the relatively wholesale dismantling of the conditions for identity, for which people are willing to fight, and the forced requirement that a world either assimilate or create itself anew. Within a world, where disruptive developments encroach on selfhood—as when a new technology displaces workers—we tend to see a fight.
History is not simply the shuffling of familiar practices. Creativity introduces unfamiliar meaning into a world, but the promise of this new meaning for dealing with the problems we face can ensure its adoption and its continuity with our past.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The tautology at the heart of this chapter is that creativity must introduce meaning if it is to be meaningful. The effort has been to show how creativity can introduce meaning that is both disconnected and different from past meaning, while maintaining the continuity necessary for history. In long form, this has been an answer to Meno's Paradox as it applies to creativity. The short answer is that, as with a posteriori knowledge, we can know what we do not know. But for some problems, we also know that we cannot know. My a priori claim is that we have a capacity to create new meaning that overcomes this incapacity. This claim, however, could not have made sense without putting it in context. Nonetheless, a great deal of work remains to justify this claim, to show that more philosophically rigorous methods cannot reduce creative novelty in standard ways to orders of explanation.
CHAPTER 3
NOVELTY—UNDERSTANDING NEW SENSE-MAKING

Novelty is the lynchpin of creativity. A creative act brings something new into being, and the concept of newness one develops determines the entire scope of philosophical investigation for creativity. Hence, novelty cannot be given short shrift. I argue that creative novelty is the newness of a new way of making sense. Creativity acts on how we make sense of our world, and realizes new possibilities with each creative act. We make our world—with new alternatives, inventions, theories, or art—based on how we give it order through new sense-making.

3.1 SENSE-MAKING AND POSSIBILITY

I will be arguing based on the phenomenological concept of “sense” and its relation to things, where a phenomenological concept is defined through orienting or ostensive descriptions in phenomenological practice. A phenomenological concept has a name, which serves in a descriptive system for orienting others toward reception of a phenomenon.\(^74\) I put the phenomenological concept of sense to work to claim that creativity realizes—makes real—new possibilities. My claim about new possibility bears some initial explanation if it is to be found sensible when I get to it.

I mean “sense” roughly as we use it in sentences like “that makes sense,” “I make sense of ...” or “the sense of this....” We have a sense for everything from the color blue and shovels to fashion and political systems. We make sense of math problems, poems, and

\(^{74}\) See Chapter 1 for further discussion.
relationships. Thus the concept I use is sweeping. But I note that making sense is not at all restricted to linguistic or “intellectual” activity. Though we read and make sense of words on a page, the basketball player also reads the court, the tracker reads the forest, the doctor reads the X-ray scan, and the art critic reads the painting. Things show up to be meaningful if we can make sense of them. Skills and values also inform this sense-making. So I do not intend to exclude further cases where natural language breaks down. Riding a bike, playing a guitar, or fitting a puzzle piece into a puzzle is sense-making, as is grasping the inequity of the way a pie is sliced, whether an apple pie or an economic pie.

Within phenomenological description, senses do not exist apart from our consciousness of objects and objects do not exist apart from consciousness except insofar as they disclose this independence. The minimal sense of *existence* depends precisely on this structure of consciousness and its object—even dreams and imaginary objects bear this minimal sense.75 Consider the difference between a feeling, a physical object, and a number. There is plenty of room for dispute here, but an initial phenomenological description could point out: that a feeling exists only as long as one experiences it; a physical object resists some but not other ways of making sense of it, that it affects us, and is therefore external (because this resistance constitutes the sense *external*); and a number exists ideally and eternally. Senses express the order and coherence of consciousness, both in how we understand our world and in how we change it to fit the senses we have for it. For example, my sense of a hammer is to put it to use in carpentry; my sense of a pile of

75 This is where, were this an investigation of “existence” we would need to distinguish the existence of dreams from the existence of perceptual objects to avoid the at bottom terminological dispute resulting from a claim like “the objects of dreams do not exist”—the latter misunderstands the claim that even dream imagery exists in some minimal sense, even as spontaneous fabrications in consciousness or the like.
wood is its possible use in a carpentry project. The former is just a sense of a thing; the latter indicates the carpenter’s way of making sense of things. Existence sometimes challenges how we make sense of it, and we sometimes experience existences to be not only external, but foreign. Hence, existence does not just confirm our sense-making in an idealist circle, but rather often challenges it. This latter point is to emphasize that senses are not purely “subjective” or intellectual phenomena; nor are they merely the recognition of the affordances of objects. In sense-making, we (the subjects) realize (make real) affordances of objects which they do not necessarily realize on their own.

The objects of consciousness are often complexes of things and their relations. The isolated things, the relations, and the complex each have senses. For example, “1 + 2 = 3” involves numerous senses (numbers, arithmetic operations), which cohere in a complex sense. Where we do not recognize a coherence to obtain between our senses of things, we say “that does not make sense”: “A = ~A,” for example, or simply finding one’s keys in a place they should not be. Nonsense depends on a failure of relations between senses of things, just as, by analogy, one cannot ascribe poor grammar or poor writing from one word. There is only the relational nonsense of complex senses of things. This is because there is no consciousness without making sense of something. The basic sense of consciousness stems from its always making sense, even if the senses it makes do not always cohere. Consciousness possess at least this minimal coherence in the project of making sense; otherwise we suggest the experience of William James’s “great blooming, buzzing confusion,” a notion I can make no sense of except in terms of relational nonsense.

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76 I am ignoring potential disanalogies like misspellings or incorrect contractions.
Were consciousness dissolved into such nonsense, it would bear no resources for recovery.\footnote{Two points. First, this is not an attempt to characterize something inaccessible, like Kant's thing-in-itself. This description relies (1) on detecting the limit of meaningful sense-making and (2) the description of relational nonsense. Second, there is some relevant ambiguity, explored later as anomaly, between nonsense and an incomplete sense.}

I have already indicated that senses of things are distinct from ways of making sense. The ways we make sense tend to range over multiple things. To oversimplify, for example, arithmetic sense-making provides a way of recognizing and engaging numbers in the specific ways appropriate to them. Ways of making sense inform our experience flexibly, allowing us to adapt to the many things we encounter. To prefigure a bit, the difficulty of describing creative novelty often rests in this distinction. First, the sense that is new in a creative act often preoccupies us and overshadows the newness of sense, because new sense directs consciousness toward something (and not toward itself). Second, the newness of sense is distinct from the newness of the way of making sense from which it issues. For an orienting example, consider Archimedes Eureka moment. Here we have not only the coherent, reproducible sense of how to measure the volume of an irregular solid, but also the way of making this sense—i.e. the result of his actual creative act. What Archimedes seems most excited about, in fact, is the new sense—"I've found it!"—rather than the establishing, the “finding,” of it. What he finds is a new way of connecting objects in experience, which entails a new sense of things.

This distinction between senses and ways of making sense is difficult to keep straight for another reason too. A way of making sense is that on the basis of which we change things or understand experience—the painter manipulates paint on a canvas
through a way of making sense, and an observer appreciates the painting through another way of making sense. But ways of making sense are themselves complex, nested, and interrelated phenomena. Within generic arithmetic sense-making, for example, one finds addition and subtraction, which will make sense of different cases. On the other hand, one may find relations to logic or reason more generally; or one recognizes values like simplicity or elegance informing the practicing mathematician. The generic sense of painting may well include housepainters and artists, but only at a cross-section, because above housepainters lies construction and above artistic painters lies art more generally. A person brings a vermiculate mass of sense-making to situations to which our vocabulary scarcely does justice in detail. Thus, I use Archimedes’ proclamation to point to another aspect of new sense-making, namely, that it arrives through an act on oneself: “I’ve found it!” The phenomenon of making new sense of things is most salient in just those moments sense-making is taxed the most. “Finding” a new way of making sense is not like finding some gold in one’s backyard; it is rather finding one’s consciousness transformed with respect to one’s object, in a way that also transforms the object. Without such decisive moments, I think we could amble through descriptions of senses and sense-making without really getting at the heart of the distinction that shows any promise for understanding creativity. Archimedes is transformed by his creative act and he no longer sees a bathtub in the same way.

With this initial exploration of sense-making, I turn to the claim that through creative acts, we introduce new possibilities.

From a conception of (a) logical, (b) physical, or (c) psychological possibility, for example, one may refute my claim based on the premise that anything presently real must
of necessity conform to (a') logical law, (b') physical law, or (c') psychological law. Provided that these laws describe rules of transformation from one state to another, they define determinate parameters for all possible states in their domain and the continuity between states. So long as we have the correct, complete laws, therefore, we cannot encounter any “new possibility” not already implied by descriptions of antecedent states transformed in accordance with law. From the perspective of a determinate order, things may be necessary, or they may be possible, but they cannot be newly possible.

But my investigation and its results are phenomenological, and they express what possibilities are for consciousness. By a new possibility, I mean a new way of making sense of things that confers on its objects new meaningful ways for them to be. My view as I intend it depends on the key premises of the argument:

1. One can acquire new senses of some objects  
2. If one can acquire new senses of some objects, then some objects afford a multiplicity of senses.  
3. Some objects afford a multiplicity of senses (1,2)  
4. If some objects afford a multiplicity of senses, then one can make sense of objects in different ways.  
5. One can make sense of objects in different ways. (3,4)  
6. Ways of making sense of objects realize the possibilities of objects  
7. If (5) and (6), then if one can acquire a new way of making sense, then one can realize new possibilities of objects  
8. Therefore, if one can acquire a new way of making sense, then one can realize new possibilities of objects (5, 6, 7)  
9. One can acquire a new way of making sense  
10. Therefore, one can realize new possibilities of objects (8, 9)

The argument is valid. Are the key premises true?

(1) One routinely acquires new senses of things, minimally, by learning from others and investigating things in one's world. One learns the sense of what some tool is in the context of work—e.g. a surgeon's scalpel—or simply the structure of physical properties an object must have and the dimensions along which they can vary (shapes of blades, lengths
of handles) to count as a scalpel, as opposed, say, to a toy scalpel or utility knife or sharp rock. One way or another, we learn what is appropriate to say in a group of people, what multiplication is, and what makes for a good argument. Acquiring new senses of things and complex senses is an everyday part of experience. As far as I can tell, the only way to try to challenge this premise is to claim that senses are never “new” in any special or creative way for consciousness, and that all “new” senses are already implicit in consciousness in our ways of making sense of things. Nonetheless, I do not think this objection directly challenges the premise that we acquire new senses of things. I will be preoccupied with an investigation of newness and creative novelty in the next section.

(2) Looking around the room for a doorstop, I might make sense of a bookend for the job. I discover something bookends afford, namely, serving as doorstops. When we make new sense of things, we find that they afford multiple senses. Senses do not necessarily assimilate, supersede, or replace each other—they reveal a new aspect of things and how they can be related to other things. Suppose a person possesses a normal arithmetic sense of the number one, but also the complex sense, “one is the loneliest number.” The number one affords this sense by functioning in—making sense in—this complex sense in a way it does not function in an arithmetic addition problem. The number one does not for this reason become an entirely different thing; rather it affords different senses, which show up in different ways of making sense. Although relations between things are infinite, I do not claim that anything can afford any sense. We just do not know all the senses things can afford. So, for example, I take the statement “the dog is the loneliest number” to be nonsense. A complex sense of this statement seems impossible, given the senses I have now of the loneliest number and dogs. Nor do I claim that the affordances of a
thing constitute its unique identity—what the thing is. Things afford much more sense than they minimally have to. So from the fact that we can acquire a new sense of some objects, we know that at least some objects afford a multiplicity of senses.

A counterexample to the second premise would have one making sense of something in a way that the object does not afford. An object “affords a sense” when it does not deny the sense one makes of it outright. For example, the number one (and ten) will not afford the sense required for making arithmetical sense of “one equals ten.” As far as I can tell, such a statement is nonsense. Thus, I do not think we could find a case in which we acquire a new complex sense that does not also reveal a sense they afford. “One equals ten” makes sense in a conversion from dimes to pennies, but only with an additional complex way of making sense of numbers together with currency. However, my view is admittedly complicated in its response to other kinds of apparent counterexamples. For example, Newtonian physics does not seem to make sense of very small things, although we thought it did historically. Did it make sense of things in a way they did not afford? And does this deny a multiplicity of senses? I think not. First, we do not necessarily deny that Newtonian physics makes some sense of small things, but only that, after new objects appear in the course of investigation, and we attempt to make sense of them consistently, its sense gradually becomes incomplete. The initial assumption that Newtonian physics makes sense of atomic objects is an unwarranted generalization made without respect to the direct investigation of those objects. Second, there is a possible conflation involved in this counterexample in the way names refer to objects. “Small things” are not the same objects as quantum systems, for example, which do not even show up in the physical description of
Newtonian physics. Or, to make this point a different way, “The dog is the loneliest number” could show up sensibly in a spy’s code without referring to dogs and lonely numbers at all. Third, we can act as if things make sense when they do not through what I call compensation. Compensations ignore the resistance of objects to our sense-making, explicitly or implicitly; they conceal this resistance. I direct this third response more specifically at another apparent counterexample: illusions and hallucinations. It is true enough that a mirage or phantom limb affords a sense we do not allow them in another way of making sense of things. But, first, I see no problem in saying that a mirage really affords “looking like a body of water.” Mirages do not deny this sense, and one could counteract this sense only by making sense of it also as an optical appearance from which one cannot drink. Only at this point, once we have standard of comparison for “reality” from which to generate the illusion, can the counterexample be pitched. But then I note that, when the parched person moves toward the mirage, it is not from a lack of resistance from the object, but rather from an irrational hope for water that ignores the resistance.

(4) When we acquire a new sense for an object, we necessarily also make sense of it in a different way than we do to achieve an old sense. The arithmetic sense of the number one, for example, bears no relation to loneliness, except through the complex sense-making of a different way of making sense of things. We do not find out something new about arithmetic in this case; that is, this is not just some unexplored dimension of arithmetic sense-making we already have, which makes sense of a statement like “one is the loneliest

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This example is quite a bit more complicated than I present here, given all the senses and sense-making involved: ideal (theoretical) things, the indirect evidence for things, ways of making sense of things linking them with everyday objects versus making sense of them through a mathematical description, and so on.

I introduced this concept in Chapter 1.
number.” One may object that the number one is not at all the same object in an arithmetical statement (“$1 + 1 = 2$”) as it is in the poetic statement. But “one” is not substitutable by any other number or by “dog” to preserve the sense of the statement, nor is “one” code for something else. The statement reflects a complex sense of things, which requires some (though not all) of the arithmetic sense one makes of “one.”

(6) For consciousness, reality is the set of currently existing objects and their modifications consistent with its ways of making sense of things. Consistency and coherence with sense-making ensures that that things are meaningful. In my usage, “reality” reflects the double-meaning we find in realization in, for example, “I realize my bag might still be in the taxi” and “my bag is really still in the taxi.” We realize possibilities by participating with things on the basis of our sense-making, and what we understand to be possible in a situation varies with the way we make sense of things.

There are a lot of nuances to how possibilities are realized in situations, and I cannot attend to them all. However, there are three worth mentioning. First, our concerns and projects typically determine in detail what shows up to be possible and impossible, while there is also a broad range of possibility (on other sense-making) that does not show up at all. Second, one’s sense-making can constrain objects to specific possibilities, and objects can constrain additional sense-making. That is, senses and objects are in reciprocal relations, in which either may dominate. To illustrate these points, consider a framer constructing stud-walls for new home. He sees that a board does not fit into its space, because it is too long, and also understands the possibility of cutting the board to fit. Boards are the kinds of things you can make shorter, and this is part of the sense a framer has of boards. On the other hand, a short board will not fit at all—no one has yet invented a board-
stretch—-and it is impossible to fill the space with it. The carpenter can of course graft another board onto the first one, but this is understood to be a different possibility than the impossibility of stretching the board. The framer also takes certain things to be fixed in his project, like the dimensions of the building. Thus, it does not typically even show up as a possibility to modify a space to fit a board, rather than modify the board to fit a space. By contrast, a woodworker with a prized piece of Brazilian rosewood seeks out the possibilities of the wood—what it can become—regardless of its size; the object constrains additional sense-making. In this context, the possibility of using the wood in a concealed framing structure does not even show up at all. There are, then, at least two ways new possibilities can becomes significant for someone: in the way something impossible becomes possible and in the way a new possibility becomes part of one’s understanding of a situation.

Third, possibilities and impossibilities are of different kinds. If we go back to the example, “the dog is the loneliest number,” one can for example imagine that, in some circumstance like an improvisational comedy skit, this phrase would make hilarious sense. Similarly, one can “expect the unexpected.” In such cases, one maintains a sense of one’s limited sense-making. But one does not, for that reason, actually understand what those possibilities are or would be in any detail. The sense that “it is possible they will invent a board-stretcher” derives from our way of making sense of changes in what is possible—a sense, on my view, of ourselves as creators. Still, this sense of unknown possibility is among the most Janus-faced phenomena. On the one hand, it supports openness to experience; on the other hand, it supports compensation that denies one this openness. Consider a magician performing a spectacular trick, levitating a train, say. The dumb wonder of a
typical child supposes that, though he cannot understand it fully, magic must be real. The
typical adult supposes that, though he does not understand it fully, there must be some
specific explanation for the trick that makes complete sense of it. The difference between
these cases amounts to this: the child mistakenly takes the “magical” object to constrain
further sense-making, whereas the adult (correctly) takes his sense-making to constrain
the object. Thus the adult immediately seeks to understand how the trick works with
respect to his ways of making sense of things.

I argue that creativity is our best human trick and seek an informed wonder with
respect to it.

We make a great deal of sense by drawing on the logical, physical, and psychological
orders of things. These efforts to make sense get their constraints through participation
with objects, in part determining what makes sense and in part responding to objects that
set constraints on additional sense-making. Granted the controversies that already exist
within and between these lawful orders—for example, whether the truths of logic are
psychological states (psychologism), whether all psychological states are physical states, or
whether logic must include the law of noncontradiction—I find it reasonable to question
whether creativity must make complete sense in their terms, and I spend Section Three
showing some of the limitations of that effort.

(9) I take the soundness of my argument to depend, then, on the claim that there is
an additional way of acquiring new senses of things, distinct from learning from someone
or learning from objects. This additional way is to create new ways of making sense of
things. To be clear from the outset, I have no problem with a claim that some of our new
senses of things are implicit extensions or entailments of the sense-making we already
have, often made explicit. But we find the basic thrust of my objection to generalizing this view in an example. Consider that every day one says, writes, or thinks words in historically original configurations—“Nine books sit on a shelf three feet northeast of my computer monitor.”\textsuperscript{80} We can utter these unique configurations relying on an implicit sense of things we typically share with others. Such original configurations are easily produced and consumed. Yet one might claim that all our utterances are of this kind, and “this is the kind of arrant pedantry up with which I will not put,” as Winston Churchill reportedly said in another context. Those gifted with words—I would say creative with words—utter impromptu phrases that do more than draw on implicit senses of things. They challenge and rearrange our sense-making. Whether one claims that all speech is creative or no speech is creative amounts to the same thing: one either lacks the resources with which to distinguish Churchill from a hack; or, to preserve a distinction, one must either argue that such differences are illusory or that there are at least two kinds of implicit sense-making, S\textsubscript{1} and S\textsubscript{2}, where the latter is what we do in making apparently “new” utterances. The latter interpretation could be fine, but I see no great philosophical advantage between it and my view, but only the disadvantage that it tortures a description of the limitations of conscious sense-making to claim it is “always already” making sense of things it does not seem to be making sense of. On my view, consciousness is limited to the senses it has and creates new ways of making sense at these limits.

\textsuperscript{80} If this is not original enough, I just need to add more conventional descriptors, of which there is no shortage.
3.2 INITIAL REMARKS ON CREATIVE NOVELTY

What is created in a human creative act—therefore, its creative novelty—on my proposed view, is a new way of making sense of things. Novelties involve a special kind of new conscious connection between things, which they could not have without one’s creative contribution. I of course want to accommodate traditional kinds of examples like paintings, but on my view, these are either the indirect results of creativity or, in more complicated cases, the medium in which new sense-making forms. A novelist like David Foster Wallace makes sense of things in a new way that informs his writing, but, in some cases, the new sense-making only forms as he writes. Hence, creative novelty appears differently at different levels of descriptions. My view should also enable one to understand the creativity involved in new invention, theory, or functional uses things. Finally, I want to accommodate putative examples of non-human creative novelty like new animal species, but only to the extent that these novelties are recognized through human acts of consciousness. Thus my aim is for a more unified account of creativity and its novelty for humans, but less of a comprehensive account than might be possible.

Regardless of one’s eventual considered position on novelty, however; the feature that most clearly initiates speculative interest is that some objects seem new in a distinctive way. These objects seem to differ from anything that precedes them. This difference might be encountered in a work of art, in a new piece of technology, or just in the casual observation of someone using a familiar object in an unfamiliar way. The entities or acts seem unlike anything one has seen before, and it is unclear how the creator came up with them.
One typical description given in psychological literature is that one expresses “surprise” in an encounter with novelty.\textsuperscript{81} Jazz improvisation may elicit surprise even from a performer.\textsuperscript{82} This description clearly leaves the particular features and evidential status of novelty left unexplored. So what if I am surprised by a string of musical notes? I am also surprised when someone slams a door behind me. If surprise is the best indication of novelty, it will not provide very good critical evidence for creativity. Nonetheless, pointing toward something “surprising” does help initiate the discussion. In this regard, a poem by Robert Frost helps guide my discussion of creative novelty throughout:

Out walking in the frozen swamp one grey day
I paused and said, “I will turn back from here.
No, I will go on farther--and we shall see.”
The hard snow held me, save where now and then
One foot went down. The view was all in
Straight up and down of tall slim trees
Too much alike to mark or name a place by
So as to say for certain I was here
Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.
A small bird flew before me. He was careful
To put a tree between us when he lighted,
And say no word to tell me who he was
Who was so foolish as to think what he thought.
He thought that I was after him for a feather--
The white one in his tail; like one who takes
Everything said as personal to himself.
One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.
And then there was a pile of wood for which
I forgot him and let his little fear
Carry him off the way I might have gone,
Without so much as wishing him good-night.
He went behind it to make his last stand.
It was a cord of maple, cut and split
And piled--and measured, four by four by eight.
And not another like it could I see.
No runner tracks in this year’s snow looped near it.
And it was older sure than this year’s cutting,
Or even last year’s or the year’s before.
The wood was grey and the bark warping off it
And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.
What held it though on one side was a tree
Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,
These latter about to fall. I thought that only
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks
Could so forget his handiwork on which
He spent himself, the labour of his axe,
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.
(Robert Frost, “The Wood-Pile,” 1915)

\textsuperscript{81} E.g. Berliner 1994 or Boden 2004
\textsuperscript{82} Berliner 1994
In this poem, Frost describes an unusual encounter with a wood-pile. The pile surprises him and is initially unaccountable. Its presence undermines his expectations for his walk in the woods. His description of the walk indicates his familiarity; it is a congenial episode like many before. Yet he readies himself for something unfamiliar by continuing his walk into a new part of the woods. Still nothing demands much from him. He easily makes sense of his encounter with a bird, but then the bird leads him to the wood-pile. The wood-pile compels Frost to speculate about its origins. He develops an account of the wood-pile, one that enables him to understand it to his satisfaction. The poem then expresses Frost’s experience, presenting it to us for interpretation.

I use Frost’s poem to examine novelty. The poem exhibits a distinctive experience one may have in encountering an object. The object of such an experience is, I claim, anomalous. It is not, at least temporarily, fully accounted for. At one level of description, to Frost, the wood-pile is an anomaly; to us, the poem itself may be an anomaly. Within the poem, Frost depicts that phenomenon I call compensation, the fortification of meaning through familiar ways of making sense of things, similar to the way we could give a simple, conventional interpretation of the poem that ignores its nuances. With this, he dispels the anomaly. Yet in writing the poem, Frost conveys a new way of making sense of things. He gives us rails along which to think through an explicit juxtaposition of words, which we might follow to come close to taking his meaning. Frost’s newly achieved way of making sense of things is, I claim, a precise example of creative novelty, embedded in his poem.

My task is twofold: first to show that creative novelty is properly a new way of making sense of things, and second to explore the relation between two phenomena, novelty and anomaly. Let me give some preliminary framing for these tasks.
concrete things we often take to be prime examples of creative novelty like paintings and poems *embedded novelty*. The virtue of such objects is that they are easily accessible for description and analysis. Yet there is also newness in our way of constituting experience—newness of value, conception, or skill, for example—which I collectively call new ways of making sense of things. I argue that embedding novelty (as a creator) and recognizing novelty (as an observer) entails a new way of constituting experience.

The first key idea is that new ways of making sense need not embed novelties in the same way, embed them with artistic qualities, or embed them at all, in all the domains in which we are creative. Quite the contrary, new theories, technologies, or use-objects, for example, do not at all appear in the same way as artistic objects. Lacking this key idea, some alternatives for someone who defends creativity include a Kant-like view according to which only artists are creative while the work of a Newton or an Einstein is not creative, or an assertion of creativity in rational or practical activity through strained descriptions of how these activities are like aesthetic production.\(^83\) I do not find these alternatives tenable. On my view, by contrast, some art, even some art worth keeping, is not very creative, while some rational and practical activity is creative.\(^84\) The reason is that, despite all the difference in embedded novelties, there is nonetheless a common condition for their

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\(^83\) There are other alternatives. For example, Irving Singer striates creativity into many different “modes,” each with its own distinctive features (Singer 2010).

\(^84\) It is worth remarking that Kant does have a view of non-creative art—copying. But I think it is fair to say that Kant, along with many other commenters on art, prioritize the value of creativity in art. However, the creativity embedded in an artwork is an independent variable in the complete evaluation of a work as a whole. A statue of George Washington need not be creative, say, to be valuable in context. An irreverent statue of Washington on a commode may well be creative, but it is the way of making new sense that is valuable, and not simply the fact that the sense arrived through a creative act. The work of a Shakespeare of HTML (the content formatting language of Internet web-pages), whatever that might look like, could be valuable because of their creativity in a new medium, even if the new specific works did not represent the best possibilities of the medium. The point here is that creativity is one factor among many to consider in evaluating art, and I am not convinced creativity is a constitutive criterion for genuine, prioritized, or good art.
existence in a new way of making sense of things. This condition cuts across domains; it does not live in just one domain and it does not constitute one domain.

The second key idea is that creative novelties are necessarily anomalous in experience. I call necessary anomalies disorder, and say that creative novelties are out of order. We cannot fully understand them or link them completely to orders of antecedent, rational, or teleological conditions; they fail to make complete sense. What complicates matters, however, is that: (1) creative novelties are not the only anomalous phenomena—some embedded novelties like paintings can exhibit perpetual anomaly and new biological species or even everyday objects like wood-piles can be temporarily anomalous; (2) creative acts often respond to anomalies—creation is often our way of dealing with anomaly in experience, and is required when we face disorder; and (3) we can dispel anomaly and conceal disorder through creative acts, but only by introducing new anomalies. The creative act exemplifies a new anomaly, even when it makes sense of an old one.

The main claims are worth emphasizing to avoid confusion later. First, I do not claim that anomalies are necessary conditions for creative acts, but rather that creative acts always exemplify anomaly. One can be creative regardless of whether an experienced anomaly precedes the creative act. Second, the creative novelty created in a creative act is a new way of making sense. Third, the specific expression of a new way of making sense in a situation is an embedded novelty—which may be anything from a new turn of phrase to a new theory or new painting. Embedded novelties are often only analytically separate from a new way of making sense, because sense-making often takes place only in a medium—for example, a new way of writing may not take form except as a writer writes. Also, embedded
novelties may or may not themselves exemplify anomalies—an artwork tends to exemplify
anomaly while a new theoretical idea does not. Fourth, the *demonstration* or “proof” of
creativity nonetheless requires highlighting persistent anomalies in experience, which only
a creative act can deal with.

3.3 PROBLEMS WITH ANALYZING THE CREATIVE NOVELTY OF CONCRETE ENTITIES

Something is new if we have not experienced it before. This is a start, but there are
lots of ways for things be new in experience. Experience, I assume, is constituted by
consciousness, and consciousness is always consciousness of something—i.e. it is always
directed toward and attentive to something or other. Different types of newness are
possible experienced aspects of things, and may include, in my terminology, *uniqueness*,
*singularity*, or *individuality*. Here I explore the limitations of investigating novelty directly in
concrete things appearing for consciousness; I deny that they necessarily constitute
creative novelty. Put simply, I argue against the view that creative novelty is primarily a
property of *objects* like paintings or animal species, a property they might possess
independently of our coming to make sense of them in a particular way. On my view, for
example, it seems that nothing essential changes about a thing—a rock—when one takes it
up in a potentially creative way—as a doorstop. The newness I attribute to creative novelty
will not be fully described until I investigate anomaly, but the basic thrust is that such
newness exhibits incomplete sense found in one’s own sense-making.

Let’s begin by removing a misconception. Creative novelty is not a matter of
temporal priority, but rather of objects and the sense we make of them. To put this point
dramatically, Pachelbel might still be considered creative in writing his *Canon in D* even if
an extraterrestrial wrote a sonically identical piece one billion years ago, quite unbeknownst to him. Or closer to home, both Wallace and Darwin can create the theory of natural selection independently—and the same goes for Leibniz and Newton with calculus, Gutenberg and Bi Sheng with the movable-type printing press, or independent prehistoric tribes and hand axes. To draw the distinction, temporal priority is part of the conception of originality in some frame of reference. The question of originality presupposes a question about the identities created, viz. whether they are actually identical. But even this question is impertinent to a study of creative novelty. More pertinent is the sense-making involved and the character of objects. The one observation I make use of below, regarding originality, is the relative lack of examples of independent creation in art—of artists creating the same style or artistic piece independently. Why this should be the case suggests some distinctive features of artistic creations.

Among things, one might claim that something is novel if it is unique, and something is unique if it is one of a kind. Multiple phenomena satisfy this imprecise definition of uniqueness, however. I consider three. What I call uniqueness, proper, is just self-identity. In what follows, an identity is the thing disclosed when we make sense of it a certain way.

If uniqueness is just self-identity, then it does not distinguish anything peculiar about some things over others. Frost’s wood-pile is a unique wood-pile, but this does not make it novel. As I noted in Chapter 1, every grain of sand is unique on a sufficiently refined descriptive system. A single grain is the only grain like this. These grains can be uniquely

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85 Note that this distinction between creativity and originality claims nothing special for creativity. A similar distinction holds even if one argues that creativity is just a kind of making. Then the question of who made what first would still be distinct from the question of what goes into making, so long as those makings are independent.
identified by both their differing intrinsic properties like mass or purity and extrinsic properties like spatial or temporal relations (whether considered absolute or relative). When entities cannot be distinguished based on intrinsic properties for one reason or another, perhaps like water molecules or quarks, we rely on extrinsic properties. Or, where neither intrinsic nor extrinsic properties seem accessible or appropriate, we tend to draw a type/token distinction—e.g. the song playing on the radio now is the same as the one on the radio yesterday. There are lots of different things and kinds of things and many puzzles in their analysis. But simply encountering a unique identity is no guarantee of novelty, because the uniqueness involved must be assumed for everything properly called an identity. One more paper cup added to the universe is not a creative addition, nor is one more seeing of a paper cup, nor thinking of a cup. A unique wood-pile, in and of itself, is nothing novel.

But why are unique entities experienced this way, to be both unique and non-novel? I offer two initial reasons, both rooted in the claim that new numerical identities need not imply any new sense or anything unfamiliar. First, in many cases of uniqueness, we bear the same overall set of relations to one thing as we bear to another thing in identifying it. That is, we make sense of each unique entity in the same general way. Two paper cups are the same, positively, in how they share many of the same attributes. But, negatively, they are the same in how they differ from each other and other things. I call this *identity of difference*. We find most identities differing along lines with which we are just as familiar as the positive attributes we encounter in things. If grains of sand are typically distinguished by mass and purity, there will not be cases of novelty no matter what additional, unique mass and purity we find. All such unique grains of sand are prefigured by how we make sense of
them. But if we find sand differing, not in mass and purity, but in some new way based on a new physical theory, then we have a non-identity of difference; we make sense of sand in a new way. This is particularly true of some artwork, where what matters about it is not its familiar similarities and differences from earlier work, but that it demonstrates a new (appropriate) way of being different—e.g. the differences that define new historic styles like realism or impressionism. We typically encounter unique objects to be familiar and fully meaningful just in case they satisfy familiar identity conditions, including conditions for identity of difference. Two dogs, side by side, are nonetheless unique dogs, because they vary within acceptable, familiar ranges.

Second, distinct things typically constrain our ways of making sense to ensure that they are both unique and fully familiar. Suppose I stipulate that genetic difference is the one criterion for distinguishing uniqueness among dogs. In this case, twin dogs would nonetheless remain unique dogs, because each dog calls for a different way of dealing with it—for example, to reach one dog I must turn to the left, and for the other I must turn to the right, or engaging with one does not seem to involve engaging with the other. These ways of dealing with an entity can be fully familiar to someone, even as one verifies a unique entity on their basis. As a consequence, merely unique entities can be accounted for on the basis of what we find fully familiar. The oddity of my claim here, of course, is that in it I contradict the initial stipulation that only one variable (genetic difference) counts in determining uniqueness; on this criterion, it seems, there is at most one dog with the same genes, and we are forced into a type/token distinction between a unique genetic type of dog and its multiple instances. The phenomenological point here is that one’s conscious involvement is the one inextricable relation to things. Where the identification of uniqueness is concerned,
there is no getting outside some relation or other to things, and through this relation things can demand more from us than what we stipulate for them. To bracket this relation to things immediately produces an abstract object—the “dog as determined by genetic structure,” which one could only mistake for an actual dog. The imagined stipulation is incoherent so long as we are encountering dogs and not abstractions of dogs. The coherent entity here, which generates a non-problematic type/token distinction, is unique genetic structure, which has only a contingent relation to its instances in unique dogs. What we see here is a convoluted commingling of entities and our relations to them on the basis of our sense-making. When we abstract, we can lose the chance to find differences that things themselves offer to other aspects of our sense-making or dealing with them; on the other hand, when entities succumb to our typical ways of making sense of them, then they are destined to remain unique in just those senses we have. I do not mean that entities cannot be unique in their own intrinsic ways apart from our relations to them—in fact, we rely on entities themselves to show us what they are by resisting our ways of making sense of them. But I do mean that entities do not claim their own uniqueness. Grains of sand, songs, or entire situations just are what they uniquely are; making sense of these things taken together and drawing their distinctions falls on the experiencing person who meaningfully encounters and makes sense of them. And because we often make sense of new unique entities through completely familiar relations to them, there is not necessarily anything creatively novel about them, assuming that novelty is inconsistent with full familiarity.

The crucial premise, then, is that full familiarity undermines creative novelty. Familiarity implies continuity with some system or process—knowledge, skill, or experience generally—which provides the basis for understanding an occurrent object or
situation. We can and do encounter unique objects, but, when fully familiar, we find them continuous with systematic connections between things, whether by causation, implication, reduction, or meaningful extension. Anomalies, then, are an experienced discontinuity or break in a system or process. Imagining an omniscient being as best we can, I hope, helps illustrate what this discontinuity must be. For such a being to find something anomalous, that thing must necessarily either exemplify a difference from the totality of knowledge—i.e. it must be different in a new way—or the thing must be something of which knowledge is impossible in whatever maximal way we can imagine—else we contradict the premise of omniscience—or both. This case suggests a different type of newness, one either discontinuous with knowledge or unknowable, which an omniscient being must encounter to be unfamiliar with anything. On the other hand, to such a being new uniqueness could not constitute a meaningful category at all, because, as part of a continuous system of knowledge, each unique identity already possesses its full determination and is already fully familiar. As Carl Hausman puts a similar point, if one fails to acknowledge the discontinuity of creative novelty:

One would necessarily suppose newness to be present throughout the continuum, and, if all processes are continuous, newness would then be continued as present from all time, past, present, and future. Consequently, no distinction between the old and the new could be made.  

To the extent that we are familiar with things, our familiarity serves in exactly the same way for us as it would for an omniscient being. We must encounter something outside the boundaries of the processes we understand to attribute discontinuity to it. We are tempted to call a unique paper cup “new” as it rolls off the assembly line only because, in contrast to

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86 Hausman, 37
the imagined omniscient being, we have not fully explored the implications or extensions of meanings involved in the systems of knowledge we already have, or we have not fully completed the processes in which we are involved; i.e. our knowledge of what we will find familiar is finite. If discovery and craft (techne) are just applications of our knowledge to find or make new unique entities, then they are not creative.

To avoid confusion, I should clarify this discovery further. We do find anomalies unfamiliar, but something simply being unfamiliar or someone being inexperienced is not sufficient for an anomaly (see below for fuller discussion of anomaly). A baby is unfamiliar with most things. But, first, a baby also lacks many of the additional ways of making sense to encounter discontinuities as we do, and the limits of her meaningful engagement will not be our own—she lives in a much "smaller" world. Yet, second, babies explore their worlds based on the perceptual, motor, and intellectual aptitudes they develop very quickly, which tend to fit the demand of things for learning about them. What matters for anomaly is not simply the initial unfamiliarity of a thing, like a mathematical addition problem one has not solved before, but rather the inadequacy of even one’s familiar ways of making sense to address a thing. When babies explore their worlds or we explore mathematics based on familiar skills, we quickly transform unfamiliar objects into familiar one’s, and there is no discontinuity here.

One might object in three ways. First, because our knowledge is finite, one may object that discontinuity always depends on ignorance. On the further assumption that we only overcome ignorance through systematic or rational extension of knowledge, then there

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87 With paper cups and other manufactured use-objects, there is also the distinction between new and used, which is probably the entirely conventional sense of the thing we care more about.
are no grounds for arguing for discontinuity in our systems. My fuller response to this kind of objection comes later. But I indicate here that the history of scientific knowledge includes occasional breaks from the accretion of data and theory extending a prevailing system of thought, turning instead toward new systems of thought that reinterpret past data. This is Kuhn’s “scientific revolution” that we see in the Copernican revolution or quantum theory. Such theories largely replace earlier theories in their domain, rather than amend them. Thus, in at least some cases, familiar systematic work provides no sufficient basis for overcoming ignorance. We see this “revolution” in more local cases of scientific work too, and in everyday problem-solving.88 A great deal of new knowledge depends not on new data or theoretical hypotheses to test, but rather on making sense of the data we already have in a new way.

Second, one may object that creative novelties are illusions, hallucinations, or delusions of some kind. Based on what I have claimed so far, novelties must be something other than just a numerically new thing, and they must somehow involve a discontinuity. The present objection states that, however we happen to experience creative novelty, this experience includes no reference; it is a connotation without extension. Like a desert mirage, the thing we claim to see is not really there. The first point to make here is that, if this objection is made in an attempt to explain creativity, then not only must novelty be shown not to be, but the consciousness of novelty must be explained as well. As Hausman again observes, however, the basic problem with this objection is that novelty does not appear for consciousness in at all the same way that unreal objects do: the objects of illusions appear to be like something they are not; novelties appear to be unlike what

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88 See Chapter One on rational problem-solving.
already is.³⁹ Ghosts and phantom limbs are unreal versions of real things (i.e. illusions), whereas creative novelties are real versions of unreal things, in the terms available for such an objection. Hence, whether this objection is literal or metaphorical, it already possesses a deep formal implausibility. As I see it, then, if one accepts the existence of novelty, an argument consistent with the typical structure of illusion would come in its defense: something is an illusion when it fails to meet a standard for what counts as real, and if novelties exist, then the illusion would be to reduce novelty to antecedent conditions. Thus, the existence or nonexistence of novelty must be established separately from any argument about illusion. Otherwise, we beg the question.

Third, one may acknowledge the existence of discontinuities but find little evidence for them in the shortcomings of a person’s sense-making. If I cannot make sense of a something (a situation, a logical proof, the value of an object), but you can, for example, it seems that the anomaly bears no existence apart from my subjective take. Or if I cannot reduce an artist’s painting to earlier styles, but you can, we seem to disagree on the continuity of the artist’s work. In short, people differ in what they find fully familiar. But I do not find this relativism to matter much for the argument, unless origination is at stake, rather than creativity. Even if something is fully familiar to you, I may require a discontinuous act of creativity to achieve the sense of a thing that you have. And when we share the experience of a discontinuous novelty, there is no independent criterion available to tell us that it actually is continuous with antecedent conditions— that is precisely what

³⁹ Paraphrased from Hausman 76. In this section, Hausman provides a more than adequate argument against using the concept of illusion to explain novelty. I need not repeat the argument here.
we lack—so we could only assume this criterion, and that would yield a compensation in experience that just makes the discontinuity go away \textit{ad hoc}.

Now we turn to additional characterizations of new entities. In addition to uniqueness, we can experience the \textit{singularity} of objects and situations. Symptoms of singularity include the absolute irreplaceability, unrepeatability, and unsubstitutability of one thing for another. To get this sense of a thing, we might distinguish between austere identity and complex or \textit{messy} identity. The meaning of a thing is relatively complex or messy to the extent that it involves relations to other entities that may be separately identified by redirecting consciousness or through analysis. A singularity is a synthesis of a unique identity and its relations into one unified identity; the mess is concealed in this synthesis. So, for example, I relate to my father’s old hammer in many ways—as a physical object with certain specifications, as a relic with a sentimental value, as a use-object—and the synthesis of all these relations yields a singular object. Calling it a hammer is just an introduction to the singular thing it is (for me). Every grain of sand possesses not only the uniqueness of its identity, but also an infinite set of relations, consciousness of some subset of which yield a singular identity. Based on this phenomenon of singularity, one may insist that every entity or situation can, when given adequate attention, exemplify newness of a different type from mere uniqueness, one that elevates a Romantic sensibility to a conception of creative novelty. This singularity is found in concrete objects, of course, and exemplified through artistic works like poems.

But this view is mistaken if it attributes creative novelty to something based solely on its singularity. Singularities, on their own, do not exemplify a type-difference from uniqueness so much as a difference in frame of reference and meaning. The significance of
singularities is afforded by the abundance of meaning synthesized. For example, seeing the oldest existing wheel in a museum or mentioning 9/11 evokes a great meaning. In both cases, we handle complexity through a synthesis. Yet the recognition of novelty runs orthogonal to whether or not it is a singularity. The crucial condition, again, is whether or not the thing is familiar on the basis of one’s ways of making sense of things. Consider a short bit of 9/11 poetry:

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I can do only two things for [those who jumped from burning floors]—
describe this flight
and not add a last line.\(^{90}\)
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I take it for granted that in reading these lines, one makes a meaningful, if vague, connection between the act of the poet and the singular photos of people jumping from the Twin Towers. But the lines can do so much with so little, not because they draw attention to an existing singularity, but because they create a new one. Another poet, by contrast, could elaborately describe a single sunset for pages, for a book, without being creative. One could synthesize all 592 pages of information in the 9/11 Commission Report into a singular sense of the event without thereby encountering novelty. Finally, note that it is not just the newness of the singularity doing the work here, but also the fact that it makes sense—that it is meaningfully integrated into experience. We can, I take it, creatively synthesize an infinite number of oddities—say, a lampshade and a train—in imagination, and one could even make a sculpture of whatever one imagines. If we say such things meet the conditions for singularity, it remains the case that they make little integrated sense. This is not to say we could not make further sense of the synthesis eventually, but it would take additional

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\(^{90}\) Excerpted from Wislawa Szymborska, “Photograph from September 11”
creative interpretive work, and whatever way we create to make sense of it further would not be what gave rise to it in the first place.

For similar reasons, I object to Carl Hausman’s account of creative novelty, which is the most perceptive and sustained account I can find. In its simplest terms, on Hausman's view, a creative novelty is a new kind of thing. His view depends on another variation of uniqueness, which I call *individuality*. Individuality refers first to a different type of “structure” characterized by an organic unity—the synthesis, in my terms—of its parts. Consider the identity of an everyday object like a pencil (his example). As we have already seen, one pencil is unique even as it shares characteristics with other pencils. On Hausman's description, the intelligibility of the pencil depends on recognizing in it the exhibition of a structure synthesizing the concrete items essential to being a pencil. Recognizing an object to be a pencil implies disregarding all items inessential to this structure. To identify a pencil, we disregard whatever singular features it might have (a bite mark, a torn eraser) in favor of those positive items of a pencil’s structure. By contrast, consider a painting. The identification of a painting involves a progressive movement toward finer and subtler discriminations of characteristics. To regard a Cézanne painting to be the painting it is, we strive to include more, rather than fewer, characteristics in a description. A painting possesses its own intrinsic ordering of elements in a structure, all of which contribute to the thing it is in an organic unity. In this sense, then, a painting introduces a new, specific kind of thing through an immanent concrete structure. Hausman further argues that, while the new structure is a unity of concrete particulars, its coherence

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91 Hausman, 8
92 Ibid, 24
must simultaneously exemplify a new Form, because otherwise the individual painting could not meet identity conditions: “if it is to be an identity, it cannot be wholly dependent on what it identifies.”

Individuals, on Hausman’s view, instance a new structure and Form: “It exhibits a new structure which newly exemplifies a Form.” Here a Form refers to “that in virtue of which a cluster of items—a group of things or of already identified characteristics—cohere sufficiently to be recognized, identified, and subsequently characterized.” The Form and the structure, on his view, are importantly distinct. A radical departure in structure is necessary to disclose a new Form, and though the Form does depend on the new immanent thing for its existence (burning the painting destroys the exemplification of Form), the Form nonetheless functions independently from this thing. So, for example, a painting may exemplify the Form of a new style we come to call “Post-Impressionism,” that can include additional paintings. In this way, Hausman largely reproduces the traditional Platonic view of the Form of Beauty, which is distinctive for its instantiation in concrete particulars, and extends this view to all creative novelty.

Hausman identifies new individuality with creative novelty. His view is, therefore, a thing-focused view, where what gives us the important hints about creativity derives from our study of things like artworks. This is a reasonable enough place to start, I think, but such a start distorts the creativity we recognize if we start elsewhere. Consider the creativity involved in a casual conversation, when someone makes a particularly striking or witty comment, which makes a new point well. Or consider someone who offers up a new alternative or act in an unfamiliar, but appropriate way, like an elementary school teacher.

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93 Ibid, 27
94 Ibid, 28, his italics
95 Ibid, 31
who solves the “problem” of kids making fun of a child undergoing cancer treatment by shaving her own head.\footnote{Weston, 4-5} There is, in addition, invention and innovation in practical matters, and revolution in scientific practice, which do not at all provide the same starting model for their objects as a work of art. Finally, even among artworks, whatever we find creative in Duchamp’s \textit{Fountain} is not at all reducible to the urinal. I mention these cases to indicate the wider concerns I have. The premise I assume is that these examples are just as viable as candidates for creative novelty as a painting. Hausman’s view should be able to account for them. Let’s see if it does.

Individuality, I claim, is neither necessary nor sufficient for creative novelty, at least when given a precise enough characterization to make individuality a useful concept. To make my case, I start by diagnosing some issues with the characterization of individuality.

Suppose I ask for a pencil, and my friend brings me a nine-foot long pencil with a one-foot diameter. The pencil, we might say, counts as a pencil by satisfying the structure of a pencil; yet it diverges from what I took myself to be asking for. If it meets conditions for the structure of a pencil, the big pencil nonetheless leaves a remainder for me to understand. The object denies the sufficiency of the cluster of items we take for granted to recognize it as \textit{just} a pencil. On the other hand, we might say that relative size should be considered a previously unacknowledged element of the structure of a pencil, which the big pencil fails to satisfy. In this second case, I think Hausman must postulate a newly exemplified Form—Big Pencil—because, despite its size, Big Pencil is intelligible to us, and because he must account for its oddity somehow in the object. But this postulation has some problems. First, Big Pencil is not an individual in the same way that an artwork is,
because it does not rely on the organic unity of increasingly many characteristics of the object to exemplify a Form. It does not matter whether it is tan or blue, for example. It is just a pencil, except very big, rather than a painting that requires us to scrutinize each of its elements in detail. But if Big Pencil does exemplify a new Form, then there must be something wrong with the phenomenology that requires a new organic unity of structure to introduce a Form. This point might push Hausman back to finding little pencils and big pencils intelligible on the basis of one Form, but without settling the remainder for understanding. Even if one allows that the big pencil exemplifies a new Form, this does not make it creatively novel—it is, rather, a disconnected oddity. Though the pencil bears some eccentric relevance to what I asked for, and though it is intelligible, it does not make sense in the situation. The key point, then, is that however we construe the Form in the situation, there is no temptation to attribute creative novelty.

So let’s vary the case. Suppose I set myself to some difficult writing task, and find myself overwhelmed. I ask for a pencil, and Big Pencil arrives. In context, I might connect Big Pencil with an exhortation to “think big,” and find myself moving forward on my project. In context, then, Big Pencil functions in establishing some new, potentially creative, connections, but it must be noted that the new Form, if it is one, does this only within a set of complex relations in a situation—whatever is creatively novel in the situation is not reducible to the newness of Big Pencil. Or suppose I have a nervous habit of chewing pencils while I work. I ask for a pencil, and my friend brings me a hand exercise ball. Here I might credit my friend with a creative insight I had not previously achieved, granting that I take the ball and channel my nervousness in a new way—that I, too, grasp the connection. But here there is no new Form at all. I am fully familiar with my nervousness and with
exercise balls, but I had not built this connection between the two. The key point here, then, is that creative novelty can appear by varying the meaningful elements of the situation we make sense of, holding objects constant.

Hausman might respond that I mistakenly identify what counts as the new structure and Form in my examples. He states that “instances of Novelty Proper necessarily vary with respect to the kinds of processes from which they issue.” So, for example, he mentions that new structures of painting will differ in character from new music, and new art will differ from new moral ideals. By extension, one might imagine a structure involving me, writing, pencils, and Big Pencil as items in an organic unity exemplifying a new Form. But this stretches the notion of a Form to something else—Forms become more like messy singularities rather than self-contained individuals. There is indeed new coherence to a situation often attributable to a creative novelty, but this coherence is not necessarily the coherence of an organic unity disclosing a Form. As Hausman himself remarks, “not every object or group of objects exhibits a pattern that is recognized in terms of an intelligible identity. Not every aggregate is sufficiently coherent to appear as exemplifying a Form.”

But these aggregates are not necessarily meaningless in relation to each other, since they could compose a meaningful singularity. The minimal appearance of creative novelty is not the disclosure of a Form; rather it is a new relation, even if between fully familiar relata. This is the case in the exercise ball example. There is no additional need to postulate a Form exemplified by this structure, because after all it is not necessarily the identity of the whole that is at stake, so much as the link between parts.

97 Hausman, 28
98 Ibid, 31
On my view, the accurate description of Big Pencil is simply that, in encountering the big pencil, we extend one familiar way for pencils to be unique—to be different in size—to a new limit. We discover something about pencils and their possibilities. Compare a case in which one encounters the Grand Canyon or a skyscraper for the first time. This case yields discovery, and perhaps awe, but neither creative novelty nor a mysterious remainder for understanding. They are not necessarily odd. When we experience Big Pencil as an oddity, it is because of the nonsense it makes in the situation.

Making a new link between parts in a situation is a new way of making sense of things. A new way of making sense may contingently be quite narrow and limited in scope with application to one and only one unrepeatable situation. Or it may be broad in scope, ranging over large swathes of repeatable situations. This difference does not imply a difference in types of sense-making, one including Forms and one not. It depends rather on the senses and entities involved and their generality. I frankly do not know what implications to draw for Hausman's metaphysics or phenomenological Platonism, but I do not find it worthwhile to stretch the notion of a Form to range over cases that do not meet its basic characterization. In short, Hausman presents an overly specific account of one kind of identity, drawing on the example of a painting, and uses the results of this investigation for interpreting all other creative novelty. When it comes to something like a moral ideal, he leaves it unclear what would count as all the correlates with the artistic case. Even a Big Pencil seems to challenge the view.

From the deficiencies I find in different characterizations of the newness of things, I conclude that the primary focus for understanding creative novelty should be on our making new sense. This shift in focus moves away from an attempt to derive a concept of
novelty simply from what we find in external entities toward our ways of participating with entities through sense-making. Thus, concrete entities or embedded novelties are still relevant, but they get a different analysis in their relation to sense-making. Because of this, now these objects may vary in radical ways depending on the senses involved and how things achieve embedded novelty. To develop my view, we must next investigate the order of things when they make sense, and the anomalies and disorder of things when they do not make sense. The latter, I claim, are constitutive of the discontinuity involved in creative novelty.

3.4 DESCRIBING ORDER AND DISORDER

As a motif for this section, return once again to Frost’s poem: unlike the bird, Frost does not initially make sense of the wood-pile. He certainly recognizes it, without a problem, to be a wood-pile, and even a unique woodpile. But he does not understand initially why it would be there in the condition it is in. He experiences an anomaly.

By order I mean the way things make sense on the whole range of background knowledge and skill one can draw on, given a chance, in a situation. By disorder, I mean the deficiency of that whole background to make sense of a situation. Necessarily, however, one only focuses on a subset of one’s skill and knowledge in a situation. When things appear in order based on that subset, one finds the situation familiar. Otherwise, one finds an anomaly, which one might eliminate by drawing on additional ways of making sense, so long as they are adequate for the task. An anomaly becomes disorder when one’s resources
for making sense of something prove inadequate, when anomaly is insurmountable given current resources.99

In Chapter Two, I described the general phenomena of positive and negative familiarity in a world. Positive familiarity includes the entire range of meaningful experience we can have given our ways of making sense, the order of which I describe here. Normal problems are those we can solve by using our mastered ways of making sense of things. Negative familiarity is familiarity with the limits of our sense-making, which call for creative acts. But this general account is inadequate for present purposes, because in specific situations it is not always clear whether something is merely a problem with an available solution, or whether it is intractable given our (positively) familiar ways of making sense. The complexities go deeper than this too, but it is important to note up front that anomaly functions as a bridge concept, including both unsolved, everyday problems and intractable problems in those moments where it is unclear just what we are dealing with.

The phenomenon of expectation indicates how anomalies arise in attention. Briefly, but imprecisely, expectations are what we think is going to happen. To be more precise, they are what we are primed or conditioned to experience. So I expect to go to work tomorrow; I expect a basketball to travel in a regular arc toward a basket. The latter indicates that expectations are not necessarily “intellectual” or propositional; they include what we take for granted in our involvement in a situation. Moreover, expectations vary in specificity and intensity from anticipation to readiness to openness. We get a glimmer of these distinctions from, for example, a basketball player who anticipates a pass, who is

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99 There is room for additional distinctions, which I will not draw in detail. For example, I mentioned the “perpetual anomaly” of an artwork above, which characterizes art so long as we continue engaging with it through interpretation.
ready for a pass, or who is open to being passed to. Or, in the latter case, it is perhaps clearer to speak of the sideline player who is open to going in the game, who thinks he might go in, and will not be surprised if he does. One kind of surprise results from unmet expectations. One expects a pass that does not come; one expects a job promotion, but does not get it. At its most intense, this surprise can be coupled with disappointment, depending on the kind of expectation and the values involved. Frost might have been disappointed by his trek into the woods, had he not encountered the wood-pile, because he expected (or at least hoped) to find something new. However characterized, the structure of unmet expectations has little to do with creative novelty, so we leave it behind.

A second kind of surprise indicates an occurrence of something unexpected, rather than the failure of something expected to occur. A hopeful, rather than expectant player gets in the game, someone throws a surprise party, or I unexpectedly meet a friend on a busy street. Frost might have been surprised, in this sense, by the sudden presence of a mountain lion. To clarify this phenomenon, note again that one focuses on a situation with only a subset of available sense-making. A purpose typically delimits what one attends to and the skills, values, and knowledge operative in a situation. Now, were my purpose in a woods to hunt, I would likely be unsurprised by a wood-pile, because I would resist having my attention drawn away from my quarry. Similarly, I may fail to be surprised in meeting my friend on the street if I am rushing home for my child’s birthday party. The dramatic limiting effects of one’s purpose has been experimentally demonstrated in the invisible gorilla experiments, in which participants are given the specific task of counting the number of passes made by a basketball team in a video. In the video, a person in a gorilla suit walks into the middle of the team, beats his chest, and walks off screen. Yet participants
in the experiment failed to recognize the intrusion of the gorilla in more than half the cases. These are cases of “attentional-blindness.” The experiment participants expect to see passes, and that is what they see. They are surprised later when the experimenter redirects their attention to the gorilla. In this different context, the participants overcome attentional-blindness and attend to a different aspect of the video. Physiological surprise—elicited by the sudden slam of a door, for example—often works in much the same way to redirect attention. It does not arise on the basis of one’s purpose, but rather redirects one from some purpose to another. On the basis of one’s full set of skills, values, and knowledge, in such cases, one is typically capable of handling this redirection and the new situation, making sense of it. That is, one shifts from one familiar situation to another. Or, in the case of the invisible gorilla, one shifts from something familiar to something unfamiliar.

Now we can note the distinction between surprises in attention versus those that redirect attention. Imagine that, while counting passes made by a basketball team, the basketball disappeared in mid-air. This would elicit a third, different kind of surprise, because expectations are violated among the objects they directly attend to. Like disappearing balls, anomalies are most perspicuous when experienced within the field of one’s attention. As an aspect of our attention, anomalies can persist as long as we attend to them, eliciting wonder or perplexity or sublimity, until we find or create the sense that dispels them. But because they show up on the basis of a specific purpose in a situation, they can also disappear because purposes shift. Thus, (1) we will need to examine the key phenomena in attention and (2) be mindful of how shifting purposes can undermine the appearance of these phenomena.

100 Chabris, 1999
Let’s attend, then, to order and disorder. Things are in order when they make sense taken together. A sequence of numbers, for example, exhibits order when some known rule accounts for the sequence. The rule is an explicit statement of how one makes sense of the numbers. Consider some example sets:

1. \{59, 13, 373\}
2. \{13, 59, 373\}
3. \{2, 3, 5, 7, 11 \ldots \}
4. \{59, 13, 372\}

The sequence of prime numbers results from the rule that a natural number greater than one be divisible without remainder by only itself or one. This rule makes sense of sets (1-3), though they come under progressively more rules of order, adding sequence (least to greatest) and completeness. We know that the set of all primes is infinite, which (3) represents with an ellipsis. Perhaps the most we could say about (4), however, is that it is a set of natural numbers.

As a matter of how we understand these sets, I cast the curious difference between the rules describing (3) and (4) as a difference in necessity and sufficiency conditions. The prime number rule establishes order decisively in (3)—making sense of all and only prime numbers. The rule makes sense of each number’s presence in the sequence (sufficiency), and shows why its absence would be a mistake for the whole sequence (necessity). So long as one is occupied by the ordering principle for prime numbers, there is no question that the numbers in (3) belong.

Applied to set (4), however, a rule to collect some natural numbers cannot make complete sense. Each number belongs as a natural number, but they could be otherwise—any other natural number. They meet a sufficiency condition, but not a necessity condition. We might also look at (2) for an incomplete sense—each of the selected numbers is a prime,
but the prime rule does not answer the question “why these primes?” The prime number
rule alone is inadequate to account for these numbers and no other. Thus, some orders
appear insufficient or unnecessary. Their rules are incomplete or they incompletely rule. I
call this lack of complete sense anomaly.

Anomaly is normally a transient property, dependent on what sense we bring to an
object of experience. We add additional anomaly to (2) by failing to recognize them as
primes, and we add it to (3) by asking why there should be an infinite series of primes at all.
That is, we change the frame of reference significantly for the way we make sense of the
series. Or one removes the anomaly of (4) by understanding it to be the set of counts of
marbles in three different jars. As long as this count is our primary concern, the anomaly
disappears. Anomaly is therefore first of all a phenomenon of human participation in a
world of concerns and projects, whether in doing mathematics or counting marbles. But
both the object and the sense-making matter in this interaction. We get a further indication
of this by noting that, with the rule of primes, I could construct a series of primes that
embeds this order and share it with others—in this case, I am a maker. Or I could encounter
a series of primes produced elsewhere and make sense of it—in this case, I am an observer.
And in the case that, as an observer, I cannot make complete sense of the series, the series
itself demands work from me.

Consider the sequence \{1, 3, 8, 18, 38 \ldots \}. One may initially find the sequence
anomalous, if one expects a pattern and does not see it initially. Now, first, suppose
someone just tells one the ordering rule for a pattern. Here one adopts a new sense of the
series and understands its order. But note that the newness of the sense is neglected,
because what one attends to is the series itself, and not the newness of sense. But, in fact, to
grasp the pattern-order of the series presupposes that one grasp a new rule for ordering numbers and test it against the series. Even if, on the other hand, one works out this pattern-order oneself, one may neglect the newness of the rule that makes sense of the series. Nonetheless, by attending to this rule, one finds something that was not there before, a new sense of the numbers.

Order is the absence of anomaly, or the presence of necessity and sufficiency conditions. Of course I mean this in a strictly experienced sense, rather than a logical sense. Logical order is one species of more rigorous order. When we experience order, we have a working grasp of our situation apparently adequate to our concerns. We make sense of what we are doing, roughly why we are doing it, and who we are doing it with. The order we experience may not be the same as robust knowledge, and a Socrates can come along to poke holes in it at any point. Indeed, when Socrates challenges Euthyphro’s sense of piety, he brings anomaly to the concept. But even general order is more rigorous than mere intelligibility, because it requires making sense of different objects together. And order can apply to any number of relations we bear to entities, be they intellectual, instrumental, conative, or evaluative. Thus, in much of our experience, order is everywhere. A courtroom exhibits order so long as its rules range over all the conduct (and arguments) it sees. A soda machine is in order as long it dispenses a cold drink when I pay and push a button. A parking lot is in order so long as drivers abide by the painted stripes. For causal explanation, order is exemplified in the confirmation of a predictive hypothesis. One coordinates interests, skills, knowledge, and values in situations which tend to fit with their expression, and one situation flows seamlessly into the next. Under these conditions, we have no need for creative work.
Anomalies, by contrast, show up in a variety of ways, but always falling short of making all the sense we seek in them. They are intellectual or moral problems, or just oddities like big pencils. There must always be something minimally intelligible in a case of anomaly, or else there would be nothing to actually attend to in the case except, perhaps, abstractly—e.g. we can give a name like “chaos” or “pure spontaneity” to something we find to be intrinsically unintelligible or inaccessible. Creative novelties are intelligible, I claim, but they are also necessarily anomalous in their inception.

When Frost encounters the wood-pile, it is initially anomalous. But he draws on further familiar ways of making sense to craft a likely story for its presence. Yet, were there a point or were something at stake, one could poke holes in this account, since there is no evidence of someone “turning to fresh tasks.” The situation permits Frost to make sense of it in this way, but it certainly does not require this sense on any standard of rigor. Nonetheless, the account permits Frost to dispel the anomaly and continue on his way. This is the process of compensation. Frost compensates for the unavailability of evidence by contributing typical ways of making sense of things in the situation.

We can recognize compensation in even the highly structured domain of mathematics. The mathematician James Milgram describes a case that serves the point, related to our earlier pattern-recognition cases. Consider a sequence of dots:

The mathematics problem is this: “Assume that the number of dots added at each step is more than the number added in the previous step. How many dots in the 20th term?” On

\[\text{101 Milgram, undated}\]
the assumption that there is a regular pattern, the expected solution is $20 \times 21 = 420$. But this assumption is unjustified, given the constraints of the explicit problem, which does not ask for a pattern. At most, one could calculate a lower bound. Thus, in arriving at a specific solution, one fortifies the sense of the problem with a compensation. Mathematical rigor demands that one must be satisfied without a specific solution.

It must be acknowledged that “seeing a pattern” and “accounting for a wood-pile” still require constructive effort on the part of the observer to make sense of their objects—they do not imply a spontaneous “intuition” into things. They make sense through familiar ways of making sense. If one is skilled enough in mathematics, the process of making sense of the above problem without compensation will be equally familiar. The difference is that this way of making sense yields fidelity to the object, whereas the compensatory pattern recognition does not. Nonetheless, the problem will not announce that one has made a mistake in the same way that, say, incorrectly cutting a $2 \times 4$ stud for a wall does when it does not fit. One may just move on from the problem without reservation, as Frost does from the wood-pile. Yet there is an additional difference between the compensation of seeing a pattern and Frost’s wood-pile: while one who recognizes a pattern typically leaves the problem with confidence in the solution, Frost can easily recognize his account to be carving out one possibility among others, and therefore not a necessity at all. Thus, while Frost’s compensation provides sufficiency conditions, it does not provide necessity conditions for making sense of the wood-pile, and the account remains open to revision if it ever needed it. Not all anomalies require full order for us to deal with them; in fact, most of them do not. However, because the range of possibilities for making sense of the anomaly are all well-ordered (by hypothesis)—that is, each revised account of how the wood-pile
got to be there would issue from an equally familiar or “reasonable” way of making sense of it—this status as provisional or open to revision excludes a recognition of disorder.

There is no single description of what art calls for. Unlike the math problem, the 9/11 poem above does not raise an explicit question or call on a reader to work for understanding. It expresses a singularity, the key sense of which one may grasp immediately. Nonetheless, owing to the language, one may explore its possible meaning in many ways. Unlike mathematics, it does not set rigid constraints on the sense one can make of it—though it does nonetheless have constraints. For this reason, one can not only make sense of it in different ways, but one can even offer a new way of making sense of it through a creative interpretation. Frost’s poem is trickier, however, because, with some exceptions (“the slow smokeless burning of decay”), the poem offers little to discourage an utterly conventional reading to an unskilled reader, as though it is just a well-expressed record of a walk in the woods. Read as an anomaly, however, the poem demands interpretation, which may range from fairly superficial (e.g. the poem is a comment on the vanity of human activity) to quite sophisticated (e.g. the poem raises questions about the activity and value of writing).102 Were we to examine additional art forms—painting, film, music—we would find large variations in the ways they deliver new senses of things or require one to engage in sense-making. But what is common among them, at least among the creative works in each medium, is that they do indeed engage us in this way, helping or challenging us to grasp a connection between things. Thus what is distinctive about art, at least a great deal of art, is not at all that it stands apart from us as new alien kinds, but rather that it expands

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102 This latter interpretation I owe to Jay Parini, personal conversation, Middlebury College, June 2013.
our understanding, whether through discovery or creation. Creative art is embedded
novelty. It gets its novel character precisely from being anomalous.

We turn now to disorder. Some anomalies are less easy to cope with than those we
have seen so far. One needs to lead a group of people, but a Gordian knot stands in one’s
way. One needs to establish the structure of a benzene molecule, but no existing principles
of molecular composition work. One wants freedom and security, but sees no way of having
both. One needs to express something in music, but this Western tonal system cannot be
made to do the job. Like Captain Vere, one faces a dilemma—allegiance to the State or
allegiance to the ethical call of a situation—both of which attract one’s moral commitment.
Call these kinds of problems “disorders.” Disorder appears when our ways of making sense
of things are deficient to cope with an anomaly. The attempt to understand the sets of
natural numbers with which we began indicates relatively mild anomaly compared to what
we can face.

We put our minds to work on these problems by combining parts into wholes,
breaking wholes into parts, and putting parts and wholes into relationships. We search for
and discover relevant facts and theories that aid us in our work. We learn as much as we
can from our conventional ways of tackling problems. Understanding gives us the elements
of logical, causal, or practical order, and by its work we try to solve the problems we face.
We draw deeply on our familiar ways of making sense of things to dispel an anomaly once it
appears. But there is no guarantee of success. Despite hard work, a Gordian Knot stays
tight, the molecular structure of benzene remains intractable, and the Western tonal system
will not diverge from the ultimate consonance of a home key. One may know that a choice
must be made, but all choices appear equally weighted and mutually exclusive. Such
anomalies may not even be clearly presented; one may have no grasp of even what would count as success with respect to an anomaly, or what questions need to be asked.

I raise these extreme examples to orient us to disorder, but anomalies tend toward disorder in many everyday cases as well. There are important constraints operating on us when we cope with a situation that ensure we must experience disorder. There are first of all the constraints that we take to be fixed. Alexander was constrained by the idea that he must untie the Gordian knot, as tradition demanded. But in everyday life, if I lock my keys in my car, I might easily miss the idea that I could break a window. If I realize that I could break a window, I might easily realize that I could just break the smallest window—and that might be just the connection I need to enable action. There are also time-constraints that work on situations—if one must make a choice now or act now, rather than later, one must draw on only those ways of making sense one has. At a moment’s notice, for example, one must find a way to patch a hole in a roof before a storm hits or make a striking analogy in an impromptu speech.

My thesis is that one must respond to disorder with a creative act. One must respond with a new way of making sense of something, even if it is just to remove a constraint on a situation or propose different constraints. Alexander created a way to make sense of cutting the Knot. Nonetheless, in order to avoid oddity, weirdness, or incoherence, new ways of making sense must in every case be connected to and constrained by something in the situation. In the case of a genre-filmmaker, nearly all of the constraints may be shared with other films in the genre, yet films like Blade Runner (1984) or Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956) embed novelties that challenge us to think differently. In everyday cases of ingenuity, for example using compacted Styrofoam containers as a building material, there
is a new way of making sense of these things operating in the background, which turns waste into a resource. What the creative painter does with paint on canvas, the tinkerer does for things lying around—the specific senses at work, and the types of novelty they embed differs, but not their shared task of making new sense of things.

The thing created in a creative act is, minimally, a new relation between things, which enables us to cope in a situation—by understanding, acting, or choosing differently. This is a new sense of things, which embeds the creative act in the world. Creativity is, properly, the making of this relation, for which there is evidence in the embedded novelty. And we see the 

\textit{necessity} for such acts only where we must cope with disorder, because there is no alternative way to cope but one we newly make. The creative act is therefore an anomaly. A creative novelty is both visible in the embedded novelty and invisible in the act that gives rise to it; it is both connected to familiar things and familiar constraints, and yet unbound by those things in introducing a way forward that did not exist before. For Frost, experience demanded something from him, something in the themes of human activity and the incorrigibility of nature, which set a task for him to turn to. The most general argument in favor of an account of creativity that claims discontinuity with the past is that, without it, there would be no importantly new ways of making sense of things. The existing order of things would always make sense of the present, were we only to know it well enough, and imply a future. But by introducing new ways of making sense, we change the order that makes sense of the present and its possibilities.

Nonetheless, in each of the cases I have been calling creative, there is a temptation to emphasize what is familiar and ignore what is unfamiliar. One can comment on all the influences that go into making a film and how they express an overall \textit{Zeitgeist}. Or one can
point to the gradual assimilation of familiar skills and ideas by an inventor that accumulate over time to determine an invention at the right place at the right time. In response to these objections, I must insist that no matter how “close” the proximity of senses, there is no necessity to their synthesis, and that a creative act introduces a discontinuity from the determinations of the sense antecedently available. On the other hand, lacking this necessity, one may be tempted to call creative acts spontaneous, lacking any necessary or determinative relations to the order of things, as if one could escape one’s Zeitgeist entirely and introduce a novelty from outside. In response to this objection, I must insist that the creative act maintain meaningful continuity with antecedent conditions. This is the requirement, examined in Chapter Two, that creativity respond at least to negative familiarity.

3.5 CLARIFYING CREATIVITY IN RESPONSE TO DISORDER

To argue for my position, then, I need a minimal case of creativity that walks a tightrope between full determination and pure spontaneity, while indicating the insufficiency of those positions. I argue that, when faced with disorder, we must respond creatively in order to make sense of a situation, where making sense is more than just acting spontaneously. If successful, I take this to be (1) strong reason to define creative novelty to be a new way of making sense of things and (2) strong evidence for our ability to be creative precisely by introducing this novelty.

To make my case, I need to clarify a specific situation in which we (1) deal with disorder and (2) draw a distinction between spontaneity and creativity. Furthermore, this situation must factor out alternative characterizations invoking (a) a conceptual or rational
scheme, (b) empirical psychological principles, or (c) skillful, practical involvement. This move is necessary in order to isolate a case in which one must necessarily act in a way that bears no reduction or explanation by reference to these alternatives. We can then investigate whether a difference remains between creativity and (d) spontaneity.

The alternatives to creativity I factor out must be understood in specific ways, but I think my understanding of them is standard and fair. (a) By a conceptual or rational scheme, I mean a coherent set of rules or procedures that coordinate one's thought or actions. Such a system allows one to solve problems by drawing inferences from available information. The view of rationality I have in mind is sufficiently broad to include subconscious and unconscious intellectual procedures. The procedures themselves must be logically related and unambiguous.

(b) By "empirical psychological principles," what I have in mind are principles of association, innate forms of species-specific rationality, and habituated or conditioned forms of behavior. So, for example, these principles describe the tendency to associate smoke and fire, and act on the basis of this constant conjunction (to use Hume's phrase). But we also observe tendencies to form different rational connections in an environment in different species. So, for instance, foraging species (e.g. rats) tend to avoid areas where they have found food before, a behavior that may strike us as irrational until we recognize the practical benefit for the forager of engaging its environment in this way. Empirical psychological principles explain an organism's activity by reference to its specific biological or practical circumstances.

(c) Skillful, practical involvement refers to one's engagement in a situation or environment in terms of complex learned abilities, the manipulation of available
equipment, and a set of purposes. To engage in an environment skillfully implies that the engagement can be done better or worse, with greater or lesser effectiveness, sensitivity, or refinement. Success based on skill contrasts with success based on chance. For example, chess typically requires great skill for success in winning a game against an experienced opponent, although chance (or luck) may play a role among novices. Playing the lottery, by contrast, requires no skill. Poker seems to be a mix of skill and luck, a matter of how one plays the hand as it is dealt. Depending on the activity, skillful involvement may also peak due to the structure of the activity. Tic-tac-toe, for example, requires skill to a point, after which matches between experienced players always end in a draw.

I just used the concept of chance in a fairly commonsense way. In the chess case, a “lucky” move is a fortuitous move made despite an inadequate grasp of the game—a good move made despite ignorance. In the lottery case, “chance” indicates elements of a system beyond one’s control.

(d) By contrast to these everyday uses, the reference to spontaneity or chance considers chance to be (1) a meaningful explanatory principle or (2) a way of describing how one acts. It is important to recognize that (1) is here understood to deliver the concrete sense we bring to an act in order to explain it. We often try to understand our acts; one way to try to understand is through meaningful explanation; and a reference to spontaneity or chance may be part of that explanation: all of these elements may occur as an aspect of one’s attempt to understand a situation. For example, I might say, “I drove to Chicago, because I acted on a whim.” Here spontaneity is supposed to be a reason for my

103 To refer to spontaneity or chance in an explanation is not necessarily to undermine the possibility of explanation, but it does ultimately require a philosophically coherent conception in metaphysics to support it. For example, the propositions “The bridge collapsed by chance” or “the species evolved
action. In the second case (2), spontaneity is described more directly without an attempt to explain anything so much as offer an irreducible aspect of the situation—the phenomenon of spontaneity. As an initial characterization, spontaneity is impulsive, making one think or act in way that bears little relation to what one was thinking or doing before. One might have the sudden idea to drive across the country or one might make a snap judgment on an important matter. From the former example, I note that a spontaneous act need not introduce anything new—it is more a dramatic shift from one purpose to another, but without an external stimulus. There could be, I think, a great deal more description of distinct phenomena. For example, one may describe another kind of spontaneity that responds to an implicit sense of a situation, rather than some blind impulse. But I do not think belaboring this description is necessary, because I argue for principled difference between creativity and spontaneity in an embedded novelty that connects antecedent conditions in a new way. The more spontaneity offers in this respect, the greater the argument for calling it creative, but also the more reason to distinguish it from other conceptions of spontaneity.

My case is a game of coin-flipping. I select this example for its familiarity and clear theoretical description.

My friend asks me to call heads or tails. How do I go about making my call? Suppose first that I am an amateur coin-caller guided only by past experience, the results from which provide positive reinforcement for a particular selection. As I proceed from one call to the next, past successes influence each new guess—a series of heads, successfully called,

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spontaneously,” taken literally, require a metaphysical conception of chance. In scientific explanation, I take it, chance is typically not understood in this way, but is rather used to indicate ignorance of causal connections or to describe probabilities.
elicits the guess of heads because heads has been positively reinforced in several repetitions in experience. Thus, we can articulate the cause of my selection from a psychological principle of association. And yet I may fail in the next round, when tails is revealed. Through many episodes, I discover that the system of coin-flipping is not ultimately tracked by accreting my experience in this way. This discovery is not a matter of conscious or deliberate assessment, but rather a stabilization of my network of associations, which leaves me unsure how to proceed. The result would be the same if I adopted the strategy of calling tails after a long series of heads—surely a tails is due. But the game does not work that way.

The game equally fails to be effectively navigated by skillful involvement, for similar reasons. The problem is that no amount of experience or knowledge can give me a skill here at all, because one precondition for skill is that something can be done better or worse. As in the lottery, the result is in principle outside my control. There are ancillary skills that might complicate the case—e.g. noticing the way one tosses the coin or attempting to doctor the coin to weight it one way or the other. And there are skills that serve as preconditions for the case, like perceptual skills, the ability to engage in a game, and so on. But none of these play a role in the base case.

After abandoning associationist or skillful strategies, I advance to reason. I may at first employ all kinds of fallacious reasoning getting no further along than my earlier associationist attempts: again, with eight heads in a row, surely soon there will be tails.\footnote{In both the association and reason case, to the extent they can be made different, I should note that what counts as “reasonable” can vary. Since I have a fairly stringent view of reason here, I direct this comment just at association. In normal human cases, we are likely to check locations where we have found food in the past to find it again. Foraging species (mice and rats, for example), by contrast, tend to avoid places where they have previously found food, because, we might say, they “know” there is no food there. Such}
The use of this kind of reasoning may initially guide my action as long as an answer seems more likely or unlikely, attractive or repulsive, reasonable or unreasonable. But, again, if I am attentive to the evidence and reason well, the structure of my concepts will eventually stop delivering a solution to my problem, and no further evidence will count in generating an act. Once I learn the appropriate probability theory, for instance, I can see the shortcomings of any guides to action for successfully navigating the game (rationally, psychologically). This is not to say that the game becomes irrational for this reason, but only that, from the perspective of the agent who must act, it makes no difference whether there are two equally rational choices or no rational choices at all: neither helps issue in an act.

At this point, we move from mere anomaly to disorder. This disorder is an experienced structure of environmental conditions in which an agent is involved and an act is solicited, but in which the most perspicuous and relevant elements of the situation cannot determine any act. The elements of such disorder include not only environmental factors and a person’s concepts and rational processes, but also emotions, skills, habits, and values—one’s ways of making sense. The problems this disorder poses are no longer “problems” in the conventional sense, to be solved and dismissed, but are rather barriers to acting, thinking, or expressing at all, provided one continues to be motivated to face the situation. In the coin-flipping example, one option is to ignore or abandon the solicitation for action, and to change one’s purpose; but elevated conflicts of value or problems of survival cannot be so easily jettisoned. I presuppose some motivation for continuing to play

_idiosyncrasies in association or reason do not matter for the case of coin-calling, because there is no order (rational or otherwise) that makes sense of it._
the coin-flipping game at this point. But I have removed our reasoning abilities and mature experience from our resources for effectively governing our behavior within the structure of the game itself.

The essential problem with disorder, in its developed form, is that it inhibits action, rather than rewarding increasingly successful action. It sustains deliberation indefinitely, so long as acting agents remains within the conceptual or experiential structure provided by the system. It moves one from action to inaction.

Nonetheless, a direct description of spontaneity may offer the most insight into how we deal with calling coins. We turn to this investigation. Can we experience our coin-calling as an act of spontaneity?

Of course we can. In everyday circumstances, if someone asks me to call a coin, or pick a random number, or perform any number of such trivial acts, I can usually respond effortlessly regardless of an intellectual or skillful development that cannot support the act. If asked why I act as I do, I have no problem saying I act spontaneously. There is not much more to the act than this. One finds oneself moving in one direction rather than the other, calling heads rather than tails. And immediately following the act, one finds oneself unchanged by the act, primed to call again spontaneously.

But consider the further development of this response. First, offering up spontaneity to describe why I act the way I do is vacuous. The key here is that there is nothing in the selection one makes that makes sense. This point is made clearer with the second observation. There is no added complexity or additional possibility or existence added by a spontaneous selection in this case. Constrained as the case is, this lack of complexity is not surprising. But it is an important point to make to deny a claim that spontaneity introduces
anything creatively novel. To appear sensible, spontaneity may only act in one of two ways, neither of which leads anywhere new. Of course, one may take a more comprehensive look at a person engaged in such a game, one who selects “neither” or marches away from the game, but then it is not the spontaneity of his act that yields interest, but rather the new sense one makes of his act that will deny its spontaneity, provided one can make this sense. In cutting the Gordian Knot, Alexander cannot be taken to act spontaneously within the “rules;” he broke the rules. But his act still necessarily found its sense only with respect to those rules, as broken. By contrast, a spontaneous aberration from the rules of flipping coins can normally be recognized only as incoherent or as a failure to play the game—and that is from the perspective of the agent, and not just the audience for the act. It would take a special set of circumstances for making new sense to diverge completely from the rules of coin-flipping; but then the divergence would not be spontaneous because of this sense.

Finally, the spontaneous act lacks permanence. Nothing results from it that lasts. There is no difference impressed on the world, no novelty embedded, and no new possibility imprinted for oneself or others. One may just as easily spontaneously select another option on the next turn. On these grounds, I describe spontaneity as dissipative; the act dissipates the moment it ends. Any sense it has self-destructs instantly. Thus, it seems that spontaneity framed to offer meaningful insight into one’s experience fails to offer much of what we might hope to get from it, and would serve only the most anemic description of creativity.

In its defense, I must mention that spontaneity can of course lead somewhere, and even somewhere interesting. Spontaneously calling heads, where much depends on the call, certainly has its effects in the world. Many football games have their tones set by a
spontaneous act; spontaneously calling a phone number initiates many of the world’s romances; and a spontaneous trip across the country can be formative. We see in these cases some of the sense of drawing attention to spontaneity of this kind in contributing to meaningful experience. But in these cases, it is important to note that spontaneity serves only at nodes threading multiple possibilities together, with the risks and reward for each possibility obscured in the bundle. The spontaneous act itself does nothing to generate those possibilities, nor does it bear on the content of the possibility selected—that possibility would remain the same whether selected spontaneously or as a matter of course. The spontaneous act dissipates and the mark it makes is mere trivia.

From an alternative characterization of creativity, however, we get much more. To the extent that we can find creativity in coin-flipping or number-calling, for example, we find it in those who actually do have something concrete to say in response to the question, “why?” To appreciate a superfluous aesthetic quality of a system, for example, tethers inessential properties to the essential properties of the static system: I may call tails because I like the look of that side of the coin. Or I may select a specific number because it is “lucky.” In these boring examples, something remarkable occurs. At the inception of one of these ways of acting, one generates a synthesis that could not be suggested by the static system on its own. One gathers disparate features of one’s experience into a new sense. This synthesis has a new status in existence; it does not dissipate like the act of spontaneity. Acting on the basis of superfluous aesthetic qualities offers a new way of acting, which one may replicate and share. Indeed, at its inception, such a synthesis sets a precedent; it does not follow one. The reference to this synthesis in explaining one’s reason for acting, however, could not have caused the act, because the synthesis did not yet exist. “Causation"
then is not an apt concept, for then we would be driven to a view of backward causation. Rather, the creative act brings a new sense into being, one that repairs the disorder in the service of action. It puts a Band-Aid on a puncture wound, so to speak. And yet, in this case at least, the synthesis contains no reason, no justification, apart from its service to action.

With respect to a creative synthesis, some ways of calling coins that look “more rational” are structurally identical to “less rational” ways. The strategy to always call heads (or always tails) because it conforms to the probabilistic theory involved in coin-calling is no more or less effective than always calling heads because one likes the look of it. But those strategies—and even the strategy to always call spontaneously—are nonetheless creative syntheses. They do not explain the act; the strategies are created in the act. The difference between an aesthetic call and a probability-maximizing call rests in the content synthesized. In the former, something external to the static system (the look of heads) helps break the stasis; in the latter, however, the concrete features of the system are, so to speak, folded back on themselves to produce a new way of acting. This result looks “more rational” because only the features of the system inform how one deals with it. And indeed there may be good reason to designate this way of dealing with the system as realizing new knowledge of the system; but it is not for that reason any less creative. Creative acts that refer to external content, I call “open syntheses;” those that refer only to themselves I call “closed.” This distinction I propose between open and closed syntheses parallels my earlier investigation of uniqueness and singularity. Closed syntheses result from a focus on the essential features of an object of consciousness, in this case the coin-flipping as a type of game with many tokens. A teacher, guiding a student through considerations about coin-flipping, will recognize a tipping point for a student when she says, “It does not matter what
call; I have no grounds for making a choice.” The student who produces the rule to always call heads at this point demonstrates a mastery of the knowledge of this object with a synthesis that reinforces this understanding. The open synthesis, by contrast, produces a singularity by referring to something inessential to the disorder, the look of the coin.

I also distinguish between making a choice and creating an alternative, affirming one option over another and creating a new alternative. Acting creatively enables one to reinforce a choice in a new way by building a synthesis with greater permanence in support of that choice. When faced with equally weighted, mutually exclusive options, one creates the “reason” or sense to pick one—whether it is one’s allegiance to freedom over security or the selection of something from a restaurant menu. In the latter, trivial example, it is helpful to recall the struggle for reasons that can come up short in so simple a case—“that one seems healthier,” “I’ve never had this kind of vegetable before”—when all one is doing is discriminating additional characteristics of the options in blind hope that something one stumbles upon will matter. They typically do not matter, and it is just an intellectual exercise that makes no connection to one’s values. So when the server comes, one either selects spontaneously or one reinforces some choice by connecting it anew to, say, the value of health. One might object that this final choice was always implicit in the situation and that, so to speak, one was destined to choose health after all the hemming and hawing. But this interpretation both ignores the skirmish of value that could condition a new commitment and depends on a choice made implicitly which, in its own formation, could have been creatively conceived.

Making a choice is minimal form of creativity because background sense-making is inadequate for determining an action and making a choice entails a specific difference from
spontaneity. In making a choice, one generates a new way of making sense of the situation to guide action, though the action one takes is no different than had one acted spontaneously or been guided by faulty reasoning. Thus, making a choice realizes a new, specific possibility no more than dissipative spontaneity. Once one makes a choice, one proceeds down the possibility selected, hopefully to a winning football game or satisfying romance. However, making a choice subtends those possibilities in a way that bears on future action, because one introduces new sense-making that survives to guide another act, another day. The football captain who chooses heads through a creative act may always call heads, and that fact leads to a specific difference from pure spontaneity. Creative choice-making introduces the novelty of a new way of making sense of things, which can affect what possibilities are subsequently pursued.

Creating an alternative, by contrast, breaks the rules or denies some of the constraints in a situation in a way that remains sensible within the situation, like Alexander cutting the Knot. That one orders off the menu provides a fitting metaphor here, provided one makes reference to the menu and synthesizes a choice based on what one sees. A creative alternative realizes a new possibility entirely, one that appears unpredictable, even “impossible,” with respect to the way one understood the situation beforehand and the way the options were specified. To follow this alternative is necessarily also to choose it. Yet an alternative, unlike a choice, challenges the world into which it is introduced to embrace it based on what it finds sensible once presented in an embedded novelty. Alexander, in his story, found such a world. But in what world would we call the football captain who swallows the coin more creative than mad? The constraint on meaningful action he breaks is one we are not ready to abandon. Hence his act is an oddity.
Open syntheses create alternatives in ways that closed syntheses do not. They provide a relation between two otherwise disconnected things, two non-rationally or at least non-habitually related elements. The synthesis provides a bridge one might cross between the two without further ado, without the necessity of finding some distant, intrinsic connection. One need not look for a further connection, a further ground, between the elements of a disordered system and the external relatum other than one's dependence on that relation in order to act. The creative act forges a link for which there is no determination, no necessity, and no sufficiency, one relatum to the other. What matters is that the link could be forged at all. In the creative act, one does not simply realize an existing possibility; one brings a new possibility into existence. For Alexander, cutting the knot made sense, not because he revealed a loophole in the rules, but rather because in a stroke he created a connection between the constraints of the situation and the genuine authority of a leader. Both sides were part of his and his “audience’s” familiar experience beforehand, but never before had they been linked. Alexander never changed the rules; he built a bridge between meanings which others could cross with him, making the rules irrelevant.

Open syntheses open up more than just a single relation, because the act of creation brings into being not only the relation, but also the elements related as possible relata. Prior to the creative synthesis, its elements are not necessarily realized as relata at all. The preference for certain “looks” is not realized as an aspect of experience one might bring into relation with other experience. Bringing it into relation with a creative synthesis gives this way of making sense a new general reality, which becomes available for further sense-making. This is why even open syntheses that appear to serve as mere choices nonetheless
create an alternative, for they open up experience outside of the immediate situation necessarily through the relata they form for the first time. For example, by realizing specific “looks” as relatable to one’s preferences, one opens up a schemata for future action, an open relation with a variable waiting for fulfilment in a situation. (E.g. where the situation affords it, other things being equal, I will prefer things based on how they look.) Open syntheses bridge a gap that may range over more experience than the occurrent situation and others that share their form. That is, they introduce a new way of making sense of things. At bottom, the only difference between the two types of open syntheses—one that looks like a choice and one that clearly opens up an alternative—is the “direction” one travels along the relation, to put it metaphorically. The coin-caller starts with his problem of acting and brings an aesthetic feature into the disorder to resolve the problem; Alexander starts as a leader and brings that to bear on his problem. Both enact a relation with no intrinsic reason.

Whether open or closed, creative syntheses are fodder for further elaboration. They may be rarefied or clarified, and they may serve in further creative syntheses. Choices embolden a way of thinking and doing, which is transferrable elsewhere through another open synthesis. Even a style of acting spontaneously or acting through aesthetic preferences may take hold as a fixture of one’s way of seeing and doing. That is, one may creatively choose acting spontaneously to be one’s typical way of dealing with disorder—and thus become habitually flippant. As elements of a situation lock into place, fulfilling the new sense of a creative synthesis, one may extend it anew. Alexander cuts to the banks of the Ganges before his bridge ends. In the grand sense, this is what it means to realize new possibilities through a new way of making sense.
The key conclusions are (1) that the novelty of creativity just is a new way of making sense of things and, further, (2) that we actually can be creative in this way, realizing new possibilities. In these everyday engagements, we connect with our world in ways that rarely require creativity. Disorder, by contrast, affects us differently, but if and only if we respond to it as creators. In these systems, the world offers no cues for differential selection, and this necessitates a precise focus on the “inner world” of our sense-making, on the skills and values by which we connect to the world. The creative act modifies those skills and values; it builds new connections that finally enable us to make sense again. None of this happens if we simply respond to disorder spontaneously. But because we do create new sense-making, the possibilities we realize in our world change too.

Based on my examples, it would be easy to misunderstand some key points. First, the idea of disorder in coin-calling is helpful for illuminating the reality of creative acts in a way that factors out alternatives to creativity. But this does not imply in the least that disorder is a necessary condition for creative acts. Rather, actions in response to disorder which form a new and lasting synthesis are sufficient for verifying the existence of creativity, on my view. But once we recognize that these distinctive kinds of acts are possible with respect to disorder, there is no principled problem with acting creatively in other situations. Creativity is, as Koestler puts it, a matter of “thinking aside”—to which I would add “doing aside”—that one may enact in any situation. But without a clear case of disorder to prove the point, one may always rightfully suspect that we always follow implicit connections rather than create them. Second, the arguments so far should not be taken to imply that the embedded novelties of creative acts are inherently non-rational,
irrational, or otherwise disconnected from other orders. These adjectives apply more to the act than the object. Some examples should help here.

August Kekulé first formulated the theory of chemical structure and the notation system by which organic molecules were represented in chains with lines representing atomic bonds. Owing to the clarifying power of this notation, organic chemistry quickly emerged as an important scientific field. Representing molecules in chains became the dominant norm. Nonetheless, the new notation could not represent the structure of the benzene molecule, despite years of devoted research. The way of making sense of molecules in chains could not represent its complexity. But Kekulé solved this problem too, arguing for a ring-structure for benzene. Kekulé reported in his 1890 address on the conception of the structure of benzene that, after years of devotion to representing benzene in a chain, he dreamed of an ouroboros, a snake eating its own tail, and connected this with the structure of benzene. In retrospect, that such a simple modification to the chain-structure marked one of greatest scientific achievements of the 19th century can seem absurd. Yet we must acknowledge the evidence that early organic chemists, Kekulé included, could not see past this way of making sense of molecules. Rejecting this linear constraint in a creative synthesis was the only way forward with a new alternative, though this alternative seems to represent a completely rational solution to the problem. What we create often fits perfectly into established orders like puzzle pieces. Similarly, Einstein diverged from the ways of thinking of his contemporaries in a creative act, but nonetheless delivered a theory that integrates disparate phenomena into new positive knowledge.

In music, we find the introduction of new alternatives at critical changes in music style. Figures like Stravinsky and Schoenberg rejected the home key of traditional Western
composition to introduce atonal music, a new way of making sense of sound. This music does not necessarily depart from the familiarity we have with rhythm, instrumentation, register, or repetition, but it does shift the coherence or centrality of a work to these attributes, rather than familiar tonal structures. More recently, the rock band Nirvana introduced an unexpected sound that set the precedent for 1990s rock music. The established pattern of development in rock music before Nirvana—hence what one took to make sense of this music—included technically sophisticated guitar solos and vocals. In its music, Nirvana broke from these dominant features with simple, dissonant solos and limited vocals that nonetheless made new sense for a generation of listeners.

We would find difficulty in all complex real-world cases, from science to art to everyday life, in distinguishing the influence of old sense-making from what is creatively novel, and distinguishing little creative events in a genre to big events introducing a new style. Making headway on that set of questions is a matter of intensive interpretive work. But the fact remains that, without such events, one must claim that *nothing really happened* in these changes. But because somewhere in the development we begin making sense of things in a new way, a new creative synthesis must exist in the mix somewhere that explains why.

Finally, a description of spontaneity bears little relevance to a great deal of that activity we call creative. In the activity of the artist, the philosopher, or the theoretical scientist, we find a great deal of *work*—even if done with enthusiasm—to enable new thought and practice. Nor would a description of mechanical problem-solving always be adequate to the phenomenon. Intense thought and practice at the edge of conventional or habitual ideas places one in the grip of anomaly with unclearly presented problems, inapt
tools for thought and expression, and unclear meanings. Here we find the creator wrestling with sense-making at the terminus of their possibility. Either “problem-solving” is genuinely creative, or it does not solve these kinds of problems at all.

3.6 THE ANOMALY OF CREATIVE NOVELTY

My final claim is that, when we try to understand creative novelty by fitting it into an order of causal explanation or, more loosely, a reduction to earlier meaningful sense-making, it resists. Creative novelties are themselves anomalous. This result explains how new sense-making is discontinuous with earlier orders of things. On the other hand, I argue for the partial continuity of creative novelty that ensures we can find it meaningful and constrained by prior experience. Thus, I intend to position creativity between reductionist, theoretical accounts and more radical accounts that would detach creativity from determinate constraints on meaningful sense-making. I consider in turn a number of ways we might try to understand creativity and challenge their sufficiency.

3.6.1 Anomaly in Explanatory Accounts

One stringent order entails the predictability of all events. Consider an attempt to explain creativity by offering a theory that predicts acts of creativity. If successful, such a theory would demystify creativity, making it consistent with the rationally coordinated elements of a deterministic view. Yet we know there are specific physical phenomena we cannot predict. Turbulence or noise of all kinds, for example, or any number of stochastic or chaotic systems seem to deny predictability in practice, if not in principle. Quantum interactions must be modeled probabilistically, which renders its predictions probabilistic. Certain phenomena cannot be predicted with certainty either because of the effect of
measuring them or because of something essential about the phenomena. I call this particular unpredictability. This term describes the failure of a predictive explanation offered through a reduction of some experience to basic units (the original sense of atoms), together with a theory relating these units. Thus, one might wonder whether creativity could be of this type: an ingredient in a system of basic units or an emergent aspect of a system, which is itself inherently unpredictable or intractable on any analysis. If so, then advocates for a radical account of creativity gain a strong negative argument (negative because they do not offer a positive position).

But to approach creativity in this way would be a mistake; thinking that creativity hangs on the predictability of phenomena within a granular analysis would mislead both a defender and a critic of the thesis. The chief reason is that, in striving to understand creativity, we seek an understanding at the level of meaning at which we encounter them, rather than through theoretical objects and their relations. This is not to deny that we encounter the elements of theory as meaningful, nor that our theoretical work cannot make a meaningful difference in our relation to those macro-objects the theories are theories of. But for the theorist, the burden is to ensure this meaningful connection, and for anti-theorist, the burden is to ensure its denial.

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105 It is worth noting the distinction between models that instance chaotic characteristics and events (like a hurricane) which exhibit these characteristics, and which seem appropriately modeled by as a chaotic system. Both cases are reductive. The difference in the latter is that the units in the model are taken to be representative of some aspects of the event.

106 Margaret Boden makes suggestions along these lines. “Occasionally, the [creative] choice is random, or as near to random as one can get. So it may be made by throwing a dice (as in playing Mozart’s aleatory music); or by consulting a table of random numbers (as in the jazz program); or even, possibly, as a result of some sudden quantum-jump inside the brain. There may even be psychological processes akin to GA-mechanisms, producing novel ideas in human minds” (Boden 1995). Clearly, however, explaining one unpredictable phenomenon by reference to another helps only to reinforce unpredictability.
Let’s consider this issue through the cipher of an argument offered by Henri Bergson. On Bergson’s view, the effort to predict a novelty always fails to provide a complete explanation, because each prediction must itself be predictable in a series of predictions interminable by any finite being. Prediction is itself an act that must be creative. I take Carl Hausman’s synopsis of this argument as a starting point, and I defend the argument. However, I deny both Bergson’s and Hausman’s specific interpretation of its importance:

If, on the basis of certain data, a logic, a hypothesis, and a theory, something “new” is predicted, that “newness” must be referred to in the prediction statement – the “newness” must be already known. And to the extent that it is already known either it is not “new,” or, if it is new, it is a creation achieved by the predictor, in which case, explanation of novelty is complete only if the prediction could have been predicted – and so on ad infinitum, unless foreknowledge is attributed, ultimately, to an omniscient being.107

Call this the regress argument. This argument concludes that only an omniscient entity at some n-order of a regress could make complete explanatory sense of a first-order creative novelty, where predictive abilities are understood as a necessary condition for explanation.108 To understand this argument, we must tease out some different ways interpreting it. On face of it, the argument makes some faulty inferences and accepts some false premises. I work to revise the argument into a stronger form.

Bergson, as I interpret him, intends his argument to make a point about the uniqueness or singularity of things (he does not make this distinction). He refers to the

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107 Hausman, 72. Hausman presents a good summary of one of Bergson’s key arguments in The Creative Mind, “The Possible and the Real”.

108 Two points: first, I acknowledge that some explanatory approaches do not claim an ability or interest in prediction; second, one might find prediction possible without anything clearly like an explanation in this sense (e.g. predicting tides with a tide- or lunar-table).
“continuous creation and unforeseeable novelty” of all things, and uses, as an example, the unpredictable detail of something as trivial as a dinnertime gathering. But I do not credit this view, for the same reasons I deny that uniqueness constitutes creative novelty. The advocate of particular unpredictability would claim too much about creativity if his argument simply pertains to uniqueness (or singularity), because even if new uniqueness is often unpredictable, this is not enough to make it creatively novel—indeed it is not anomalous at all. No matter how unpredictable a unique identity is, we still usually find it completely familiar. The view that makes everything novel and indeterminate, yet defends a view of creativity, must distinguish creative novelty from non-creative novelty. And if we are asked to see all events as creative, then this both trivializes the concept of creativity and denies us grounds for the basic task to, for example, understand the difference between a creative artist and her first copycat—or a unique dinner party and a creative one. Thus, even if Bergson motivates the regress argument, he does it in a way that fails to distinguish creative novelty. His version of the argument claims too much.

But Bergson offers a stronger argument, depending more on the singularity of events. On his view, a prediction of events can never be adequate to a situation, because prediction depends on a causal description, causal descriptions require identity between cases, and no two cases are ever completely identical. For example, no two swings of a pendulum are ever identical. That is, on Bergson’s view, one of the fundamental conditions for prediction can never be satisfied. He uses a mental event as an example: “Take [...] the simplest feeling, suppose it to be constant, absorb the whole personality in it: the consciousness which will accompany this feeling will not be able to remain identical with

109 Bergson, 73
itself for two consecutive moments, since the following moment always contains, over and above the preceding one, the memory the latter has left it.”\textsuperscript{110} Because of memory, no two mental events can ever be the same, and if mental events are non-substitutable, then they cannot function in an explanatory prediction attributing like effects to like causes.

The response here is to deny that Bergson has the correct theory of explanation, or at least that there is an alternative theory that does not make the mistake he ascribes to explanation. A traditional positivist view of explanation, according to which a statement of observed regularities suffices for explanation provides just such a response. Arguing against Bergson, Bertrand Russell contends that explanation has little relevance to a determinist project of linking together all \textit{particulars} in a network of causal necessity. Rather, explanation serves to describe the relation between different \textit{kinds} of events. “If [one] could foresee that A was going to murder B, [one’s] foresight would not be invalidated by the fact that [one] could not know all the infinite complexity of A’s state of mind in committing the murder.”\textsuperscript{111} Statements of causal law should, on this view, propose constant relations between kinds of causes and kinds of effects. “[I]f a body falls freely, there is constant relation between the height through which it falls and the time it takes in falling.”\textsuperscript{112} Russell, I think correctly, criticizes the particularist view of prediction for its austerity: kinds of causes connected with kinds of effects is enough to meet most critical demands. If we embrace the positivist view of explanation and couple it with my objection, there is strong reason to reject Bergson’s interpretation.

\textsuperscript{110} Bergson, 137
\textsuperscript{111} Russell, 230
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 231
Yet Hausman rebuts by emphasizing the individuality of things, rather than their uniqueness or singularity. To Hausman, the positivist conception of explanation excludes precisely what is of interest when applied to creative work. Predicting that a kind of person (Picasso the painter) will make a kind of object (a painting) may well be sensible. But for Hausman, our interest falls entirely on the instantiation of a new kind of thing, in the particulars of the individual. We are interested in *Guernica* and its organic unity of details, and not the mere prediction that a painter will paint. Trying to understand creativity demands greater specificity than the relations between kinds of events used in a positivist prediction. Even in the case of Russell’s murderer; “A,” if he is a serial killer, a good detective will understand that the generic prediction that A will kill again is not enough to catch the killer. Thus Russell has simply ignored creative novelty, rather than predicted it. In my terms, Russell compensates for the phenomenon of novelty, because he constructs a theory that cannot suitably address its existence.

Hausman’s problems lie in another direction. I already argued against his conception of creative novelty, and I find his view faulty here for taking new Forms to be the paradigmatic examples of creative novelty. Neither Russell nor Hausman make much sense of embedded novelties like Kekulé’s diagram of a benzene ring, because they do not fit the mold of physical explanation on which they are focused. Here Russell might at least point out that Kekulé’s diagram is the necessary condition for advancing organic chemistry and seek its rational development from antecedent ideas, making (on my view) a different mistake. But for Hausman, by relying on special new kinds of things to motivate the regress argument, he makes the argument claim too little.
Let’s take an example to get the intuitive thrust of the argument as I understand it. Suppose I am faced with the problem of hanging drywall on a ceiling alone, and I develop a new way of hanging it. Were a predictor predicting my innovation, he would have to include this new method of hanging drywall in the prediction claim. To make this prediction, the predictor must have a grasp of the conditions operating in the situation (causes) and what will result from my activity (effects), because one reasons from causes to effects in a prediction claim, and because the logical form of a prediction requires a specific statement of both the cause and the effect, both based in the knowledge of the predictor. Then, if the predictor recognizes this method as creatively novel, in the same way I do, he could then ask what accounts for his ability to predict this new method. How did he predict this? The force of this question runs in two directions. First, the predictor typically reasons from like causes to like effects, and within the point of view of a predictor newness implies an unlike effect—that known causes result in a previously unknown effect or that previously unknown causes result in this new effect. Either way, the successful prediction depends on acquiring new knowledge not from the event, but rather before it. Thus, more than just predicting something, the predictor would have to recognize in his prediction, minimally, an additional new sense-making. Additional secondary and tertiary, etc., predictors would have the same experience in a chain until one (an omniscient being) already possessed the relevant knowledge of cause and effect to make the prediction without recognizing any novelty in the situation. Second, but related, is that the prediction may be made in one reductionist sense-making scheme, while the novelty appears in a non-reduced form. But the predictor cannot just predict neuron-firings or physical interactions or behavior—this is precisely the level of description that would fail to be predicting a novelty. While
predicting neuron firings, the predictor must also make sense of, say, a specific brain state to instance precisely this creative novelty, which, again, would reproduce a creative novelty in the experience of the predictor.

The key point then is to notice what actually drives the regress. The regress does not proceed simply on the basis of a recursion in prediction, the particularity of the prediction, or the possibility of a successful prediction. The regress proceeds only on the basis of a continual recognition of meaningful novelty at each of its levels. If we drop the attention to new sense-making at any point, then the prediction could (in principle) be complete, but then we have dropped the anomaly of the case through a compensation. Once a predictor realizes he has predicted something creatively novel, new anomaly is introduced, because he too has created something. I grant that this point can seem more like clever trap than a serious point. To reduce this sense, we should keep in mind what is really at stake is the full claim that one order of understanding wants to make over new meaningful sense-making, while forgetting to account for one’s own role in generating this understanding. When trying to make complete sense of creativity, we often disregard precisely what is creative in the act—its novelty—and turn toward the sense we have just achieved. This point applies, mutatis mutandis, to attempts to understand past acts of creativity as well, rather than to predict future ones. Insisting on the order of a nexus of determinate causal relations at any point, past or future, requires one to disregard the novelty one finds at the center of the nexus.
3.6.2 THE NON-TELEOLOGY OF CREATIVITY

Generally, teleology is the study of phenomena exhibiting purposes, aims, intentions, or tendencies to develop toward an end state. A teleology answers the question *why*, as opposed to *how*, in an account of something. I focus on two fairly proscribed strains of teleological description and analysis of creativity, inspirations and intentions, where inspirations are the figurative *pull* of something inchoate and largely indeterminate to be realized and intentions are the *push* of an agent’s ways of making sense of things in producing something. I argue that, though intentions structure our activity and inspirations offer motives for activity, neither concept quite captures the creative act. Creative novelties themselves are not intentionally produced, if by an intention we mean an object of consciousness that guides each step of a production. Rather, creativity is an unintentional act of production that transforms the object of consciousness. In a classical sense, I mean that creativity lacks *foresight*, which is to say again that, whatever possibilities project from one’s ways of making sense, creativity is precisely that act by which a different possibility is realized. On this view, too, the sense that inspires is often a creation, or a creation in process. One may be driven by purpose to create, but one cannot create on purpose.

In a dominant trope, creators describe their work as matter of giving form or expression to something inchoate, of bringing faintly perceived value or being into concrete existence, and of being led by an indefinite identity. Others describe creativity as a matter of channeling, or serving as a medium for some other productive agent. One is inspired by a Muse, for example. Or, in another take on creativity, one experiences a rush or flow—an experience of peak performance—in the production of something new. Taken collectively,

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113 Special thanks to Richard Mohr for his comments on this section.
such “inspirational” views, coupled with the idea that being has its own intrinsic positive value, serve to explain the motivation of a creator. Again, I turn to Hausman to express a version of this view:

The future determination that ought to be given determination does not provide rules; it does not display criteria for accepting or rejecting ideas or elements. But it does appear as a “requiredness,” a demand, and a foundation for the inevitability of the specific Form to be made definite. Thus, the dim presence of a Form as such, before the specificity of the Form is recognized, is an aim that lures the creator. The creator is lured by it because, as a vague and as yet undetermined Form, it marks the beginning of the being of something, something that can have a definite intelligibility and specific value.\textsuperscript{114}

On this view, something as yet unreal pulls the creator in its direction.

But such a description must be enriched. The development of a new way of making sense realizes new possibilities to explore, and the objects of consciousness immediately express this pregnancy. It is as though, after a long time in a maze, one turns a corner to faintly perceive an exit and gradually works toward it. This is an experience of wrestling something inchoate into being. Or one turns a corner to fully face an exit—the “rush” toward a creation. In both cases, the perception of a way forward is the major act of creation, and not the character of one’s approach to it. The author who envisions a new plot twist may indeed be “pulled” toward it ecstatically (or laboriously), to realize it concretely and in a detail it does not have at its inception. But this additional work should not be confused with the inception that makes sense of the directed activity.

In my terms, the basic points for explaining inspiration are, first, that what serves to inspire action is often the creation, the object of a new sense-making, and the inspired activity it guides is the creator’s effort to embed this object concretely, as in the case of

\textsuperscript{114} Hausman, 50
realizing a plot-twist. Second, when the object of inspiration is inchoate or vague, this indicates either that constitutive elements of the object are themselves vague and need refinement—“imagine a world with no more scarcity”—or that the sense itself is of a special kind, which requires a temporal or spatial extension for its realization—e.g. music or sculpture. In other words, descriptions of inspiration often presuppose a creative act or mistakenly generalize over one kind of experience. I grant that a great deal of creative work bears the character of inspiration. One gets a glimmer of something and gradually zeroes in on it or one ecstatically seems to produce without a clear sense of oneself as the productive agent. But since most characteristically inspired states seem possible in non-creative contexts—think of a basketball player “in the zone”—I do not see how inspiration can be essentially related to creativity.

On another analysis, or even in the same analysis (cf. Hausman), intentionality is considered a necessary condition for creativity. Intentionality must structure or guide what one does if it is to be rooted in prior conditions and be one’s own creative production. Moreland Perkins expresses this view in his analysis of creativity:

That the conception of what she makes must be the maker’s, that she must in effect invent what she makes, entails, in turn, that creative work is purposeful, deliberate, intentional.115

Put in such stark intellectualist language, many creators are likely to be dissatisfied with this claim. This is not because one wants to deny the importance of intentions or purposes entirely—the creator is a motivated, intentional being who typically grasps a situation in which she works—but rather because a creative novelty is precisely what is not known ahead of one’s creative act. Perkins is aware of this, and offers a qualification:

The agent intends to make a certain kind of thing; what she makes is the kind of thing it was her purpose to make. I say the kind of thing, because it won’t do to say of creative work that always the worker intended at the start to make exactly the specific thing she succeeded in making. For this suggests that she knows ahead of time exactly how it is to come out, which is often—perhaps usually—not true. But the kind of thing she makes she must be engaged in trying to make if she is to be credited with creativity. This much is implied by the condition that the conception must be hers.\textsuperscript{116}

I pursue the question of how we relate to our “own” creations more fully in Chapter 4. Here I want to acknowledge that a great deal of creativity does indeed proceed as Perkins claims. Much of the time we act in situations structured by our intentions and purposes. A painter sets out to paint a particular kind of painting or a scientist works on a particular kind of problem. The specificity of this “kind” is determined by the specificity of the intentions involved, including, in addition to cognitively articulated goals and propositional knowledge, also one’s perceptual- and bodily-intentionality, skills, know-how, and values.

But this focus on a kind of thing does not distinguish creative activity especially well from other kinds of activity. It does not distinguish the thoroughly conventional mobile-home manufacturer from a creative architect, because both may aim at a kind of thing. Only an intention of the more specific creative novelty would distinguish the cases on an intentional analysis. Moreover, it seems there are cases that do not clearly follow Perkins’ analysis. Consider, for example, the case of doodling. Doodling serves as a metaphor for moving from one thing to another without any overly specific goal, purpose, or problem to solve.\textsuperscript{117} Such cases can certainly exclude a preoccupation with anomaly. In a concrete case of doodling on a piece of paper, one might just aimlessly move a pencil from place to place and fill in planes here and there. There is a game-like characteristic to doodling, but without

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., Location 2701
\textsuperscript{117} Thanks to William Schroeder for introducing me to this example.
necessarily possessing even the intention to play a game. In my discussion of singular identities, I mentioned imaginatively synthesizing a lampshade and train—here we find a doodle in the play of ideas. The production of these doodles is relatively non-intentional and unconcerned with producing a certain kind of thing. But they can amount to something when, in a creative perception or interpretation of what one has done, one finds it serving a new meaningful extension of possibilities. To be clear, on my view, the doodling activity itself is not creative without a new way of making sense of it. By analogy, breaking a bunch of multi-colored glass into a pile generates a doodle of sorts, which may achieve creative significance in one’s survey of the mess. But, alternatively, one may make sense of a doodle in conventional ways as well, seeing that one has doodled a giraffe, much like one sees familiar shapes in clouds. Doodling becomes creative only if one sees something new in the doodle.

The main point, then, is that we arrive at a moment for creativity from multiple angles of activity. Intentions, purposes, or concerns are required for most human activity we recognize to be meaningful, but the embedding of novelty can come before as well as after the creative act. This point may seem odd until we characterize acts of so-called accidental creation. Louis Pasteur’s vaccination for chicken cholera arrived by accident when a spoiled sample of bacteria failed to kill birds injected with the sample. Vaccination itself was not a new idea at the time, but familiar understanding led researchers to focus on finding naturally “weaker” strains of bacteria, as Edward Jenner did with smallpox and cowpox. Pasteur’s lab assistant moved to throw out the sample on grounds that it had simply gone bad—an important example of the lack of a creative insight—while Pasteur made the creative connection between weaker strains and spoiled samples. Pasteur had the
experience to perceive in the situation a solution to a problem that had not yet been fully represented, but which his experience may never have represented from below, so to speak, based on his intentions.

Other "odd" angles for creativity exist as well, in, for example, the practice of brainstorming, open-ended questions, constructing metaphors, and so on. When these practices lead to creative novelty, rather than just waxing on existing ways of making sense, it is not enough for someone to say they “know it when they see.” It is more accurate to say they “see it when they know it.” Intentions play the role of embedding someone within meaningful practices and a larger world, and only someone with the appropriate intentional preparation (ideas, goals, skills, experience) will be equipped to both understand and meaningfully connect a novelty to earlier meanings, both establishing a continuity and realizing a new possibility. For this reason, I have not insisted that anomalies are necessary conditions (as motivation) for creativity, but the established connection between a creative novelty and earlier meaning is necessary.

Creative acts do typically have some orienting intention that frames them and the relevant sense-making involved to a “kind” of sense-making. Moreover, intentional activity often structures the entire sense-making context in which a new creative novelty is formed and with which it newly forms a continuity. But creativity cannot be reduced to the functioning of this intentional structure in a situation, when the acts themselves are modifying their objects. There is in creativity a conjoining of standard intentional action and modifications of one’s way of making sense. To get oriented to this synthesis, consider, on the one hand, a joke:
A traveler rests in the home of a friendly man to avoid a storm. With water pouring in through the roof, the traveler asks, “Hey, why don’t you patch that big leak?” The man responds, “Well, I can’t patch the roof when it’s raining. And the roof doesn’t leak when it’s sunny. So what can I do?”

What is funny about this joke is the shortcoming of the man to draw connections between situations and form a new intention. He does not have the sense to fix a problem in one situation that only appears in another. On the other hand, consider the Vogelkop bowerbird, a New Guinea species of bird that makes elaborate, ornately decorated nests to attract mates. Now if we are to describe this activity in non-teleological, behavioral terms, as biologists often do, we must rather say that the bowerbird is entirely absorbed in its activity. It does not “make a nest to attract a mate.” Instead, it “acts nest-making-wise such that mates act attracted-wise”—or some such. The bowerbird will not detect that there is anything like a “leak” in the nest (which often has a roof) to be fixed later. Rather the bowerbird can only detect deviations from the order it is compelled by instinct to produce. A hole in the roof may be patched, but not because it leaks; rather patching demands to be done in accordance with the pre-given form of activity. The man in the joke, acting like a bowerbird, would patch his roof on a sunny day, not because it will one day leak, but because his instincts demand that the house satisfies a specific form. Human intentionality therefore puts us both above and below non-human animals: above because humans take things as intentional objects and draw connections between them; below because humans can fail to make or act on these connections when instinct would guide much better. But when a man intends to patch a leaky roof, all the specific action lay

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118 I am trying to make a serious point about human creativity, rather than a serious point about non-human animals. I do not know whether other animals are creative and will not pursue that question here.

119 Max Scheler, I think, makes a similar point in his discussion human instincts and drives: “Only in man does the capacity to isolate the drive from instinctive behavior and to separate the state of pleasure from
ahead of him, as yet unintended in its detail. He intends a “kind of thing.” And with familiar sense-making leading him he may patch the roof without a problem. But the matter is quite different for a painter or a scientist working at the extremes of established meaning. With the kind of object(ive) abstractly in view, perhaps something as general as a “solution to X,” the required sense-making does not yet exist that would achieve this end. Creative acts lie underneath our intentional acts, as though instinctive, but never quite “natural,” filling in a domain never before populated with the objects of conscious life. Creativity places new instincts in the service of an intention. By the time one intends what one does, the creative work has already been done.

I have been focused on identifying a central lack of intentionality in the creative act. If intentionality fully structured creativity, then one could intend to be creative, not just formally, but in content, which implies a density to our intentional lives that it does not have. On their own, intentions have hiccups, smoothed over by skillful coping\textsuperscript{120} or creative synthesis. Creativity therefore remains refractory to an intentional analysis. Of course we have intentions to do, make, and think things, and our intentions, shaped by how we make sense of things, keep us acting more or less effectively in situations. We may even be guided by an unknown, and not just indeterminate, ideal—the sense that something, an ideal skyscraper, may be possible, like a board-stretcher (cf. Section One). But we cannot intend to create anything, except as an aspiration without specific sense. Creativity yields

\footnote{functional enjoyment assume such monstrous forms that it is quite correct to say, man can be either more or less than an animal, but never \textit{an animal}” (Scheler 1968).
\textsuperscript{120} One might introduce the concept of body- or perceptual-intentionality at this point (cf. Merleau-Ponty), which I would welcome on fuller description. My key claim here, however, is that perception and bodily comportment can face ambiguity or anomaly as much as any other relation to the world.}
intentional connections only in retrospect, where we then put it at risk of reduction to the order it just made of things.

3.6.3 An Overreach of Metaphysical Principle

Finally, creativity might itself be taken to be a constitutive ingredient in a system to account for creative novelty. I take Alfred North Whitehead to provide an example of this view, though Whitehead’s full account is incredibly complex, and I would be dishonest to claim I give him an adequate treatment here. Thus I draw on his work only to make a general point, rather than provide a full exposition of his view.

Whitehead seems to argue that one must assume a principle of creativity in order to explain the newness of events that cannot be derived from antecedent conditions. This principle may be interpreted as a productive principle or as a generalization over claimed instances of novelty. As Irving Singer describes Whitehead’s approach, whereas Hegel affirms a distinction between being and becoming and sought to show how becoming progressively approximates being, and Nietzsche denies the distinction solely in favor of becoming, “[Whitehead] claims the creativity that characterizes, and even unites, all reality underlies not only the Becoming of what exists but also its transcendent Being.”121 In Whitehead’s words, indicative of this point:

There is a becoming of continuity, but no continuity of becoming. The actual occasions are the creatures which become, and they constitute a continuously extensive world. In other words, extensiveness becomes, but 'becoming' is not itself extensive.122

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121 Singer, Location 124
122 Whitehead (1978), 35.
On this view, there is indeed a world that exhibits continuity retrospectively, and there is
the being of this (past) continuity. There is the being of creatures, but as beings these
creatures contain within themselves a principle of becoming. The extension of being
coincides with what comes about (or “becomes”) through creativity. In many ways,
Whitehead’s position is consistent with my own; the becoming of continuity describes the
effect of a creative act. What worries me, however, is the absolute denial of the continuity of
becoming—i.e. that present conditions could actually ensure a specific future being. In this
respect, Whitehead bears a strong similarity to Bergson. Both suppose that present
conditions bear an essential indeterminacy that makes the future unpredictable.

Irving Singer responds to Whitehead by redirecting the investigation. We must
acknowledge that the metaphysical position (or cosmology) offered by Whitehead cannot
be confirmed or denied through observation. Rather, the metaphysical view must be
understood as its own “conceptual work of art”\textsuperscript{123} and as its own kind of creative product.
As an artistic production, one may indeed use the metaphysical view to enrich one’s life and
understanding of the existence. But this should not be mistaken, on Singer’s view, for an
explanation. For Singer, the metaphysical doctrine cannot explain anything any more than a
Monet or a Picasso can.

One may credit Singer with elegance or charge him with gross oversimplification at
one’s preference. For an example of the latter, taken as a generalization, Singer’s view
undermines metaphysics and any philosophical pursuit of rational coordination and
argumentation that does not depend on empirical evidence. He poses a false choice
between a demand for causal intelligibility on the one hand and aesthetic production on the

\textsuperscript{123} Singer, Location 146
other hand, and casts metaphysics in the latter. No doubt Singer is sensitive to and
supportive of the promise of aesthetic sensibility. But Whitehead would surely rebel against
the choice Singer poses.

Nonetheless, there is a significant insight in Singer’s view, which I can recast in
different terms. Recall the regress argument offered by Hausman and Bergson. There the
regress terminated only in an omniscient intelligence. Denial of novelty at any other level of
the regress where it can appear constitutes an explanation with compensation—a neglect
of the novelty at that level. In Whitehead’s case, however, the case is reversed. By positing
an ineliminable principle of creativity at any level, he neglects the possibility of genuine
prediction offered at that level. To claim there is no “continuity of becoming” is precisely to
reject the coherent sense and repeatability we do experience to extend into the future; he
brings this coherence into question without addressing the concrete demands that often set
that sense-making in the objects of experience. And this is a piece of “aesthetic” production
that can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed, for it bears on experience only externally
to our ongoing pursuit of sense-making. There is no question of the in-principle possibility
of meeting those demands for coherence at any level of the regress; the point is that in each
prediction of a novelty, a new novelty supersedes it at a different level of analysis. The
omniscient being would predict, not a novelty, but a necessity. At least within acts of
prediction, Whitehead extends the regress artificially. Thus we can see one way that
Whitehead potentially offers an “aesthetic” production that delivers creativity at the cost of
continuity that might constrain it. The constraints on creativity about which we might
legitimately care are made to disappear at the bald assertion of a creative principle.
I must repeat a common refrain. Even if we cannot step into the same river twice, this will not in itself make the river unfamiliar. We master differences between rivers as much as their similarities. And if a new river counts as creative in one’s metaphysics, then we will need a new word for the differences that actually matter. To state the point with some hyperbole, with respect to meaningful existence, I can coherently claim that I will rise tomorrow like on any other day and fulfill that claim. To deny me that meaningful claim with an insistence that there is no continuity of becoming deprives us of the meaningful coherence we do after all experience.

3.7 OBJECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

My position remains to be clarified in response to two lines of questioning.\(^\text{124}\) First, how, in the abstract, can creation be distinguished from non-creation? On my view, we must draw a categorical distinction between those acts that develop lines of possibility already available in extant ways of making sense from those that produce a new way of making sense—i.e. creative acts. The basic worry is that the same act can fall on either side of this distinction depending on the details of one’s characterization of the case. At its extreme, this is a worry that can push an account of creativity back toward the two positions I have attempted to avoid, namely, that all acts are creative or that no acts are creative. On the one hand, for example, the local case of Kekulé’s new way of making sense of benzene may nonetheless be characterized as a possibility implicit in atomistic chemistry more generally, implying discovery rather than creativity. On the other hand, the latest three-chord rock song playing on the radio may introduce a new take on something

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\(^{124}\) Thanks to Arthur Melnick for raising the questions that guide this final investigation.
quite narrowly construed. And there does not seem to be any principled reason, then, to extend some element of creativity to most if not all experience.

Second, how is the phenomenon of creative novelty to maintain its generality across different domains, when novelties exhibit different characteristics in each domain? I hinted at such differences in my earlier coin-flip case, for example, in “more rational” and “more aesthetic” creative resolutions to cases, where one kind of creative synthesis depended on none other than the minimal or essential features of the case (a closed synthesis) and another related features of the case to “external” non-essential characteristics (an aesthetic, open synthesis). Science, on one characterization, strives for generally, if not universally, applicable descriptive or explanatory frameworks, while art often tends toward individual or singular works. Perhaps as a consequence, new scientific paradigms often supersede older, deficient paradigms, whereas Bach and Schoenberg peacefully coexist with three-chord rock groups. That is, even if we see Bach to be a developmental step in music history necessary for Schoenberg’s atonal music, we are not tempted to replace Bach with Schoenberg, or call the latter “better” for that reason. Classical composition does not offer itself as a problem to be solved in the same way as a scientific anomaly challenges a theory.

This second question relates to the first, and demonstrates its importance, insofar as different kinds of novelties or domains could suggest a response to the first question, but will not answer for all novelties. For example, if creative novelties consistently make us sensitive to what we take for granted in our world—in a way that discovery does not—and art deals with anomaly as part of its constitutive concern by exhausting all its current possibilities and creating new ones—i.e. if one aspiration of art is to create—then we can perhaps distinguish a three-chord rock band from a Schoenberg (when the band does not
meet the first condition of exposing convention) and categorically distinguish creativity in art. But this response is possible only because we can depend on art to challenge its current practices; reproduction of the past is an intrinsic anomaly of art practice, which aims at creating something new. Even if we could clarify and defend this way of providing a criterion for creation in art, it is unlikely to work for scientific or many cultural practices that do not intrinsically aspire to create, because it looks like anomaly in those domains is contingent, rather than implicitly built in.

To retain the generality and integrity of creativity across domains, my view is that a way of making sense is a creative novelty if and only it is impossible with respect to antecedent ways of making sense at its inception. Margaret Boden expresses this view in a somewhat similar way when she draws a distinction between “impossible ideas” and merely statistically improbable ideas. Impossible ideas are those that some conceptual framework could not generate on its own. The systematic objection to her, analogous to the objection to my account, is that, for any conceptual framework $P$ relative to which a relevant idea is impossible, one may postulate a higher-order conceptual framework $Q$ that operates on $P$ to make that idea possible. Thus, the impossible idea is fully possible on the combination framework of $P$ and $Q$. To give this setup some catchier language, let’s call the enlarged scope of possibilities deep possibilities. So the deep possibilities of music history include Bach as well as Schoenberg. The deep possibilities of scientific knowledge include Kekulé and Pasteur.

To restate what I have been arguing: at least when it comes to human sense-making in a meaningful world, explanation by deep possibility runs out. The claims driving this

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125 Boden, 2004
conclusion are (1) that our meaningful worlds are organized and limited (especially Chapter 2), (2) that our sense-making is limited, but can be extended (this chapter, section 1), that a creative novelty is a new way of making sense (section 3), and (3) that alternative forms of explanation fail to account for all new sense-making (section 4). The other side of my work has been to show that, nonetheless, new sense-making connects with antecedent sense-making (often by resolving anomaly) to build meaningful continuity.

This continuity is what continues to generate the difficulty in seeing something “impossible” in the creative novelty. The key idea, however, is that however we characterize deep and antecedent possibilities, those possibilities are not realized for sense-making until the creative act. I have endeavored to show that sense-making is not cut off from existence outside it—I do not hold a simple subjectivism—but neither does existence simply determine the sense we make of it or the senses we can make. In creative acts in science we realize that the natural world is different than we previously realized was possible. In musical creativity, we realize that music can be different than we previously realized was possible.

None of this on its own, I think, necessarily undermines the theoretical arguments in favor of even deeper possibilities represented by a hard determinism or a teleology like Hegel’s. But it does suggest the limits of our sense-making participation within such systems.

3.8 CONCLUSION

Creative novelty is a new way of making sense of things. Because of this, it cannot properly become the object of the orders that would seek to make sense of it. It is
necessarily anomalous. Creativity leaves us hints we can follow in favor of a mystery or ignore in favor of a new order. It is constrained in part by objects, the senses of things we already have, the values we presuppose, and the skills we enact. But it operates beneath these things, the ever-present possibility of changing our meaningful world, to “turn us to fresh tasks.” Though it introduces new order, new sense, and new possibilities, creativity exists out of order.
"Over the course of the last decade...we seem to have reached a general agreement that creativity involves the production of novel, useful products."\textsuperscript{127}

“The created object...must be valuable for its own sake. And its inherent value is the condition by virtue of which the created object may become instrumentally valuable in perfecting or advancing, or, in the most radical instances, creating a tradition.”\textsuperscript{128}

“It is a philosophical common place that creativity is highly valued.”\textsuperscript{129}

Here are three examples, one from a psychologist and two from philosophers, to indicate the establishment view that creative novelties are valuable, and that creativity is valuable for the function it serves in bringing novelties into being. Serious inquiry and popular consciousness alike embrace this value of creativity. More than disciplined, rational, and calculable people, we often desire creators: parents would have creative children; economists would have entrepreneurs; political regimes would have visionary leaders. The values rooted most firmly in artistic practice now appear in numerous domains – the value of novelty, change, difference, alternative, uniqueness, innovation, and revolution. The value of creativity often supplants such traditionally valued notions as reason, order, critical judgment, and conservatism in many domains of life, and we express this hierarchy of values through pop psychology imperatives to “think outside the box.”

\textsuperscript{126} This chapter contains substantially revised content from my essay “Common Experience and Individuation,” \textit{Appraisal}, Special Issue on Max Scheler, Vol. 8 No. 4, October, 2011. Used by permission.
\textsuperscript{127} Mumford, 110
\textsuperscript{128} Hausman, 50
\textsuperscript{129} Kieran, “Creativity as a Virtue of Character” in Kaufman (forthcoming, 2014). In context, it is clear that Kieran endorses this commonplace, and that he takes it to be a consensus view.
What grounds this affirmation of creativity? To embrace creativity categorically, one must claim that creativity or its products are always valuable. More precisely, one must claim that through creative activity, humans bring only positive value into being. Positive value is a criterial attribute of a created identity, which implies a uniformly positive value of creativity simpliciter. Put simply, creativity is always a good thing.

These claims contain a tiny core of truth. But they are extraordinarily misleading and short-sighted simplifications of the evaluation of creativity and its results. Like a good lover, one must know the shortcomings of one’s beloved. I dedicate this chapter to introducing and demonstrating some of the evaluative complexity of creativity. I derive this complexity, first, from the basic anomalous features of creativity and its embedded novelties and, second, from the constitutive role creativity plays in selfhood.

Among traditional philosophers, I find Plato and Nietzsche most helpful for initiating thought about the value of embedded novelty and creativity. In their own ways, both thinkers link creativity to concerns about the self or the soul. From Plato, we get the worry of the effect of novelty on ourselves and others. From Nietzsche, we get the special consideration of value-creation. My thesis is that we find the minimal constitutive value of creativity just in the way a creative act opens up the possibility for additional thinking or doing for a creator, which did not exist before. But even these new ways of making sense are not essentially tethered to truth, beauty, or goodness. They are not, on a broader analysis, even essentially tethered to further usefulness. They are tethered only to what senses existence affords, which on rigorous orders of understanding may be false. Thus the further

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130 It should be understood that my interpretations ignore anachronism, and my goal is not to offer a definitive view of either Plato’s or Nietzsche’s thoughts. My goal is to investigate creativity, its value, and its ethics, and I find helpful resources in the work of these philosophers.
evaluation of creativity must always be found in specific senses involved, in their relation to a creator, and in their relation to the world into which they are embedded. Yet, on the other hand, creations can challenge the evaluative systems themselves that we leverage against them, thus complicating evaluation from the inside, so to speak.

Plato’s *Phaedrus* provides an orienting example. In this work, Socrates criticizes the practice of writing, and thus mounts a considerable challenge to our own institutions, practices, and ways of life. We depend on his criticism being mistaken. The claim in summary is that written language undermines skills like remembering, speaking, and active thinking; it petrifies ideas so they are no longer responsive to context; it artificially constrains dialectical inquiry; and, because active thinking and dialectical inquiry are integral to the soul’s aspiration to wisdom, it threatens this highest goal discerned by Greek philosophy.

In the dialogue, Plato has Socrates tell an Egyptian legend. The god Theuth invents many arts, geometry and astronomy among them, but is most proud of writing. Yet the king of Egypt, Thamus, rebukes Theuth for his uncritical optimism. Foreshadowed in this legend, we see already the perennial conflict between creativity and conservative principles:

[Writing] will create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality.\(^{131}\)

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\(^{131}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275a ff., Jowett trans. For my purposes, the complex literary frame can be ignored. Socrates rebuffs Phaedrus for caring about who delivers the criticism of writing, rather than assessing the criticism independently, and we can follow his lead.
The claim should strike us as astonishing, if we have the imagination to envision a world in transition from an oral to a written tradition. The critical investigation of writing serves to remind us that even the longest-lived, most edifying practices once had a beginning, a creative embedding in our lives, and that reflective minds can always bring controversy to their inception. On the one hand, this point foregrounds the importance of what we say or fail to say about new practices—social media, alternative energy, biotechnology, and so on. On the other hand, the proliferation of certain practices (like writing) can seem almost inevitable in retrospect, and the original criticisms can seem overwrought. Plato’s dialogical form of writing provides a nice counterpoint to many of Thamus’s worries.

However we discredit the worries about writing, two general points remain. First, our creations affect each other and the world. Second, our creations can affect the ways our experiences are framed—the sense we make of things. The first point indicates effects narrowly conceived at the level of objective fact. Call these consequences. The second point concerns a more obscure effect—a modification of the self. These modifications occur at the level of one’s background understanding, in one’s capacities to engage in the world actively and intelligently, and in the form of life one finds meaningful. To put an ethical spin on these effects, utilitarianism may emphasize the consequences of factory-farming as a net reduction of happiness, where happiness is reduced to a particular brain-state of organisms with nervous systems.\textsuperscript{132} The practice of torture, on the other hand, indicates a modification to the self for both the torturer and the victim. One who succumbs to torture, on one account, finds his autonomy perverted, while the torturer must treat another human

being as inhuman.\textsuperscript{133} Even if we fully understand the consequences of practices like sex-enhancement drugs or social networking, it is unclear that we understand their modifications to selfhood. This, I take it, is the important point to take away from the \textit{Phaedrus}. One must examine creations not only for their consequences, but also for their effects on the soul.

The effect of writing on remembering is only one instance of a more general circus of creation, and it demonstrates only one relation among others that may lead to dubious results. Creations have effects that may impoverish human life, and only a careful analysis helps ensure that we evaluate them adequately and pursue the most fruitful ones. No staunch commitment to progressive or conservative principles will help in evaluating creative change, because both conceal as much as they reveal. Thamus and Theuth are both limited in insight.

Such is the context in which I consider human creativity. Creativity is a personal and cultural wild-card.\textsuperscript{134} There is no guarantee that creativity will have positive consequences or enable positive modifications. Neither can we assume that creativity does not introduce genuine positive value. How then can we deal responsibly and intelligently with creative change? My answer to this question will be limited to opening moves: we must first


\textsuperscript{134} This is because creativity is anomalous. Creative activity (1) resolves contradictory elements of one’s practical involvement, (2) selects one element over another, or (3) introduces contradictory elements into one’s practical involvement. I present and defend this conception of creativity earlier in this dissertation. The anomaly of creative novelty stems from the inability to link novelties to conditions with necessity and sufficiency, while the continuity of creative novelty stems from the conditions that are available. The inability to predict the effects of creativity support a conservative principle of epistemic limitation; the requirement that we deal creatively with our experience supports a progressivist principle of improvement. Hence the difficulty.
understand the constitutive value of creativity more accurately and second understand that our evaluation of creations is often an evaluation of a form of life embodied by a creator. With this in mind, then, I must emphasize that am not offering a position sceptical of the possibilities of incredible and enriching value that accompany creativity and creators. My view is closer to a neutrality with respect to a constitutive value of creativity, and works to serve as a corrective to the idea that we can just assume the positive value of creativity without doing the greater work of intelligently cultivating this value.

4.1 CREATIVE VALUE

In the genesis of a new art style, the artist makes sense of experience in a new way and embeds this understanding in an artwork. This new sense-making is irreducible to antecedent conditions: we (or the artist) may discover all kinds of necessary conditions for the artist’s activity (earlier styles, technical abilities), but never sufficient conditions; or we may discover sufficient conditions for the artist’s activity (social or environmental circumstances) but never complete necessary conditions. To lack necessary and sufficient conditions is to lack a determinative cause, whether physical or teleological—it reveals an anomaly. Only after the fact do we assimilate the creative activity into a means-end analysis or understand the meaningful continuity of an embedded novelty. We describe the technical requirements for reproducing the artist’s achievement on average, and we interpret the work as achieving certain ends. Finally, we stipulate a scheme of classification: for example, this new type, “impressionism,” shall range over tokens satisfying a particular list of conditions. To insist on a determinative cause for a creative act anywhere in this chain is to undermine its status as creative and assimilate it to familiar orders of meaning. If I reduce
the activity of an artist to a scheme of physics, biology, sociology, history, teleology, or theology, then the activity is appropriated by a theory that could ideally predict the artistic production and determine its meaning. But creativity is necessarily anomalous, so these schemes succeed fully only by denying creativity.

Within this process, the criterion of positive value is often stipulated for creativity, although it is not recognized as a stipulation. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the motivation to include value in the definition of creativity serves to dispense with the production of eccentric, trivial, or accidental new identities. For example, if Jim throws a baseball through a window, he plays a role in the production of a new configuration of glass shards. On this view, even if Jim performed his act with the intention of producing something new, many would resist calling the ensemble of shards an embedded novelty (in my terms), because the novel identity may lack value or even be destructive, the putative opposite of creation. Or, to take another case, if Jim dresses in a radical way, one may wish to just call him weird rather than creative. The creativity-theorist wants the criterion of positive value to undermine these cases. This stipulation seems most prevalent among psychology researches presumably with the justification that it clarifies the concept of creativity. My own view (Chapter 3) handles these cases easily—the only criterion Jim must meet is the achievement of a new way of making sense. Breaking glass and dying one's hair typically do not meet this condition, but the acts become interesting precisely when they do.

In any case, a stipulation alone does not have the power to separate medically-advanced torture from medically-advanced treatment, propaganda from advertising, degrading art from enhancing art, or nuclear weapons from nuclear power. To the extent that one member of each pair may involve creativity, so may the other. With a stipulation of
positive value, one simply expresses a preference for the creativity in some cases over others. And functioning as a preference, the stipulation makes quick work of cases of weirdness or eccentricity without ever understanding them. In a discussion of creativity, the punk artist could be unjustly dismissed. The question, then, is whether there are any actual reasons supporting the criterion of positive value.

One might argue that being itself is (or possesses) an intrinsic positive value. To be is to be positively valuable. Thus, to bring something new into being is to bring something intrinsically valuable into being. The claim that creations instance positive intrinsic value is defensible only if there is something of intrinsic positive value about being. Carl Hausman puts it this way:

[A new being] is valuable simply by virtue of its being, where the term 'being' is used to refer to any determination or discriminable and identifiable object of consciousness. Accordingly, the created object is valuable because it is a determination or coherent structure which exemplifies intelligibility that was not previously known. And this is to exemplify the inherent value of determinateness as such, the value of being an intelligible object without consideration of the respect in which the new object is intelligible.\(^\text{135}\)

I agree that creative novelties, despite their anomaly, exhibit a coherence and continuity that justifies the attribution of being to them. The question then is whether there is any intrinsic value to “determinateness as such.” One may object that there are surely negative determinations of being. I quote Hausman’s response to this kind of objection in full:

Someone might, of course, object that not all new things are valuable merely because they are beings. Surely some of the destructive Nazi “innovations” were not valuable because they came into being. But this objection, I think, springs from the view that a thing, whether new or old, may be evil (may be a disvalue) without regard to other things. The view I am suggesting assumes that evil is distinguishable from the being of an evil thing and is identifiable only with respect to a conflict between the thing in

\(^{135}\) Hausman, 50
question and some other determinate object. Thus, I wish to insist that coming into being is in itself of value and that there is no disvalue without a conflict of beings.¹³⁶

But this view of evil, even if plausible, does not support the value of being as such, but rather leaves its value indeterminate. Put another way, it does not show that being is positively valuable, but only that it is evaluable. The same considerations that attend the attribution of evil (disvalue) to identities must attend the attribution of goodness (value) to them. E.g. ‘Beings need not be valuable without a concord of beings.’ If the advent of a gas chamber does not have a negative value without its incorporation into a genocide, this same line of thought applies too to the invention of vaccines.

What is more clearly the case is that, when a creator brings something into being, the practices in which he works and the values that motivate him tend to help him select what counts as an innovation and mediates what works he follows through with. A torturer works in a medium of torture, and creations that overcome the problems he faces fall, at least initially, right in line with the negative value of his practice. New ways of making sense can go either way, positively or negatively, in synthesizing new senses.

I do not mean to claim that independent, embedded novelties, which presuppose a new way of making sense, necessarily reflect the positive or negative values of the creative novelty (sense-making). Part of Hausman’s misconception is his preoccupation with independent objects. The creation of a new weapon for nefarious purposes does not restrict that weapon to only evil uses. This is part of the complexity of new things that often seems totally missing from dominant conceptions of creative value. Participants in black markets and criminal organizations often create systems that can be put to different uses, just as the

¹³⁶ Ibid, 51
NASA space program generated technology of use in many other places (e.g. building materials). The specific kinds of creations of artists, I argued in Chapter Three, are often anomalous, and can be evaluated in many ways. The value of a piece can vary wildly depending on whether one recognizes irony, for example. I do not resolve these evaluative difficulties, but, in studying creativity, we need to keep them in mind.

When creativity is understood to be the act that introduces a new way of making sense, an account of its constitutive value proceeds quite differently than on the object-focused view. Creativity realizes new possibilities in a situation by modifying our experience. We see things differently after creativity than we did before. The effect is an extension of meaning and a new way of thinking or doing that one did not have before. Here, in sum, is the only constitutive value of creativity—the value of further sense-making—and even this constitutive value can be either positive or negative or, on some standard, true or false.

I frankly do not know whether to call this an extrinsic or intrinsic (positive or negative) value. This situation results again from the anomaly of creative novelty and the fact that it is non-intentional—i.e. we cannot direct ourselves to create specific things, because that presupposes that we have already created them, though we can support enabling conditions for creativity and be attentive to experience. The artist who works creatively finds herself working along lines previously unknown to her. The scientist breaks through a wall in conceptualizing a physical phenomenon. The inventor makes sense of the value of some conjoining of parts to solve a practical problem. The rush that can accompany these cases derives from that sudden opening of a way forward in thought or action, which may be instrumentally for something or intrinsically for itself, not because of something
about creativity, but because of the sense-making implicit in the specific act. But this rush can equally accompany the person who creates a new way to manipulate others, for he too finds a way forward that previously did not exist. From this basic opening of a way forward provided by a creative act for the creator and beyond, everything about creativity is open to critical evaluation.

We see an additional peculiarity of creative value through a brief investigation of the formal properties of value and their concomitants in evaluation. The most basic formal property is that values are positive or negative. Both values and disvalues are species of the class of value, and it would be a simple but decisive error to think of all value as positive value. Of evaluation, the most basic structure is attraction and repulsion, exemplified in an act of estimation or a response to features of value. This structure may be expressed in the simple prereflective experiences of finding something beautiful, desiring one food over another, or taking a jump shot rather than going in for a layup when playing basketball. In these cases, evaluation, in the sense of a differential selection of elements of a situation, is embedded in most of our experience. Alternatively, we can reflect on our experience, abstract from it, and deliberate about it in ways that make evaluation seem more cognitively articulated in the form of judgments. In both cases, there is only an ideal conformity of evaluation to value. For example, it seems that one may be repulsed by a positive value, due to resentment, or one may positively value a disvalue.

Are there further formal properties of value? Max Scheler, following Brentano, identifies the following:

1. The existence of a positive value is itself a positive value;
2. The existence of a negative value is itself a negative value;
3. The non-existence of a positive value is itself a negative value;
4. The non-existence of a negative value is itself a positive value.\textsuperscript{137}

According to these claims, we can distinguish between possible and existent values. Assuming, then, that a particular artwork is valuable, a world in which the artwork exists is more valuable than a world in which the artwork does not exist; similarly, the destruction of such an artwork removes value from a world in which it exists. These considerations then apply, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, to practical objects (tools) or scientific objects (theories).

We verify these formal properties in our evaluations of things. For example, we evaluate the burning of the Library of Alexandria or the destruction of the Twin Towers as a loss; we evaluate the construction of a new university as a gain. But the experience that validates these properties is teleologically structured, in the sense that values are only recognized on a background of presence and absence of objects we can consciously intend. Our evaluations of non-existence are retrospective (in the case of the Library) or prospective (in the case of a university to be built), but only those possibilities continuous with our available ways of making sense can be objects of consciousness in these evaluations. Creation therefore presents a peculiar case for evaluation, because one may well fail to recognize any particular 'absence' in the world, which a creation fills. I need not recognize the need for a new art style until an artist has already created it; the possibilities for aesthetic value may seem completely realized to me, the spectator, until I recognize the creative addition. Even those who detect the inadequacy of sense in a situation—who encounter disorder that calls for creative response—do not have the specific creation available to evaluate. The most one can say is that “a resolution to this issue would be

\textsuperscript{137} Scheler, \textit{Formalism}, Pg. 82. Scheler ascribes these particular claims to Brentano, but has far more to say about formal properties of values in this section.
valuable.” But, again, while a creative act introduces a new existence or possibility for evaluation, the created status does not guarantee that the creation must be positively valuable.

The anomaly of creativity—the fact that novelties, after all, do not exist until the creator brings them into being—makes it impossible to evaluate creations with foresight. The conditions for foresight simply are not met. That is, one cannot suppress the creation of a thing, but only certain possibilities one foresees on the basis of one’s sense-making once a creation exists. This evaluative feature of creativity has some of its most important implications for creators themselves who both advance the meaningful possibilities of a world and endure a world’s censure.

4.2 THE CREATIVE SELF

The investigation of the creative self proceeds in three stages of increasing complexity. First, I consider the personal relation of creators to their creations. Creative novelty is primarily a modification of oneself and one’s way of experiencing. It modifies one’s own skills, knowledge, and abilities, extending what can be meaningfully thought or done. Creators own their creations. Yet how one relates to a creation can vary considerably from aloof disinterest to embodiment in oneself. The second stage of my investigation develops the more significant attachment one may have to a creation with a more robust conception of the self.

Third, I consider value-creation. Perhaps the most important distinction bearing on the evaluation of creation is a distinction within creative novelties. All creativity changes, for the creator, how she can make sense of things. All creativity realizes new possibilities,
which become possible objects of evaluation. But an allegiance to familiar values remains part of the continuity implicit in most creativity. One shares typical creations, in embedded novelties, with others, and draws on shared values when communicating or expressing creativity in a new work. Our values inform the pursuits that are most worth undertaking, and our familiar skills or received expressions may be unsuited to that undertaking. This is the motivating condition for ‘common’ creativity. For example, we might see the creativity of the writer evident in a new horror novel, in the way it opens up new possibilities for the genre. Despite its creativity, however, such work typically reproduces the basic commitments of existing ideals and values. In other cases, however, values themselves are created; the values by which we make sense of experience are modified. This is value-creation. In creating a value, however, one creates a new way of making our activity significant. A new value shapes our world by figuring into our practices, skills, and goals. For example, a writer may produce a work aimed at opening up a new way of valuing and committing oneself. The most distinctive general feature of value-creation is that it challenges familiar evaluation on its own level; it resists complete assimilation to earlier values. Value-creation therefore disrupts continuity in a more significant way than other creativity, because it disrupts the continuity of significance itself. For some hints of this, consider the difference between an artist who demonstrates beauty in a new way in a work versus the artist who demonstrates ugliness in a work, but insists it is art. The latter work challenges an audience to evaluate art differently, not simply on the basis of beauty. Or consider the evaluative dismissal Einstein made of quantum mechanics with the quip, “God
does not play dice with the world.”\textsuperscript{138} Finally, Nietzsche’s work to highlight, reevaluate, and supplant the value of asceticism discloses both a past value-creation and an effort to create a new value.\textsuperscript{139} I will work to understand how value-creation is possible.

4.2.1 A Creation of One’s Own

We are familiar with cases in which some ideas seem to be our own and other ideas seem to belong to someone else. For example, one attributes a particular literary idea to its author, but claims ownership of one’s personal reflections about that idea; one allows Descartes his conception of God, but claims a particular interpretation for oneself. In these typical cases, both the ideas of others and one’s own ideas must occupy a place in a single mental life, or else one would be unaware of their distinct senses. I contend that we find the first, minimal relation of a creator to her creation in this sense of ownership. We find that ideas or acts belong to us in a way they do not belong to others, because they indicate the creative act required to generate them.

To develop this view, I draw on an account from Max Scheler, for whom the best explanation for these distinctions refers them to a more basic shared social experience—what I would call a world. Scheler argues that one’s own ideas are contingent achievements of a developmental process separating one from one’s shared world.

The suggestion that the individual self may be derivative or achieved arises in the context of Scheler’s discussion of the problem of other minds. The view that makes the perception of other minds a philosophical problem begins with the commonsense claim

\textsuperscript{138} Hermanns 58. The fuller quote: “Nature doesn't know chance, it operates on mathematical principles. As I have said so many times, God doesn't play dice with the world.” Of course Einstein expressed reasons to be dissatisfied with quantum mechanics, among them its probabilistic, nonlocal (action-at-a-distance), and linear features. But his reasons appear on the background of a basic commitment to an ordered universe.

\textsuperscript{139} Most directly, the critical part of this project appears in On the Genealogy of Morals.
that we are each aware of our own mental states in a privileged way. This starting point requires one to find lurking in the contents of one’s mind—perhaps in comparison of one’s perception of other physical bodies to one’s own—some necessary relation to others in order justify the knowledge of their independent existence. Thus, on this view, one must somehow connect representations of an other “inside” one’s mind with an actual other “outside” the mind, which opens the possibility of a skeptical wedge between the representation and the concrete other. Call this the “traditional view.”

Scheler’s key claim is that the traditional view begins with the faulty assumption that one’s mental states are always one’s own in a sense adequate to establish a distinct, individual self. This is the assumption, for example, that everything showing up in subjective reflection is one’s own, and signifies one’s own mind. But why should we identify the perception of a mind with the perception of one’s own mind? According to Scheler, when one attends to the phenomenological evidence without the presupposition that a “real substratum” (e.g. the nervous system) provides a reference point for identifying all and only those things that are one’s own, then one encounters a field of mental life differentiating between mental contents in a quite different way. For example, among my “own” mental states—thoughts, feelings, volitions—I constantly attribute some to another person. I express a thought in conversation that I got from a friend; I sympathize with a loved one’s pain; I do the will of some authority figure. These are experienced differences in the ownership of a mental state, which deny me a full claim to them. Traditional accounts, and many contemporary accounts, will not adequately accommodate the distinctive experience

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141 Ibid, 245
of ownership, because their conditions for being a self are too inclusive. For example, the Cartesian cogito, simple subjective experience, or physical bodies do not have the resources to distinguish one’s ideas from others’ ideas at this level of examination, because both kinds of ideas relate to a “substratum” (or logical pole) on equal footing.

To account for this basic sense of otherness within one’s own mental life, Scheler considers an “immediate flow of experiences, undifferentiated as between mine and thine,” and a “stream flooding” over the self.142 I label this “common experience” to maintain fidelity to Scheler’s text, but the structure of this experience itself is easily amenable to the description of worldhood offered in Chapter 2. To describe common experience, Scheler begins with the basic experience in which a mental state is given with an undetermined reference to oneself or another. Ideas in the air (political ideas, fads) or the pervasive mood of a rock concert could serve as examples. Such mental states are clearly enough presented, even if one has doubts about who “owns” them. One simply falls in with ideas or moods presented in this undifferentiated state, and is governed by them. The mental lives of children and traditional cultures provide exemplary cases of common experience for Scheler. Children are bound by a “family feeling,” or a dominant set of ideas, feelings, or tendencies handed over from their close relatives or community long before the capacity for the kinds of distinctions necessary for individuality develop. Traditional cultures tend to prioritize different possible experiences through communal norms, such that those experiences that might lead to differences are never taken up or explicitly pursued.143

Common experience provides the grounds for shared understanding and a pervasive

142 Ibid, 246ff
143 The community “overshadows the private life of the individual” (Ibid 248).
background from which one can slowly begin to collect and organize experiences into
distinct categories of self and other. By the time one develops the symbolic capacities
necessary for distinguishing an individual self, one’s mental life is already filled with the
mental lives of others.

At least in this book, however, Scheler seems to consider the process of developing
one’s ideas to be a matter of self-discovery, rather than creativity. Scheler holds that a
unique person, a concrete whole, underlies all of our acts. Call this an “essential
personality”. For Scheler, persons are always individuated as concrete essences: “the person
is the concrete and essential unity of being of acts of different essences...”\(^{144}\) Because it is
concrete, the unitary personality instances an ordo amoris, an ordering of value-preferences
or loves, though these preferences can be distorted in concrete action through value-
inversion (ressentiment), self-deception, or, perhaps, by the influence of some external
power. The question then is how one attributes some contents to oneself, and some to
others. What is the criterion? Scheler describes the fact of this attribution, without
explaining what makes something our own:

“[undifferentiated common experience] represents the common starting-point for the
elaboration of an ever nicer distribution of the material of experience so given between
ourselves and other people; an ever more precise appropriation of ‘our own’ and
repudiation of what belongs to ‘others’.\(^{145}\)

The reconstruction I propose for Scheler’s position consists of an entity galvanized by the
tension between one’s essential personality and one’s received values and ideas in common
experience. It should be possible for one to bear a veridical relation to one’s essential

\(^{144}\) Scheler, *Formalism*, Pg. 383. As a concrete essence, for Scheler, a person is also not merely a “network of
acts”: “Abstract act-essences concretize into concrete act-essences only by belong to the essence of this or
that individual person.”

\(^{145}\) Scheler, NS, 246
personality, to be true of it.\textsuperscript{146} The unitary person thus provides an implicit criterion for judging the acts, ideas, and values presented in mental life for their authentic connection with a more basic, essential personality. With the right sensitivity to the “call” of this essential personality one may gradually articulate one’s authentic personhood. This achieved self is an uncovered or discovered self. It provides the meaning of being true to one’s own nature.

Perhaps the closest Scheler comes to ratifying this position is in his \textit{Formalism}, where he describes the “coming of age” of a child:

The basic phenomenon of coming of age consists in the ability to experience insight into the difference between one’s own and someone else’s acts, willing, feeling, thinking, an insight which is already given in the immediate experiencing of any experience itself (the insight into the difference is \textit{not} based on the content of the experience).\textsuperscript{147}

The parenthetical makes all the difference, because Scheler has still not explained the actual attribution of particular mental contents. How \textit{this} concrete, particular idea becomes my own, how I may be jealous of another’s use of it, and how I may make a genuine claim to it still seems obscure.

Nonetheless, there is a strong reason to accept this account of one’s own thoughts if Scheler has accurately described common experience. He wishes to express a conception of the human person for whom authentic self-knowledge is always possible, and access to the mental lives of others is essential. On his account, common experience seems both extraordinarily deep and yet never deep enough to deny the possibility of personal self-discovery. We can rely on common experience to guarantee that when one achieves self-

\textsuperscript{146} “Both self and body acquire their ultimate individual character from their evident connection with the unitary \textit{person}” (Ibid 243).
\textsuperscript{147} Scheler, \textit{Formalism}, 478
awareness, one’s mental life comes replete with ideas and experiences of unrecognized origin, but shared intelligibility.\textsuperscript{148} And we can rely on one’s essential personality to guarantee that one always has a buoy above the surface conditioning the possibility of self-discovery.\textsuperscript{149} The argument, then, is that once we acknowledge undifferentiated common experience, and once we characterize this stream as a deep background capable of (nearly) overshadowing one’s personhood entirely, then we must assert an essential personality to make sense of the basic fact of one’s own ideas. Or, to formulate this point differently: given common experience, if there are to be individual ideas, then there must be some essential personality making the individuating process possible. In brief, by positing a ground of shared meaning as strong and uniform as common experience, we must posit an equally strong ontological condition for the possibility of individual selfhood. For fidelity to Scheler, I should note that, on his view, this essential personality is not a transcendental ego operating behind acts, but rather embodied in acts of the person, where it discloses its essential order.

Yet common experience must be even “stronger” for Scheler in a different way, in a way that never permits genuine creativity. It is not just that common experience can dominate one’s mental life, but also that, it seems, all experience must in principle be common.\textsuperscript{150} Scheler’s brief commentary on art can bring this point into focus. As Scheler conceives it:

\begin{itemize}
\item One is “filled with ideas and experiences of whose real origin [one] is completely unaware” (Scheler, NS, 247).
\item Note Scheler’s qualified language: in family feeling, the child’s own life is only “almost completely hidden from him”; the private life of an individual in the primitive tribe is only “virtually” overshadowed (Ibid 247ff, my italics).
\item Scheler makes an exception here only for pure bodily sensations, which are genuinely private.
\end{itemize}
That is indeed the mission of true art: ... to press forward into the whole external world and the soul, to see and communicate those objective realities within it which rule and convention have hitherto concealed.\textsuperscript{151}

Poets are adventurers into human experience. They “soar above the prevailing network of ideas in which our experience is confined, as it were, by ordinary language; they enable the rest of us to see, for the first time, in our own experience, something which may answer to [their] richer forms of expression...”\textsuperscript{152} While it is true for Scheler that artists make a contribution to possible self-awareness, they do not actually create new experience or new possibilities, even if they disclose possibilities that would not have otherwise been recognized without their activity.\textsuperscript{153} They discover new forms of expression that chart the order of being. Experience is always already common experience, even if it can be further explored by artists. And, according to Scheler, how could it be otherwise? Reproduction of ordinary experience would be superfluous, and pure subjective fancy would be “transitory and ... necessarily a matter of complete indifference to other people.”\textsuperscript{154} Art, for Scheler, only makes sense on the background of a remarkably comprehensive common experience. Individuals never differentiate themselves from common experience in this sense, but only discover their concrete essences within it.\textsuperscript{155}

In this context, it seems that Scheler offers a version of the view that being itself is well-ordered. Objective values all fit together seamlessly, and there is no conflict but what

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 253
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid, 253-254
\textsuperscript{153} See Chapter Two on hyperconventional change and disclosure for more of my view here.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, 253
\textsuperscript{155} This thesis must be handled carefully, for it does not deny individuality in a different sense. With his notion of the “intimate person” (Scheler, \textit{Formalism}, 56 ff.), for example, Scheler argues that each person, enmeshed in (or sculpted from) an objective totality of values, is nonetheless singular. An essence is not necessarily universal, when it is concrete.
we introduce through our ignorance or ineptitude. But this is not quite right. In another work, for example, Scheler not only acknowledges, but vigorously describes the phenomenon of tragedy and finds it to be an essential aspect of existence—objective value-conflict, independent of our idiosyncratic takes on a situation. The argument under consideration here succeeds, Isubmit, only if common experience is accurately described. Does his description answer to the phenomena? I do not think it does, particularly when one attends more closely to the conflicts, some perhaps tragic, that appear in common experience.

Scheler’s vision of an “immediate flow of experiences” streaming through a channel of “sociologically conditioned patterns” of mental life suggests that common experience provides a continuous source of meaning in terms of which a person lives, and from which one might never need to distinguish oneself but for the call of an essential personality. But this premise is false. The basic reason is that disorder is embedded in common experience itself. I give two examples of this disorder, discord and displacement.

The basic structure of discord is a tension or incommensurability posed by the specific contents constituting common experience—these are tensions built into features of the shared values, thoughts, and styles of life presented in shared experience, which only present themselves in specific contexts. Discord arises when common experience presents an issue or poses a challenge to us and reveals its inability to settle the matter for us. We saw a minor example of this in Chapter 3 with coin-calling. But more broadly, the conditions for discord may be met contingently in any dimension of experience. Discord forces us to

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156 Scheler, *On the Tragic*
157 Scheler, *NS*, 246ff.
make choices—to prioritize—or generate an alternative to the typical responses available to us. In such acts we cease to be a mere *embodiment* of the contours of common experience and instead come to engender a positive contrast with it.

For adults, discord appears in many practical or moral choices. One may be faced with a choice between two academic positions, each presenting a significantly different arrangement of values: a high-pressure position in a prestigious department amenable to one's career or a teaching position amenable to one's family life. One may have to choose, as in Sartre's famous case, between a commitment to a family member (one's mother) or to a political cause. Most distressing are the choices that leave one marred, like Sophie's choice between one of her two children in a Nazi prison camp. Discord introduces us to a common world we did not make, but which calls on us nonetheless to act.

Discord appears in life even for young children. It opposes the complete "overshadowing" of the mental life of a child in the ethos of a family. For instance, a child faces the diffuse influences of her parents: parents may assent to entirely opposed activities, have differing temperaments and moods, express themselves in different gestures or patterns of language, and embody different styles or attitudes toward life. Much of the complex turbulence of a concrete romantic relationship is impressed upon the child, and not just the celebrated connections it provides between people. Some of these differences can be combined or reconciled, but others are confrontational or contradictory. They present alternative ways of being a person. Even life with a single parent can be complicated by shifts in mood, temperament, and expectations. Moreover, the child usually collects other experiences outside the family, which disrupt regular "family feeling." It is of course possible that a dominant member of a family will override many of the sources of
discord as they arise—an oppressive husband and father may leave little room for alternatives. But it is doubtful that such interventions can always succeed. A child, like an adult, may also be carried by inertia or indecision past the relevant contextual conditions in which a discord arises, and thus may not have to face it at all. But at least sometimes the child, like the adult, must act in order to resolve the discord and is therefore forced to creatively make choices or create alternatives. Finally, note that discord is not necessarily distressing (one may be presented with very different, but equally positive or exhilarating values to pursue). Instead, discord refers to the forced moment in one’s experience where one must individuate oneself with respect to alternatives presented in common experience.

Displacement refers to an isolation in common experience in which one must offer up a personal act in order to re-engage with one’s world. It is form of detachment forcing one to respond to ‘gaps’ in the structure of common experience—instances when the common stream carves out an island, as it were, and no longer carries one along by a continuous shared experience. This is not necessarily an intellectual detachment, because one’s experience may be principally characterized by impulses or emotions. In displacement, one’s impulses are disconnected from a situation such that one must articulate or develop them in a new way.

Displacement, like discord, is often unavoidable. Even in a crowded room, in the bustle before a holiday dinner, a child may find herself displaced: the adults move around her in indifferent orbits—they are busy, wrapped up in putting the turkey on the table, filling glasses, and chattering; the child drifts between the adults, but is not present to them. Here the practices informing common experience have suddenly left a gap, a pocket into which the child falls with no immediate expectations, no requirements, and no desires.
but those she can muster on his own. Now she must speak or act in order to fill the practical space left to her, to reconnect with her environment. Of course, she cannot produce her act \textit{ex nihilo}, but must draw on available resources. Nonetheless, raising one activity to prominence—to go explore outside, to raid the dessert early—forms a new connection of one’s own to experience in a way only made possible from the space opened up in displacement. In displacement, one’s own desires and ideas have a chance to “materialize” and move one to action in a new way; the source of one’s acts moves from the undifferentiated dictation of the common stream to something more immediately one’s own. Displacement forces this new distinction between being drawn along by practical engagements and moving oneself along. This distinction may not be very sharp, and it may not last long, but it indicates a starting point for a person attached to specific contents by means of creative acts.

If these patterns accurately describe part of our engagement with common experience, then the development of one’s own ideas—one’s sense-making—is often not a matter of discovery, but of creation. Discord and displacement describe concrete anomaly or even disorder in common experience. In these patterns, the resources provided by common experience prove inadequate for containing the life of a person; one must contribute something new to it in order to act. As practical, intellectual, and ethical beings, we carry with us the skills and values with which we inhabit a shared world, but this shared world also inhabits us with its meaning and resistance. We realize disorder in our world and respond to it creatively; but then we realize disorder in ourselves. There is slippage between the disorder of worlds and ourselves that places us out of common order, with our own ideas.
Art often expresses this disorder too. For example, Sophocles’ *Antigone* reveals the discord between two currents in common experience, brought to relief only in a contingent, tragic circumstance. Hopper’s “Night Hawks” and Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* both seem to showcase possible displacements, where common experience fails to secure the ongoing engagement of its members. Artists often bring us into contact, not with new orders of being, but with being out of order. They enable the conditions under which we may experience discord and displacement, and thus inspire us to respond with our own creative acts.

Creation poses a special problem for Scheler. Recall that common experience was introduced as an element in a solution to the problem of other minds. Common experience accounts for our cognition of ideas owned by others and essentially related to them. But for Scheler to explain the cognition in others of our own new ideas, he must hold that common experience is, in some sense, a repository of all possible (cognizable, shareable) experience—that the materials of experience are never created, but only “wrested … from the fearful inarticulacy of our inner life.”158 But this is just what Scheler’s conception of the link between personhood and our own ideas leaves unclear: how is this idea the one I stumble upon and how are specific ideas discovered in my personality? The reason is that creativity operates on the senses available in the situation. Thus creation involves some continuity with common experience, but is nonetheless irreducible to it. Even if there is a more basic personality with which our ideas may be continuous, then, this personality does not provide the criterion for one’s own specific ideas—it does not have the “content” to

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158 Ibid, 253
serve in this way. The only essential criterion is that *I thought this or I did this* in a way irreducible to common experience.

I will not argue further whether or not there is an essential personality, and will investigate without this assumption. Even if persons have essences, I do not see that their possession guarantees the continuity required to undermine the necessity for creative acts, overrides the specificity of anomalous concrete experience, or even undermines the possibility or necessity of changing oneself. If one has a basic ordering of values, one might still need to be creative. Many of the ideas one claims for oneself are what one comes up with, achieves, or creates, rather than what one discovers to be true of oneself.

4.2.2 Identifying with One’s Creation

Nonetheless, one may not identify oneself with one’s own creations in any more than an expedient or short-lived way. *I had this idea, I did this,* and *I created this* may not express additional phenomena that indicate a genuine contribution to selfhood, among them responsibility for one’s creation, commitment, protection or nurturing of the creation, or pride, for example. One may make sense of things in a new way, but need not value or embody this sense-making further. In Chapter 2, I developed the concept of internal and external goods to argue that only some of our engagement in a world constitutes meaningful identity. Now I extend this view with some sharper analytical tools and a richer descriptive vocabulary.

Phenomena like commitment and responsibility tend to accompany an internal relation to one’s creations. Internal goods are one specification of an internal relation. By an internal relation, I mean a relation that modifies the constitution of one or more of its relata. Once established, the existence of the relata entails the existence of the relation. A
Traditional example of an internal relation is marriage, which bears an internal relation between spouses. Meaning-holism in semantic theory provides another example: a term acquires its meaning only on the basis of a complex of structural relations to other terms in a language which determine the appropriate use of the term. Virtues, too, are properly characterized as internally related to selves. Having a virtue is partially constitutive of being virtuous. One cannot have a virtue without being (in part) the virtue. And by newly achieving or possessing a virtue, one becomes meaningfully different. I define external relations negatively: an external relation is a relation in which the constitution of relata are not altered by their relation. For example, being to-the-left-of is an external relation. External relations are not trivial; it is important to see that externally related entities can affect each other, as when one billiard ball strikes another. But in such relations, the mere fact of the relation between entities does not affect their identities. So, for example, private property ownership may typically be an external relation made possible by a particular political and economic arrangement, but it can also be partially constitutive of one’s identity through an internal relation. One can see this latter point in cases in which the identity of a businessperson is internally related to his business. To seize his business would be to bring a kind of personal harm to this person. Such examples show that the concept of an internal relation can be applied in a rigorous logical sense only with great care in characterizing relata. The concept of an internal relation, in this context, captures an important, meaningful connection we bear to aspects of ourselves, others, and our world. If you burn down my home, I will experience a loss incommensurate with the loss of an externally related physical object, though most of what constitutes significance for me will of course survive the burning. Alternatively, if, over time, I lose my attachment to my home,
this entails either that I have changed or that my home has changed. Internal relations do not always survive such changes.

Creativity, I claim, contributes to selfhood when it enhances or develops internal relations. My questions are (1) what accounts for internal relations and (2) how do creations support them?

There are many analytically separable and nuanced concepts of the I, among them consciousness, the subject, the ego, the rational agent, the logical pole of experience, the essential personality, the self, the embodied self, or the soul, to take a few. By person I mean the totality of ways of making sense one has at one’s disposal. Recall that senses put us into contact with the world, with its affordances and possibilities. They include both cognitively articulated thoughts, but also embodied skills and values.\textsuperscript{159} The self, by contrast, specifies a subset of one’s personhood—an integrated system of senses that mutually support and confirm each other. The basic phenomenon of selfhood involves coherence, meaning, and facility in one’s world. The distinction between personhood and selfhood entails that one may enact a self to varying degrees, because one’s sense-making must itself afford integration and one must realize this integration in one’s life. Let’s pursue this further.

The model of the self I endorse claims that robust selfhood results from the coherence of three constitutive factors: values, talents, and self-image.\textsuperscript{160} Values order the objects and activities of one’s experience by their importance. Typically values act prereflectively on our experience, conditioning what appears to be worth doing. We can also reflect on our values, though doing so is difficult and may lack fidelity to our

\textsuperscript{159} See Chapter Three.
\textsuperscript{160} Schroeder (2013). Schroeder’s account draws heavily on the account of freedom offered by Bergmann (1991).
experience. Talents refer to one’s physical, intellectual, or artistic capabilities, skills, knowledge, and sensitivities for actively engaging in one’s world. Self-image refers to one’s self-assessment or self-understanding. When each of these factors is aligned and acted upon, one is “self-enacted”—living with a robust and fulfilled self. For example, a businessperson who values her products, her customers, and her contribution to her community; who successfully runs her business; and who conceives of herself as a businesswoman will be self-enacted in at least this portion of her life. By contrast, a lawyer may value her work and successfully represent her clients, and yet feel that she should have pursued some other calling, art or medicine for instance, more fitting to her self-image; a parent may value the raising of children, see herself principally as a caregiver, and yet constantly find herself unable to inspire and educate her children in the way she would like; a painter may see herself as an artist, produce exquisite designs, and yet be unable to appreciate the value of her art as anything but transient or superficial additions to culture. In each of these cases, one gets the sense that life is not going as well as it could, and that it could be otherwise. On this view, being a self is not a given; selfhood is won or lost through a process of development and integration.

I amplify the constitutive factor theory in three ways to serve present purposes. First, I emphasize opportunity or an occasion for action as a necessary condition. One does not achieve self-enactment in a vacuum, apart from a world that affords one’s sense-making and in which one acts.\footnote{One might argue that there are extreme cases of self-enactment that depend on no (relevant) conditions of the world. I take Viktor Frankl’s account of affirming life in a Nazi prison camp to be a possible counterexample (Frankl 1992), or perhaps, in principle, the Stoic sage. If these are indeed plausible counterexamples to my claim, then I would need to be more precise: an occasion for action is necessary just in case one’s self-enactment refers to conditions of the world, which it normally does.} Many self-enactments are very refined, situated in the specific
details of a practice. The self-enacted professional athlete may have a difficult time with retirement, for example, if his new life affords none of the opportunity for engagement and achievement he found in his earlier work. Second, I reiterate that one’s senses of value, skill, and knowledge may far exceed what one integrates in self-enactment. We see this extension at work, for example, when one can basically understand another’s perspective and values without adopting them for oneself—when they are not one’s own. One can recognize the importance of specific problems—say, water distribution in underdeveloped countries or the need for a unified physical theory—without thereby working on those problems. They are not experienced to be one’s own problems to solve. Third, of the three constitutive factors, I prioritize the importance of one’s values. We find, for example, that even the inept parent or the unfulfilled businessperson can nonetheless affirm their lives, even while they lack full engagement. Self-image can change with great rapidity given the right insights, and many aspects of talent can typically be changed or achieved, but one commits to one’s values much more robustly, even when one falls short of self-enactment.

The enacted self and its constitutive elements condition the existence of internal relations. Self-enactment attaches one to specific elements of one’s world, elements one depends on for continued robust selfhood. This is why burning down my home could affect me and my possibilities, to the extent that I have invested a life into it. What one “owns” on the basis of selfhood extends into the world, into one’s projects, activities, and valued objects. Moreover, the constitution of one’s enacted self—one’s integration of values, talents, and self-image—expresses its own set of internal relations. On the basis of their relation, they bear an enhanced expressive power, so to speak. That is, if one values reason, has a talent for reasoning, and sees oneself to be one who reasons, then reason becomes
potent in a way it cannot otherwise be—similarly for the constitutive factors of a professional basketball player or an artist. Removing a factor leaves each remaining factor truncated. From the expressive power of a self-enactment, finally, we typically see the enhanced phenomena of ownership—responsibility, commitment, and protection.

But note that one’s self-enactment need not be created or call for creativity. One may be self-enacted in a conventional identity in the “common stream,” where one “owns” ideas, not through creation, but by adoption. Creativity performs a complex, contingent, but important function facilitating changes in oneself and one’s world where self-enactment is threatened or calls on one for its achievement.

In one case, for example, we see Kekulé struggling to make sense of benzene. The character of this struggle is more than just intellectual curiosity—he is committed and to some extent risks himself on this problem. He masters the relevant concepts and theory, invests himself in the project, and, until creating the required synthesis of concepts, is uneasy with his theoretical sense-making. As a theoretical achievement, this creation bears no stamp of subjective idiosyncrasy—it is not “his” for that reason. Neither is it simply one more idea he has had, whether creative or not. This new idea develops out of the complex self-enactment he achieves in his work and reinforces it. And this is fortunate, because one’s self-enactment may not last long on an insoluble problem, particularly in a world that resists one’s values. Most cases of meaningful creativity are of this kind, preserving or pursuing self-enactment by creating knowledge, skills, or sensitivities that realize new possibilities for oneself and one’s world. Here we typically see inventors, entrepreneurs, and scientists. We also see artists seeking to connect experience in new ways. Artists, as

162 Or perhaps, as with Scheler, one enacts aspects of an essential personality.
mentioned earlier, can present a special case when their work expresses the disorders of our world. But like prophets of old, this task of pointing out disorder is their calling, or it is as close as they get to it.

Based on the view I have presented, I can point out a few evaluative complexities. First, it is possible to create without responsibility or commitment, to create against one’s highest values—the values that figure in self-enactment—and even to undermine one’s self-enactment through creativity. One who values reason and who realizes the problem of evil can be left adrift; similarly, creative insights do not always wait until one is ready for them. Novelists, for example, can be surprised and disgusted by the violence or degradation they can make sense of, in part by embodying their characters and in part by creating them. It takes an additional commitment to honesty and the writing process to see the project through to completion.

Second, despite evaluative puzzles like resentment and self-deception, I see no principled reason to deny self-enactment and creativity to morally dubious or evil people. Cons, cheats, and liars can express creativity in their work. Exploitation and torture are arts calling for constant creative extension. The leaders of cults or white supremacy groups can express a robust integration of directed hate, facility, and self-image. Creativity, in these contexts, advances hateful work. Though this work often consists of magisterial acts of value-blindness, illogic, and disdain for others, it nonetheless creatively contorts values and insecurities toward new possibilities—think of Mein Kampf. Creativity is not fettered by positive value, but only the affordances of the objects of experience—which are apparently quite extensive.
Third, I have been describing what might be called the moral psychology of creators without drawing the distinction between creative novelties proper—new ways of making sense—and embedded novelties in the world. This conflation is typical, (1) because many creative acts occur in a medium, occurrent with their embedding. The writer, for example, often creates only as she writes. Often because of the first reason, (2) internal relations extend not only to new sense-making, but also to embedded novelties—specific expressions of ideas, novels, paintings, theories, and so on. The social value of creativity occurs only in these embedded novelties, and we tend to respect (and often legally protect) this attachment. Among the many complexities that result from these relations, I emphasize the case in which the creator identifies with her creation. I return to Plato’s account of writing to describe some of the difficulty:

At the Egyptian city of Naucratis, there was a famous old god, whose name was Theuth; [...] he was the inventor of many arts, such as arithmetic and calculation and geometry and astronomy and draughts and dice, but his great discovery was the use of letters. Now in those days the god Thamus was the king of the whole country of Egypt [...]. To [Thamus] came Theuth and showed his inventions, desiring that the other Egyptians might be allowed to have the benefit of them; he enumerated them, and Thamus enquired about their several uses, and praised some of them and censured others, as he approved or disapproved of them. [...] But when they came to letters, This, said Theuth, will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; it is a specific both for the memory and for the wit. Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a quality which they cannot have [...].

Theuth here expresses the attachment of an internal relation to his work. We can, I think, imagine the pride that comes with presenting one’s own greatest achievement. Of course

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Plato makes the first point about this special attachment. It can obscure one’s evaluation of the creation. I do not think one can insist on this point, however, because (1) in many cases of creativity an audience does not (or has not yet) grasped what is creative or newly valuable about a creation. Or (2) the difference in evaluation may entail a genuine value conflict. Nonetheless, the protectiveness one has for one’s creation links it directly to self-enactment in a way that resists honest criticism. Along with a creator’s pride in a creation, we also see the disappointment or resentment that can accompany its censure, or dismissal. This is because, where creators identify with their creations, they take the attacks on their work to be attacks against themselves.

Typically the values in question in creativity are superficial, not because they are fake or unimportant, but because they are themselves continuous with deeper shared values. Kekulé could rely on the scientific values that informed his work when communicating his results to others. In addition to the requirement that a creative novelty be understood, Theuth and Thamus could presumably discuss the merit of writing so long as they agree on some standards of evaluation and, more generally, they both embody a commitment to evaluating its costs and benefits for others. Aside from its constitutive value, most creativity adds new instrumental, artistic, or intellectual value that we assess more broadly through familiar evaluative standards. The background condition is that the creator and his audience shares common purpose or set of values that the creation claims to enhance or achieve.

There is, however, the possibility of value-creation of a more significant kind. From the analyses of personhood and selfhood, we can infer the limitations of evaluation. In an individual case, the values integrated in one’s self-enactment provide one’s most
meaningful evaluative perspective. This perspective extends, in degrees of understanding, to those additional values with which one is familiar, though one may not identify with them. But despite this extension and its evaluative possibilities—the shifts and changes made possible through new identifications or different priorities—the limit of one’s evaluation is necessarily the limit of one’s familiarity in a world. Value-creator work at this limit. They offer values, seemingly impossibly, that are discontinuous with antecedent values, which make a new claim on us to evaluate differently. Such creation calls for some special consideration.

4.2.3 Value-Creation

What makes sense of value-creation? To answer this question, I supplement my account of creativity with a Nietzschean account of the creator, primarily as it is offered in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The picture of a creator I take up from Nietzsche is neither a born genius nor the result of an accidental process, but is rather the result of a developmental process in which one masters, but cannot reconcile, many of the values transmitted in one’s world. The value-creator faces evaluative disorder and responds with an alternative. Despite the simple consistency value-creation possesses with the account of creativity I have offered throughout this dissertation, there are nonetheless some distinctive puzzles. My point of entry for studying the nature of the creator will be Nietzsche’s “On the Way of the Creator,” where he discusses the challenges facing the development of a creator.

Many of Nietzsche’s points about value-creation are highly stylized to achieve a particular effect on a reader. He offers few (recognizably) concrete examples, because, as I

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interpret him, he is himself engaged in an effort to create a new value. At least within
written or literary works, a value-creator usually cannot take typical argumentative
strategies for granted because the values that coordinate the sense one makes of premises
are themselves under question. Offering familiar examples of something often just
reinforces familiar interpretations of those things. There are limits to what examples can
do. Nonetheless, I will try to offer some examples to orient us to some of the key points
about value-creation.

Value-creation in literature typically embeds argumentation within descriptions that
disclose anomaly within evaluation. I offer utopian novels like Edward Bellamy’s *Looking
Backward* or Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, or Daniel Quinn’s fictional dialogue, *Ishmael*, to
be examples of this effort. In such works, an author methodically situates arguments, and
the value-perspectives behind them, within the lives of those who hold those values, in
order to generate dissonance. The author must produce the conditions for a reader to grasp
the contingency of specific values—to deny their status as fixed constraints on sense-
making. To do this, for example, Nietzsche and Quinn perform genealogical analyses in an
effort to undermine orthodox values; Bellamy and Callenbach produce descriptions of lives
that do not depend on specific values. Or, in the case of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche
requires a reader to think interpretively in ways that disrupt habitual patterns of thought
and association, and conjoins habitually disconnected ideas. To put a complex point
schematically: to realize and communicate their values successfully, value-creators must
somehow invert what we take for granted in other kinds of creation. In ‘common’ creation,
one takes values for granted and overcomes problems in our practices; in value-creation,
one first shows how the practices we take for granted disclose problems with our values.
Hence both kinds of creativity depend on some meaningful continuity with the past. Yet value-creation attempts something altogether more difficult, because it challenges the values that help constitute selfhood and criticizes the life’s work of those most devoted to those values. The normal response to this attack is entrenchment, conservation, and counterattack—often without understanding.

Among efforts to create value, Nietzsche’s work is distinctive because he seems to advance the value of value-creation as such, in addition to some specific values. I am not convinced that Nietzsche entirely succeeds in this goal, but he does offer striking insights into the difficulties of value-creation.

In “On the Way of the Creator,” Nietzsche’s Zarathustra describes two powerful pressures working against the creator: the challenge presented by one’s world through social norms and a personal deficiency undermining creative work. What are these pressures and how might the creator overcome them?

The social pressures against creativity function in two ways, as a relation of the creator to those around him who challenge or ridicule him and his activity, and as a matter of social conscience, in which the ideals and judgments of the masses penetrate the creator’s own ideas and motivational sources. The problem is being either against or among “the herd.” Nietzsche provides numerous strategies for dealing with the former problem, including choosing one’s friends prudently, altering one’s environment, focusing one’s efforts on only those who are most open to creative achievement, and neglecting those who are beyond help, who can only function as an obstacle to creation. Should each of these fail, however, the creator must attempt to separate himself from the many influences of the
herd, even if that means accepting, enduring, and even pursuing complete physical solitude and isolation.

This same principle of purging and escape applies to the social conscience as well, but now the means of escape is much more difficult to discover. The social conscience can go with the creator even into isolation. Thus Nietzsche attempts to show in his general ethical project how to overcome the “yolk” of herd conscience in its various guises. This project includes intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic critiques; the presentation of new goals, ideals, and ethical prerogatives; and a revision of our approaches to culture, art, science, and philosophy, of which his focus on creation is a substantive part. Above all, however, the essentially problematic element of social conscience is its moralism. Nietzsche argues that, by the nature of value-creation alone, any new value will be automatically rendered “evil” by society. This is because the moral attitude is self-contained, conservative, and constantly defensive; it survives by recognizing and suppressing alternative forms of life and criticisms of its tenets. Nietzsche’s strategies suggest the possibility of breaking the grip of social conscience through the mastery of a highly critical, “free spirit” perspective. Normally, a value functions prereflectively to condition what we find important. When we live in terms of a value, we see no distinction between the value and its motivational power. Even when we recognize the values that guide us, they normally do not appear as the proper objects of assessment. In short, we do not draw a distinction between a value and the value’s contribution to action. Nietzsche’s free spirit discloses this conflation and enables a critical assessment of value. The free spirit transforms values from sources of motivation into resources, which can then serve in a revaluation of values.
However, to free oneself from the grip of social conscience is not yet to become a creator. “You call yourself free? Your dominating thought I want to hear, and not that you escaped from a yoke.” The second pressure—personal resistance—works against the creator once he achieves a free spirit. For Zarathustra, freedom from the illicit influence of social norms and practices is not enough—freedom must be freedom for something. But in discharging the motivational force of values, becoming “free” from the yolk of one's received values, we introduce a new problem of motivating further action. This is the problem of resistance.

Resources can be as scarce or plentiful as you like, but creation requires taking up these resources in a particular motivated way, a way that imbues them with orders of significance in which one sees some resources as more worthy of development and pursuit than others. The problem is this: the free spirit has wiped away the motivational elements that guide a person. The values figuring among one's resources can no longer guarantee motivation to action, because the creator has escaped from them in order to better inspect and evaluate them. The creator is free, but free for nothing. Nietzsche writes, 'One day you [creator] will no longer see your high, and your low will be all too near; your sublimity itself will frighten you like a ghost. One day you will cry: “Everything is false!”' Beyond the social conscience is the emptiness left once that conscience is purged. “But the worst enemy whom you can encounter will always be yourself; you ambush yourself in caves and woods.” The creator must find a new way of relating to and taking up his resources and motivating his activity, one which overcomes two threats: the threat of motivational

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165 Z., "On the Way of the Creator," 46-48
166 Ibid
167 Ibid
stagnation (sublimity), with its concomitant developmental stagnation; and the threat of self-destroying, self-destructive, or degenerate activity (ambush). Nietzsche sketches an answer to this problem:

Lonely one, you go the way of the lover: you love yourself and that is why you despise as only lovers despise.

The lover wants to create because he despises! What does he know of love who did not have to despise precisely what he loved!

With your love go into your isolation and with your creativity, my brother; and only later will justice limp after you.

With my tears go into your isolation, my brother. I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself and thus perishes.168

Given the emphasis on despising oneself, one possible interpretation is that the void opened up by becoming free for creating is itself a motivating force. Here despising becomes an act of focusing on the fact of one’s emptiness and one’s underdeveloped values. This has two elements: the concept of a lack and the act of disgust or despising one’s condition. One sees the limitations of one’s own resources, including social and cultural conditions, and reacts with disgust. One is drawn to fill in this lack by creatively working with one’s resources in new ways, by experimenting with new configurations of values, by acquiring new skills and working with them until something stable and coherent—a new creation—ultimately emerges.

But I find this view problematic. First, an awareness of a lack does not necessarily result in the impulse to fill it. By analogy, a lack of knowledge does not call one to pursue it unless one first determines the importance of filling the lack: there are many mathematical truths one neither knows, nor cares to know. A lack of motivational value could just leave

168 Ibid
one listless and apathetic. Therefore, something more is needed than the generic sense of a pure lack. Second, were one to respond with disgust to a perceived lack, there is nothing to constrain this motivation to creative development. A disgust with current cultural conditions could push one to despair, apathy, or spontaneous destruction, rather than the creation of new value. Disgust is not itself sufficient for creation even when it is available as a motivational source. The phenomenon of disgust is much more one of revulsion, avoidance, and abandon, than of active engagement, and is suspicious on those grounds as motivation for creativity. It is clear that Nietzsche, perhaps rightly, emphasizes disgust with many of one’s cultural and social norms, but disgust does not figure necessarily into the transformations and development of the creator once these norms are aborted.

My solution to this problem is more Heideggarian in spirit. In the achievement of a free spirit stage of development, one discloses oneself to be a possible value-creator. This is a structural feature of transforming “lived” values into resources, that they become malleable and changeable. One understands that, whatever the evaluative conditions that dominate within familiar practices, they could to some extent be otherwise. There exists the possibility of alternative, change, and new difference. This realization of oneself to be a possible value-creator is similar to “expecting the unexpected,” in that it does not yet possess a specific content. The objects of one’s experience, values, afford modification for the free spirit in a way they otherwise do not. Nonetheless, the price paid by the free spirit is the greater part of his self-enactment—no values are any longer one’s own. And this is the lack experienced by a value-creator, but now not just a lack or a loss, but also an ideal to work toward again. Thus the free spirit takes up the possibility of creating new value and with it a new self.
To understand my claim here, consider why we typically do not understand ourselves to be value-creators. First, in Scheler’s common stream, what passes for common sense conceals creativity—our lives and practices are typically distributed among and shared with others, providing the basis for shared intelligibility. Only one who creates in response to the deficiencies of this common world gets an initial sense that creativity is possible and may even be necessary. Second, because values take priority in the structure of the person, and because they act invisibly on average in coordinating experience, it often takes a great deal of experience to become familiar with the meaningful limits of our values and the ways they can contingently conflict. Only a complex person is likely to get an initial sense of differences among values and their possible deficiencies. Third, both to deal with one’s world effectively and to make the deficiencies of values matter, one must typically embody them in self-enactment. Otherwise, the conditions are not met for caring about achieving an integration of values. Fourth, even when one finds one’s self-enactment threatened in an attempt to integrate different value-perspectives, one typically does not make the dramatic purging of the free spirit. A different option is to simply make a creative choice, reinforcing one value over another without introducing a new alternative value. Only becoming a free spirit discloses the possibility of creating an alternative self-enactment based on a new value.

One might wonder whether this account of the creator agrees with Nietzsche. My account seems to agree with much of Nietzsche’s aspirational conception of the self. With some interpretive work, for example, the Three Metamorphoses—the camel, the lion, and the child—suggest the steps one must take to disclose oneself to be a value-creator.\footnote{Z., “On the Three Metamorphoses,” 16-17}
see Nietzsche’s rejection of common experience in his early admonition: “Be your self! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself.”\textsuperscript{170} However, Nietzsche’s emphasis on types in his later work may also indicate a different concern for the kinds of cultural contributions that types provide in addition to value creators. And even in \textit{Zarathustra}, Nietzsche seems to suggest that individual value creators may not be the end of development.\textsuperscript{171} Though I have not suggested anything that contradicts these additional directions of investigation, I have also not offered an understanding of creativity that extends to them. Though it can be difficult to pin down Nietzsche’s official view, we can see many of the resources required for understanding the value-creator.

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To generalize this account of the value-creator and verify it in concrete cases, I think we have to recognize that my interpretation of Nietzsche records (1) an idealized process that admits of variation, (2) an emphasis on distinctively moral values, and (3) an account of original value, and not just creative value. A more general account of value-creation does not need to invoke the concept of evil, except with respect to moral values. The value-creator often faces the inertia of dogmatism and its reactionary tendencies, even in science, art, or industry, where creators may just be called tasteless or stupid, in so many words, to dismiss their work. In a different kind of case, the recent advent of alternative forms of unregulated currency seems to articulate a value at odds with the traditional form of the state. A currency like Bitcoin may not simply be the solution to a problem on typical evaluative systems, but rather the condition for the existence of a new way of evaluating

\textsuperscript{170} Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator” in \textit{Untimely Meditations}, 127

\textsuperscript{171} E.g. Z. “On a Thousand and One Goals,” 43: “First peoples were creators and only later individuals; indeed, the individual himself is still the youngest creation.”
what economic exchange *should* be. It is not for that reason morally evil, even if it is considered *bad* in some ways and *wrong* in others. The closest many of us come to individual value-creation can be seen in two cases. The first involves periods of localized value-crisis, relieved by a “rebirth” into a new form of life. Occasionally, no deep knowledge of an existing model guides this rebirth. For example, one may begin to question the value of marriage without much familiarity with the history of its criticism; one may realize and pursue a new value to make sense of intimate relationships—to evaluate them—only to later discover a large community devoted to the value one proposes. This is an example of creation without origination. Second, the act of following alongside a value-creator itself calls for co-creation. So, for example, to follow Quinn’s *Ishmael* is to trace an intellectual development that gradually unhinges a Western value of perpetual progress and domination of nature, seeking to supplant this value with something quite different. But an engaged reader does not simply read words, but rather traces the arc of meaningful development established by the text, often leaping ahead to prefigure key moves, and grappling with the deflation of values to which one has long been committed. Reading such a book leaves one’s evaluative perspective changed, provided one grasps the meaning of the text and there is a coherent meaning to grasp.

The key points to take away are these. First, value-creation is possible, and there is some sense we can make of it. Second, value-creators often do face extreme adversity, both in simply being understood and in being tolerated, let alone embraced. Third, the resistance of a world to a new value is also the resistance to a new form of life—a new way of being a self. But, fourth, because creativity is constrained by only what existence affords, and not to
some standard of truth or goodness, I again see no strong reason to assume new values are necessarily positive contributions.

4.3 CONCLUSION

To put the issue starkly: one the one hand, a value-creator often risks everything by interacting with an uncompromising, conservative world that denies her way of life. A ‘common’ creator often creates something with unknown and unpredictable effects, whether material or personal. Either creator may well create something of negative value. On the other hand, we in the world who do not adopt that value or create new ways of evaluating have no better way of assessing creations than through the critical and evaluative perspectives we already have. And we have no better way of enriching our lives and building a better world when faced with its disorder than by creating anew. This situation often represents a stalemate between creators and their world.

Within the complexity of a meaningful world, there is no single adequate answer to the questions: “how should creators deal with their world” and “how should we deal with creators and their creations.” There is no single evaluation of the value of creation, because its value depends in each case on what is created. We do have the general credo to maximize positive value, but this credo is completely unhelpful when the task is to evaluate positive value in untested creation, partially discontinuous with antecedent orders of meaning. A world involves ideals and values that figure into one’s creativity; and one can create something that extends shared possibilities and values. A personally fulfilling creation may fail to be socially new or valuable, or it may be morally condemned. We can also see the possibilities of a highly creative person who nonetheless falls short of value-
creation and a value-creator who nonetheless fails to provide any cultural contribution. The former pursues the perfection and full realization of a received value through high creativity. Such a person may perform an invaluable service to the value-creator who creates a new value without articulating or developing it thoroughly. But this is an altogether safer path for a creator, and a path that often maintains a world’s values as they are.

More than anyone else, the value creator experiences the phenomenon of being out of order, being apart from the most basic, meaningful possibilities available to others, recognizing their deficiencies, and recognizing the necessity of a creative act. But the value creator does not impress creations into a world, like seals into wax. The world does not extend meaningfully in all directions uniformly, evenly, waiting for one to discover its features. It is concrete and specific, yet incomplete. Its strands of meaning protrude in disconnected agencies, the riffling hair of Medusa in which we are entangled. The relations we form, the bridges we cross, the values we create, depend not on the discovery of preexisting possibilities—with the creative act we cross nothing but nothing—but rather on the availability of a destination, a place to land on shifting grounds of meaning. The being of these relations, we hold only in the selves we enact and our commitment to them. Creativity forms the relations a world could not form for itself. But because it could not form them, it cannot easily evaluate them. This, I hope, is a first step toward understanding the real value of creativity, and an indication of the work to be done.
I began this dissertation with the view that we do not understand creativity well enough to cultivate its value or mitigate its disvalue. I have worked to present an account of human creativity that illuminates a single phenomenon at work in many domains. Through creative acts one brings new ways of making sense into the world, with its new meaningful possibilities. Creativity enacts the becoming of new being. I have argued for this much in common for creativity in all domains. From this view, I isolate the three main results.

First, creative novelty is discontinuous with antecedent orders that would seek to make sense of it. Nonetheless creative novelties must be partially continuous with antecedent conditions in order to achieve meaning and value. These two aspects of creative novelty provide the basis for my claim that creativity puts one “out of order,” which I hope to have demonstrated in multiple contexts. This disorder provides the sense, inextricable from creativity, that relates creativity to a prior nothingness.

Second, creative novelty is a modification of one’s own sense-making. This result is the key to grasping the generality of creativity in multiple domains. Scientific practice and everyday problem-solving often require creative work no less than artistic practice.

Third, creativity does not imply a positive value. I argued against conceptions that either stipulate the positive value of creativity and its results or argue for the intrinsic value of new being. As a consequence, the evaluation of creativity stands to be much more complex, for both creators and the recipients of their creations, than one might think.
These results fall short of offering specific prescriptions for cultivating creative value. But they lay the groundwork for what can only be more specific and exacting work by urging the integrity of the phenomenon that features in further investigation. I briefly suggest three areas, both to indicate further work to be done and work I do not take myself to have adequately addressed.

**Domain and Relation Specific Investigation:** Though creativity possesses a generality in all domains, a full account of creativity would nonetheless examine the varieties of novelty in different domains. I have indicated some distinctions—for example, between creativity in artistic, scientific, or entrepreneurial practice—but without any effort to exhaust the main points one might make in each domain. Moreover, the relation between creativity and such varied phenomena as imagination, dreams, or freedom is left largely unexamined here.

**Ethics:** The investigation of creativity within philosophical ethics shows a great deal of promise for theoretical and practical considerations. For example, an investigation of creativity suggests a new way of interpreting existentialist ethical positions and moral dilemmas. And creativity shows promise for everyday efforts to form more valuable ethical solutions to problems and assist in self-development. The emphasis on practices could be extended in an analysis that gives some practices greater priority for assessing creative value and enabling creators. Finally, the issue of conflict between value creators and their worlds requires further examination.

**Metaphysics:** While I have hinted at constraints on a metaphysics of creativity, several puzzles still demand fuller philosophical treatment. Put in Whitehead’s terms, for example, a metaphysics that includes meaningful creativity must include both the becoming
of continuity and the continuity of becoming. A second metaphysical set of questions would investigate a more general conception of creativity than we find in the specifically human case, if there is one to be had.

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These areas of investigation push a philosopher in multiple directions. But the importance of creativity in its many manifestations warrants this attention.
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