

REVELATION BEYOND CURRENT PERCEPTION

Developing an Ontological Framework for Creativity

ABSTRACT

The existing philosophical conversation surrounding creativity is limited by its dominant empirical analysis. These accounts reduce creativity to its mechanisms or consequences, rather than the moment a creative idea is born. We first analyze certain philosophical accounts that engage with creativity through ideas of experience, consciousness, and environment, then synthesize them, and finally discuss what may be missing. Next, we aim to address this gap by putting forth a unique ontological definition of creativity that describes the moment of creative emergence: *a revelation beyond current perception*. By seeking to complement philosophical and empirical perspectives, we explain the framework and then discuss implications that the ontological perspective may have for the real world and its many creators.

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I. INTRODUCTION

New ideas shape the world, but the origin of novelty itself is among the most overlooked mysteries in philosophy. Despite its profound role in human development, creativity has not enjoyed the same rigorous analysis as logic, reason, and imagination. Philosophy thrives on abstraction, conceptual reasoning, and structured systems. However, when defining creativity, conventional philosophical evaluation falters—torn between scientific measurability and the mind’s ambiguity. Thus, philosophical literature about creativity is limited, and the existing philosophical conversation is preoccupied by what creativity *does*, rather than what it *is*.

In the modern landscape, creativity remains almost exclusively studied by psychological and neurological frameworks. The prevailing psychological definition defines creativity as the ability to develop original work.¹ Furthermore, within psychology, creativity is often reduced to exploratory and combinational results within defined parameters. However, an empirical evaluation alone fails to encapsulate what creativity means for individuals and, consequently, how it may be cultivated. While scientific methods excel at analyzing outputs, they lack an element that accounts for subjective human experience. With limited phenomenological exploration and a dominant observational analysis of creativity, the resulting negligence contributes to an increasing gap in understanding. Unlike other cognitive forces that primarily interpret existing information, creativity is uniquely generative—reshaping boundaries and forging new ways of understanding ourselves and the world. However, addressing the existing philosophical gap necessitates an exploration into creativity’s fundamental nature—what it truly is, not merely what it does.

The aim of this paper is to initiate a broader philosophical dialogue by engaging with existing perspectives and synthesizing them into a novel ontological framework that better understands creativity. To do so, this paper explores four main perspectives that offer valuable insights into the nature of creativity: Plato, Schopenhauer, Hausman, and Kant. Then, this paper argues for the defining traits an ontological definition must contain, before going on to use such traits as scaffolding to build the definition: “*A revelation beyond current perception*.” Then, the established framework is defended and its implications are discussed. Because ontology is the exploration and nature of being, this framework is necessary to evaluate creativity’s essence.

¹ American Psychological Association, “Creativity,” *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. Accessed December 2025, <https://www.apa.org/topics/creativity>.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Despite its limitations, the existing philosophical conversation offers valuable perspectives on topics analogous to creativity, which may aid in constructing an ontological definition. Among the earliest of these contributors is Plato, whose discussion about poetry indirectly serves as one of the first philosophical explorations about creative emergence. He argued that poetry is not simply technical skill or imitation, but rather something that emerges through divine inspiration. He described these poets as experiencing a “Bacchic frenzy,” suggesting they became representatives of the gods.² This idea has less to do with actual poetry but rather with the experience of creating poetry. He believed the inspiration that drove creative works like poetry did not originate from intellect but a force beyond empirical perception which he ascribed to be divine. Analysis of this perspective introduces a unique insight: creation is an experience, not just a product. In this view, people do not produce creative moments; rather, creativity is an independent force that flows through them from an external source. The phenomenological significance lies in the proposition that true creativity is independent of conscious effort, aligning with reports of creators across history who describe their significant ideas as impulsive “feelings” rather than calculations. From August Kekulé discovering the atomic structure of Benzene from a daydream of a snake biting its own tail,³ to Einstein’s “beam of light” thought experiment that drove the development of the theory of relativity,⁴ the common characteristic is an element of inspiration independent from pure, calculated intelligence. While Plato captures the experiential truth of creativity, he locates inspiration within divine influence, removing the creator’s agency, lived experience, skill, and intentional engagement. Therefore, Plato’s definition alone cannot serve as a sufficient ontological description because it relies on a supernatural mechanism and offers no naturalistic account of creative emergence in human consciousness.

Because of the great overlap between creativity and the creator, any ontological definition of creativity must therefore account not only for the nature of the idea itself, but for the consciousness that generates it. Arthur Schopenhauer bridges this gap when he addresses this in his

evaluation of the creative experience. He explains the creative genius as a momentary loss of self. It happens in a state of total immersion into the task at hand, in which the individual loses themselves entirely within the object, forgetting their individuality and will, and exists only as one with the object.⁵ Consider Beethoven or Mozart: while physically present during composition, their minds were wholly absorbed by their music. Their experience was no longer concerned with their identity being Beethoven or Mozart. Instead, because their conscious mind was so deeply concentrated on their compositions, they temporarily *became their piece*. For Schopenhauer, the creative genius flourishes when the distinction between the creator and creation vanishes. This characterization captures the widely experienced nature of creative emergence: ideas emerge with a clarity that exceeds methodical construction. Plato locates creation as a force beyond the individual, while Schopenhauer locates it within the momentary dissolution of the individual altogether.

Moreover, Schopenhauer adds that the creator cannot consciously witness the act of creation because, at that moment, there is no self or ego left to observe—only the idea as it emerges. However, while Schopenhauer’s account details the individual creative experience, it lacks an ontological dimension about the status of the idea that appears. It remains unclear why particular thoughts that are revealed to certain people are what they are and what influences these specific thoughts to emerge. A complete ontological definition must preserve this experiential dimension but also explain why and how certain thoughts arrive in the creative state.

To understand what gives creativity its distinctive yet grounded novelty, it is necessary to turn to Carl Hausman and Maria Kronfeldner’s views of creativity. Hausman advances a line of thinking that aims to answer these questions by claiming that genuine creative products must be *metaphysically novel*, meaning that they cannot be predicted or explained by prior events.⁶ This argument suggests that something created as results of algorithmic processes or pure reasoning cannot be considered creative. Essentially, if something can be explained by prior events or reasoning, it is not metaphysically novel, and therefore not creative.

This argument captures an intuitive truth about creative emergence: creativity resists introspection. This perspective is mirrored by Schopenhauer’s description of a loss of self; however,

2 Plato, *Ion*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Dover Publications, 2002).

3 John H. Wotiz and Susanna Rudofsky, “Kekulé’s Dream,” *Chemistry in Britain* 20 (1984): 409–12.

4 John D. Norton, “Chasing the Light,” in *Einstein for Everyone* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 1–3.

5 Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1859), trans. E. F. J. Payne as *The World as Will and Representation* (Dover Publications, 1966), 178–84.

6 Carl R. Hausman, *A Discourse on Novelty and Creation* (State University of New York Press, 1984), 79–86.



when studying the creations of many famous innovators and artists in detail, a deep conceptual challenge arises. If a creative idea is completely isolated from previous causes, at what point does it become supernatural, arbitrary, or pure randomness? When the lived experience, development, and vision of the creator is forbidden to engage with the creative process, Plato's divine allusion to creativity is rendered doubtful, and leaves agency and practical conditions unexplained. Hence, Maria Kronfeldner casts doubt on Hausman and assumptions of creativity being incompatible with causal determination. She argues that creative products that need to be completely metaphysically novel are incompatible with natural law.⁷ The preclusion of cause suggests that something was created out of nothing. This is empirically inadequate and implies a supernatural influence incompatible with a naturalistic, ontological definition. Therefore, it may be more accurate to say that creativity cannot be fully predicted or explained by prior events. Lived experience and intent shape the space in which creative ideas emerge, even if they cannot determine which specific ideas will appear or why. But as Kronfeldner concedes, there is a limit to what your environment alone can provide before an idea is no longer creative. Complete prior explanation implies expectation, expectation implies calculation, and what is fully calculable cannot be truly novel. Creative products are thus grounded in causality without being confined by it.

This argument aligns with discussions heard from Schopenhauer's "loss of self." If creative emergence involves a loss of self-identification, then it demands an element that is beyond deliberate conscious oversight. It does not seem reasonable to believe that Beethoven could explain precisely why he chose every note in his sonatas, or why Van Gogh chose to distort the sky the way he did in *Starry Night*. However, these acts were not purely impulsive either; they relied on an initial purpose, intention, and capability. Similarly, Chopin's Scherzos are not a collection of randomness; they stemmed from a deep intention to express oneself, transcending established boundaries. Immanuel Kant would describe this transcendence as "exemplary originality." In his discussions of the artistic genius, he argues that creative ideas are not just "new," but they reconfigure the standards of what is considered novel.⁸ An exemplary creation gives more than what it has. This suggests that, despite subjective roots, creativity must have intention and meaning. When Schopenhauer's ontological hints are combined activity becomes slightly clearer.

7 Maria Kronfeldner, "Creativity Naturalized," *Philosophical Psychology* 22, no. 4 (2009): 461–80.

8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2000), §§43–50.

With the central perspectives established by the preceding discussion, the goal now shifts to consider what these accounts offer in the ontological discussion of creativity, and what these accounts leave unanswered. Taken together, they each illuminate a distinct dimension of the creative experience—inspiration, consciousness, causality, and impact. While they stand in contrast to the empirics of contemporary perspectives, what remains missing is a definition that weaves these ontological threads into a coherent whole. While these theories all accentuate the conditions, mental state, and foundation of creative works, a unified definition that answers exactly how a specific idea comes to show up in consciousness—the moment of creative emergence—is needed. The analysis above reveals that any complete ontological framework for creativity must display three core features:

1. The transformation of consciousness in the moment of creative emergence.
2. Emergence that is rooted in causality but is not confined by it.
3. The capacity to bring forth possibilities and new standards unavailable to prior awareness.

Since no single thinker has integrated all three perspectives, the definition that follows seeks to fill this ontological gap.

III. FRAMEWORK: CREATIVITY AS A REVELATION BEYOND CURRENT PERCEPTION

With the three prerequisites established, I now offer the definition: "*a revelation beyond current perception.*" At first glance, this may seem abstract, lofty, and ungrounded; however, further scrutiny reveals the unique merits of such a definition.

"Revelation" often strikes us with mental images of religion or supernatural mythos. Stories of heroes being divinely inspired and reaching a sudden understanding are universally known. However, in this definition, a revelation does not denote a supernatural intervention, as it may ordinarily imply; rather, it is an unforeseeable disclosure arising within the creator's consciousness; derived from experience rather than bestowed from beyond it.

When reviewing prerequisites for this definition, phrases such as "*transformation of consciousness,*" "*emergence,*" and "*unavailable to prior awareness*" point toward a common theme of "beyond-ness," indicative



of creativity's nature. As discussed, when one is immersed in creation, they experience a sort of loss of metacognitive awareness — they are no longer consciously evaluating their own thinking. Instead, they experience what can be described as an arrival of ideas. This is seen in known psychological phenomena such as flow states, colloquially described as being “locked in.”⁹ When people are immersed fully in the task at hand, they often experience effortless control and enjoyment as their sense of reality melts away, resembling Schopenhauer's “loss of self.” Indeed, creators in such states describe their most significant ideas less as products of conscious construction and more as ideas that “flowed” to their minds spontaneously. This phenomenology aligns with the notion of “revelation” in the definition: ideas are not forced but encountered. Thus, most who experience these phenomena cannot intricately describe their thought process in retrospect, only the experience of doing what came to them. The lines between thought and action become indistinguishable and inseparable.

Phenomena like this best represent the first core feature and are some of the best examples of what is understood as creativity, thus why the word revelation is the most precise descriptor. The word implies more of a form of disclosure rather than insight or product, which distinguishes between empirical definitions and ontological ones. The shortcoming of analysis that empirical methods have upon the moment of creative emergence is implicit within the word revelation and thus creates the foundation for the definition.

I have also chosen the words “*beyond current perception*” to intentionally reflect another facet of the nature of creativity. This phrase serves to ground the term revelation, clarifying that while revelatory creative ideas exceed current awareness, they cannot escape the experience, capacity, and intention that make them possible. The second core feature that is listed is the simultaneous restriction of causality and its apparent movement beyond those bounds. Reflecting on the analysis of Kronfeldner and Hausman's remarks, it was concluded that a more suitable version was that a creative product cannot be *fully* explained by prior events. The creator's state of mind and lived experiences contribute to the value that is recognized in their creative products. What I argue therefore is that the causality of creativity is rooted in the *current perception* of the creator themselves, while a revelation, the moment of creative emergence, helps take the creator past those bounds. This is why the definition cannot be reduced to “*a revelation*” alone; ensuring that importance of a creator's current perception is recognized explains why revelations are personal and unique

9 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (Harper & Row, 1990), 48–67.

for each creator. Recognizing this, in its fulfillment of the second and third core features, the definition bridges the gap from original to exemplary, as alluded to by Kant, demonstrating that creative ideas aren't just new but capable of reshaping what is considered new.

Some may argue that creativity is an incremental process rather than revelatory, emerging through refinement rather than a sudden disclosure. Cognitive science frequently characterizes creativity as a combination of reasoning and associative thinking—building upon existing concepts with new information.¹⁰ The importance of structured reasoning in creative work must not be denied, as standardized evaluations help to construct a measurable scientific understanding of creativity; moreover, this emphasis on measurability may also make a definition such as “*a revelation beyond current perception*” seem overly abstract. However, acknowledging the explanatory power of cognitive science does not invalidate ontological accounts of creativity, as the proposed definition clarifies that while creativity relies on revelations that are not fully calculated, they are not arbitrary either. The present framework does not deny the role of reasoning or environmental influence; rather, it argues that causal structures establish the conditions under which creative emergence becomes possible. However, while creativity does arise from causal experience, it reveals possibilities unavailable to prior awareness. Any model based only on optimization, recombination, and prediction will be incomplete in its description. While empirical models may analyze how ideas are processed and refined, an ontological account is necessary to explain how novel ideas first emerge. Hence, the definition does not invalidate any quantitative analysis of creativity but clarifies its scope as a partial view of its ontological nature.

Because empirical access to the inner mind is limited, an ontological definition of creativity is necessary to obtain a fuller picture. It must capture the moment of creative emergence alongside the subjective experience preceding it. While the established perspectives earlier mainly articulated the creative experience, the definition aims to bridge a new gap by describing the specific moment of creative disclosure. By centering analysis on this moment rather than by its mechanisms or outputs, the ontological framework offers a unified account of creativity that neither an empirical nor phenomenological report can alone provide. Therefore, this definition is proposed to encapsulate these phenomena where philosophical inquiry may complement empirical analysis.

10 Julia P. Wendt and Ricarda Steinmayr, “Personality and Intelligence as Predictors of School Achievement: A Meta-Analysis,” *nj Science of Learning* 10, no. 1 (2025): Article 31, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-025->



IV. IMPLICATIONS

With the definition of creativity now established, I aim to now discuss its broader implications for the world. The following section examines what the definition means for those who wish to engage with creativity, not as an output, but as a distinctive mode of expression and experience.

1. CREATIVITY CANNOT BE DIRECTLY LEARNED OR TAUGHT, ONLY ENCOURAGED.

This becomes evident when considering how similar individuals produce different results under similar conditions. Even when individuals share comparable resources and environments, problems rarely yield identical solutions. The invention of calculus by Isaac Newton and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz exemplifies this point. Both men working in a similar mathematical domain invented calculus completely independently and differently. Their notation, logic, reasoning, and philosophical views diverged. With two distinct approaches aiming to explain the same principle of reality, the creative element emerged not from imitation, but from that which cannot be standardized: individuality. This raises the question of whether creativity can be taught or instilled. In accordance with the definition of creativity as *a revelation beyond current perception*, creativity is shaped by experience but emerges from the essence of the self. Individuality itself can only be cultivated, never implanted. No one can be taught how to be themselves, for no one *is* them. Some may argue that educational practices may refine technique and originality through open-ended prompts, guided imagination, heuristics, or even a book about how to act creatively. Using similar methods, teachers may certainly encourage creative behavior and expression. This does not imply that education plays no role in creative development; while teaching can imitate creativity's results, it can never instill the spark behind them.

2. A CREATIVE EXPERIENCE DEMANDS INTENSE ATTENTIONAL DISCIPLINE.

If creativity is understood as a *revelation beyond perception*, then it cannot arise from distraction or uncontrolled cognition. The prior analysis of Hausman and Kronfeldner showed that intention and deep conscious engagement are vital to creativity. However, the creative experience is neither as random as chaos nor rigid as structure; it is a balance of freedom and control. Revisiting Schopenhauer's "loss of

self"¹¹ and Csikszentmihalyi's flow state¹² naturally leads into how such states can be experienced. Schopenhauer does not describe the creative experience as a collapse of consciousness, but as its transformation. In a creative state of mind, relinquishing control over consciousness, self, ego, and image allows effort to feel absent and deep creative revelations to arrive. It is no coincidence that profound ideas often arise in stillness when one is "lost" in their thoughts. However, one cannot fully relinquish control over consciousness if, at that moment, they are not in absolute control of it. Paradoxically, to surrender control, one must first master it. This leads to the conclusion that ontologically, creativity is founded upon structure but actualized through the dissolution of it.

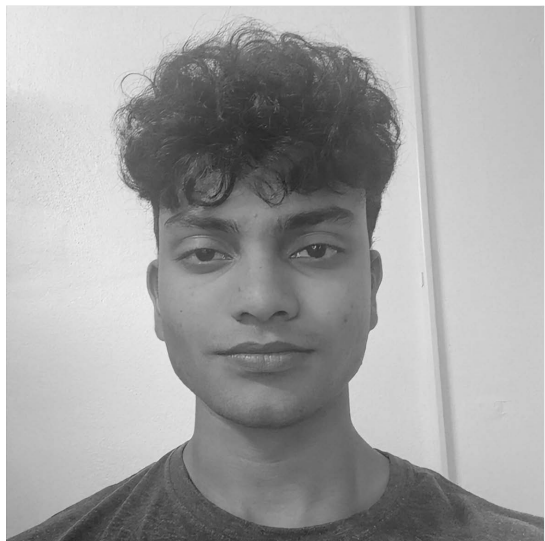
V. CONCLUSION

While acknowledging that further work remains, this paper aims to introduce a sufficient starting point to a much-needed philosophical discussion about creativity. By synthesizing phenomenological perspectives, this paper aimed to fill a philosophical gap by building a definition for the moment of creative emergence through three core features: a transformation of consciousness, emergence rooted in but not confined by causality, and the disclosure of possibilities previously unaware to awareness. By then ontologically defining creativity as *a revelation beyond current perception*, the understanding of creativity and its balance between subjective experience and objective transformation is clarified. Ultimately, if new ideas shape the world, then the essence of novelty itself is something philosophy cannot afford to neglect. Future work is invited to challenge and extend this account as new perspectives continue to creatively emerge.

11 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 178-84.

12 Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 48-67.





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