

# Grasping the Enigma

- Definitions and open questions

## WINDOWS ON CREATIVITY

There can be different worldviews or approaches to Creativity, which can be thought of as different windows on the same topic. Although each approach may be concerned with answering different questions or achieving certain goals, these views are not mutually exclusive and their interests overlap with other approaches. Just as looking into a room through different windows shows us different views on the same space, so looking at creativity through different windows lights up creativity in different ways.

Different approaches have different priorities and ask different questions.

### **Theological** – creativity as spiritual imperative

This worldview is rooted in the idea of God as Creator and specifically beginning with the act of Creation<sup>1</sup>. Any human act of creativity is therefore a natural extension and response to this supremely creative force. Human beings, created in the image of God, reflect God's creativity.

Questions that might be asked about creativity from a theological perspective include:

- How does creativity relate to our spirituality?
- How is our personal creativity affected or inspired by creation/the natural world?
- How should creativity impact on worship?
- What is our role as creative beings? How should we use our creative aspect?

### **Practical** – creativity as tool

This approach is interested in the process of creativity. Starting from a conviction that creativity can be learnt, it looks for tools and techniques that can be used to unlock creativity, and apply creative approaches to problems and situations in a wide range of settings.

Questions that might be asked about creativity from a practical perspective include:

- How does one apply creativity as a tool for problem solving?
- What are the benefits of different types of thinking such as logical and lateral thinking?
- Is creativity a process that can be learnt?
- How can I employ the practices or value of creativity to a particular task?
- What are the specific tools, techniques and methods used in the creative process?

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:1-31



## **Philosophical** – creativity as fundamental question of life

The philosophical perspective is concerned with the trying to define and explore the essence and ethics of creativity. It searches for what lies at the heart of a creative act, or person.

Questions that might be asked about creativity from a philosophical perspective include:

- Why is creativity important to human existence?
- What compels or stiffens creativity?
- Why are some drawn towards creative actions, while others compelled towards destructive behaviour?
- Where is the boundary between sanity and insanity?
- Normal and the abnormal?
- Is it important to push these boundaries?
- Why are tensions important in the creative process?

A note of interest: A 'Foundation for Philosophy of Creativity' has been setup at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, to "...promote and further any research having generally to do with the notion of creativity."

For more information, go to: <http://www.siu.edu/~fpc/>

## **Political/Sociological** – creativity as human activity

The political and sociological approach starts with people: it sees creativity in the context of human interactions. It is concerned with the use of creativity to communicate, manipulate and persuade. It is also very aware of how creativity is defined and shaped by culture.

Questions that might be asked about creativity from a political/sociological perspective include:

- How can art be used to communicate a message?
- How does creativity relate to social movements?
- Why is shared story important in society and culture?
- How can creativity be applied to influence opinions or decisions?

## **Scientific** – creativity as biology

This approach focuses on the mind and the brain when trying to understand creativity. It begins with the evolution of the human brain and mind, and how creativity has helped humans survive and evolve. It also looks for psychological and neuroscientific explanations of the processes of creativity and the different ways it manifests itself.

Questions that might be asked about creativity from a scientific perspective include:

- In what ways is human creativity unique among animals?



- What processes in the brain are associated with the generation of new ideas?
- Can creative acts be classified?
- Is the ability to be creative the product of nature or nurture?

Each of these windows shows only part of the whole, multi-faceted nature and scope of the topic of creativity. And understanding the variety of different approaches to creativity explains why it is so very difficult to reach a universally satisfying definition of creativity. However it is not necessary for us to commit to only one approach; the approaches inform each other and are useful at different times.

## Reading and Resources

R Alter '***The Art of Biblical Narrative***' Basic Books 1983

E de Bono '***Serious Creativity***' HarperCollins 1995

C Booker '***The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories***' Continuum 2004

J Cameron '***The Artist's Way***' Pan Books 1995

J Cameron '***The Vein of Gold***' Pan Books 1997

M Csikszentmihalyi '***Creativity***' Harper Perennial 1997

JE Davies (Ed) '***Stories of Change: narrative and social movements***' State University of New York 2002

NM Jackson (Ed) '***Right to Dance***' Banff Centre Press 2004

A Koestler '***The Act of Creation***' Picador 1975

C Seerveld '***Rainbows for the Fallen World***' Stride Publications 1988

