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# The Value of Malevolent Creativity

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Creativity is generally assumed to promote individual and collective flourishing. But in order to effectively foster creative agency, as opposed to haphazardly endorsing a nebulous cluster of practices and behavioural dispositions, it stands to reason that we need a sharp conception of what creativity *is* (or at least as sharp a conception as possible). Until recently, philosophers and psychologists have fairly consistently posited two necessary conditions of ascribing creativity to particular artefacts or ideas: that they are a) novel, and b) valuable.[1] On this view, which we might call the standard view, the value condition is typically conceived in terms of objective social value.[2] A number of commentators, however, have recently taken issue with the standard view, and specifically with the value condition, protesting that it flies in the face of our use of the term "creativity" to refer to socially *harmful* phenomena. On their view, the value condition therefore either needs to be radically reformulated or altogether discarded. In the first part of this paper, I survey the various attempts that have been made to reformulate the value condition, arguing that none proves entirely satisfactory. I subsequently advance a new conception of the value criterion – one that avoids the pitfalls into which its predecessors have fallen.

Value and novelty have been posited as jointly necessary conditions for ascribing creativity because, in the first place, we would not normally call a product that is valuable but lacking in originality creative – for example, a standard, mass-produced kitchen knife. There is then, as Kant observed, such a thing as "original nonsense",

[1] See e.g. Richard E. Mayer, "Fifty Years of Creativity Research", in R. J. Sternberg, ed., *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 450; N. C. Andreasen, *The Creating Brain: The Neuroscience of Genius* (New York: Dana Press, 2005), p. 17; Berys Gaut, "The Philosophy of Creativity", *Philosophy Compass*, Vol. 5, No. 12 (2010): 1034-1046 (p. 1039). For the purposes of this paper, I will be using "novel" and "original" interchangeably. It is worth noting, however, that some theorists draw a sharp conceptual distinction between these two terms (see e.g. Francis Sibley, "Originality and Value", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 [1985]: 169-184).

[2] The creativity of an individual is then a function of the quantity of creative products that he or she generates (Davide Piffer, "Can Creativity be Measured? An Attempt to Clarify the Notion of Creativity and the General Directions for Future Research", *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, Vol. 7, No. 3 [2012]: 258-264, p. 259).

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which in spite of its novelty, is entirely useless.[3] In such cases – take the incoherent ramblings of a madman for example – the term 'creative' strikes us as unwarranted. Proponents of the standard view take this to be incontrovertible evidence that ascriptions of creativity are conditioned by a value criterion.

Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge can, on this view, be described as creative insofar as its design was pioneering and, to the extent that it facilitates transport, the structure is of indubitable social value. Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* would likewise qualify, being undeniably original in both composition and subject matter, whilst also granting the majority of its viewers valuable aesthetic pleasure. This gels with our intuition that we express approbation when making ascriptions of creativity. It is then correspondingly difficult to imagine the adjective "creative" being deployed in a pejorative sense.

But what about instances where we predicate creativity to products that we deem to be unambiguously *harmful*? As Cropley et al. have remarked, we frequently ascribe creativity to phenomena that were fashioned with the express aim of causing injury (what is usually termed *malevolent* or *dark* creativity). To substantiate this observation, Cropley et al. cite cases of U.S. citizens referring to the 9/11 attacks as a creative act.[4] We can also quite legitimately say that people have exercised their creative capacities in fashioning novel instruments of torture.[5] Berys Gaut draws the conclusion that, "since torture instruments and the mass slaughter of innocents [both of which can be called creative products] have extreme negative value, the value condition for creative products seems to be false".[6]

To remedy this aporia, Cropley et al. claim that we need to adopt a "functional notion of creativity".[7] They maintain that if acts "are effective in achieving their purposes, they may be said to have displayed creativity, despite the fact that the products do not benefit our common good". *Ex hypothesi*, we may label a novel product 'creative' if we judge it to be (or to have been) of instrumental value *with respect to the goals of the creative agent*. Otherwise put, they consider the specific goals of the individual predicating creativity (hereinafter referred to as the *predicator*) as irrelevant to the value condition. While a number of critics have convincingly rejected the functional model *qua* solution to the issue of malevolent creativity, they are yet to fashion a cogent alternative.

In order to address this problem, I begin by briefly mapping out the concept of value insofar as it is pertinent to our subject matter (Section 1). In Section 2, I

[3] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 137.

[4] Arthur J. Cropley, David H. Cropley, and James C. Kaufman, "Malevolent Creativity: A Functional Model of Creativity in Terrorism and Crime", *Creativity Research Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2008): 105-115 (p. 107).

[5] Gaut 2010, op. cit., p. 1039; Alison Hills and Alexander Bird, "Against Creativity", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2018a) (doi: 10.1111/phpr.12511); Paisley Livingston, "Explicating 'creativity'", in Berys Gaut and Matthew Kieran, eds., *Creativity and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 115.

[6] Gaut 2010, op. cit, p. 1040.

[7] Cropley et al. 2008, op. cit., p. 107.

critically assess the existing objections and alternatives to the functional model. I then present the novel objection, which comprises the critical thesis of this article, that we should not consider malevolent creativity a genuine counterexample to the standard view (Section 3). I marshal evidence that suggests that even malevolent creative products often carry positive value for the predicator. This brings me to my positive thesis that the value of a creative phenomenon should be conceived *as an inherent form of value for the predicator* – that is, provided her predication is grounded in her own *appropriate experience* of the phenomenon in question (and we will be examining what qualifies as an appropriate experience in due course). To be more precise, I contend that creative value ultimately consists in a positively-valenced (though not straightforwardly pleasurable) affect of surprise which is elicited by saliently original phenomena. I conclude by gesturing towards some of the practical ramifications of these findings.

## 1 A Brief Typology of Value

The philosophical debate concerning the correct taxonomy of value is intricate and ongoing; however, for our purposes it should suffice to draw two key distinctions in how we ascribe value. First there is the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic value.[8] There are myriad phenomena that we value not in themselves, but on account of what they provide us with. I do not, for example, value my screwdriver *in itself*, but insofar as it enables me to repair my bicycle. Nor, in turn, do I value my bicycle in itself, but only insofar as it enables me to tour the countryside on the weekends. I can therefore be said to *extrinsically* value the screwdriver and the bicycle, both of which are valuable only as means to ends that are extrinsic to these two objects. The pleasure that I take in the act of touring the countryside, however, does not serve any extrinsic purpose, and insofar as I value it in and of itself, I can be said to apportion it *intrinsic* value.

The second relevant distinction lies between *instrumental* and *inherent* value, both of which are subspecies of extrinsic value. An object has instrumental value if it only has value in relation to some other object or activity. If my bike is stolen, my screwdriver is emptied of value, even though it does not itself undergo any change. On the other hand, as C. I. Lewis argues, an object possesses *inherent* worth if its value is "disclosed or disclosable by observation of this object itself and not by examining some other object".[9] In other words, such objects are valued on account of the pleasure that I take in beholding them.[10] A painting is thus inherently valuable to the extent that I enjoy the pleasure that it elicits, and not because it serves

[8] For a comprehensive analysis of this dichotomy, see Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Values", in Iwao Hirose and Jonas Olson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 29-43.

[9] C. I. Lewis, *An analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (Illinois: Open Court, 1946), p. 391.

[10] For an extended treatment of inherent value, see Robert Audi, *Reasons, Rights and Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 47-9.

any extrinsic function. However, we might also say that Brunel's Suspension Bridge has inherent value insofar as viewing its well-proportioned, symmetrical form can be a pleasurable experience, although unlike the painting it nonetheless also serves an instrumental function (i.e. as a piece of civil engineering). As such, inherent and instrumental value are mutually compatible and both can be coherently ascribed to a single object.[11]

So the question is now: Where does creative value fit into this heuristic schema? According to Cropley et al., a sharp conceptual line runs between *functional* and *aesthetic* creativity. They controversially argue that for a product to be considered *functionally* creative, it must "possess not only novelty but also relevance and effectiveness", that is to say, "it must also satisfy the need for which it was created. Without relevance and effectiveness, the product is merely aesthetic".[12] For Cropley et al., then, the value of a creative product can take either an inherent or instrumental form (or both) depending on whether that product exhibits aesthetic or functional creativity (or both). They aver that the value of malevolent creativity can *only* be explained in functional terms since it is obviously aesthetically repugnant. For reasons that will be elaborated below, this strikes me as a radically myopic conception of malevolent creativity.

As we have already seen, Cropley et al. theorise that we can conceive of the beneficiary of creative value from two perspectives: that of the predicator (and her social group), and that of the creative agent.[13] By their lights, the counterexample of malevolent creativity debunks the predicator-oriented, standard view of creative value since it evidences the fact that individuals ascribe creativity to products that they judge to be of definite negative value, both to themselves and their collective. It is the evaluative perspective of the creative agent that is, they claim, relevant in such cases. A functionally creative product only has to "satisfy the need for which it was created" in order to be labelled 'creative'. On this view, even for the victims, the 9/11 attacks qualify as a creative product by dint of the fact that they served their intended purpose for Al Qaida.

For Cropley et al. the value that conditions cases of malevolent creativity is therefore conceived as an *instrumental* form of value *for the creative agent*. Against this, I will argue that there is a single, global form of value that conditions the predication of creativity, as opposed to different forms depending on whether the product in question is aesthetic or functional in kind. This is an *inherent* form of value *for the predicator.* But before substantiating this thesis, we first need to consider some of the existing objections and alternatives to the functional model of creativity.

[11] It should also be noted that inherent value is not peculiar to aesthetic objects. As Audi (op. cit., pp. 48-9) demonstrates, moral behaviour, for example, can also possess inherent value.

[12] Cropley et al. 2008, op. cit., p. 108. See also Arthur J. Cropley, and David H. Cropley, "Engineering Creativity. A Systems Concept of Functional Creativity", in James. C. Kaufman and J. Baer, eds., *Faces of the Muse: How People Think, Work and Act Creatively in Diverse Domains* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), pp. 169-185. Livingston (op. cit.) also advances a functional notion of the value criterion, though he does not distinguish between functional and aesthetic creativity.

[13] Cropley et al. 2008, op. cit., pp. 105-6.

## 2 Objections and Alternatives to the Functional Model of Malevolent Creativity

The most straightforward objection to the functional model is raised by Novitz, who denies that malevolent creativity actually constitutes a form of creativity at all (and hence does not present us with a true counterexample to the standard view). He seeks to recategorize such malevolent activity as "ingenious destructiveness", thereby reframing it as a pseudo-problem (since it no longer represents an anomalous instance of creativity).[14] Yet, as Gaut rejoins, this "fails to capture many people's (sometimes equivocal) intuitions that there is something creative about these evil acts".[15]

If we accept malevolent creativity as a valid counterexample, however, it still remains to be seen how effectively it can be accommodated by Cropley et al.'s functionalist model. Gaut has rightly questioned the explanatory force of the modified value condition posited by the functional notion of creativity – viz., that the product "satisfy the need for which it was created".[16] This implies that "had the terrorists' acts been foiled they would no longer have been creative, but one might suppose that their creativity depended on thinking up the idea in the first place rather than being successful in carrying it out".[17] Dissatisfied with the functional model, Berys Gaut proffers his own alternative conception of the value condition. What is essential, he avers, is that creative products be considered valuable "of their kind".[18] A creative product does not have to be valuable for *anyone* on Gaut's view, so long as it effectively fulfils the criteria that define the species of object to which it is supposed to belong. A terrorist attack only needs to be effective at causing terror, for example, but does not have to be of value for either the terrorists or the victims and their society. And a terrorist *plan* would only have to be good *qua* terrorist plan – and so would not have to be successfully enacted (hence Gaut's model is able to

[14] David Novitz, "Creativity and Constraint", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (1999): 67-82 (p. 78). See also David Novitz, "Explanations of Creativity", in Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston, eds., *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 186-7.

[15] Gaut 2010, op. cit., p. 1040. Sternberg takes a similar tack, recommending that we "assess and teach for wisdom in conjunction with assessing and teaching for intelligence and creativity". On his normative definition of creativity, ascribing value to malevolent phenomena betrays a lack of wisdom; he consequently discounts any predication of creativity to such phenomena. Robert J. Sternberg, "The Dark Side of Creativity and How to Combat It", in David H. Cropley, Arthur J. Cropley James C. Kaufman, and Mark A. Runco, eds., *The Dark Side of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 318.

[16] Gaut 2010, op. cit., p. 1040.

[17] Livingston (op cit., pp. 117-8) does not view the fact that failures are often labelled 'creative' as substantive counterevidence to the functional model. Livingston claims that creative failures always make *some* progress towards the instrumental end sought by their creators, even if they ultimately fall short of that end. He cites the example of the failures that plagued the early years of aviation. However, Livingston does not consider Gaut's counterexample of the failed terrorist plot, which, viewed instrumentally, represents an unmitigated failure, and can nonetheless quite legitimately be described as creative.

[18] Berys Gaut, "The Value of Creativity", in Berys Gaut and Matthew Kieran, eds., *Creativity and Philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 128-9.

accommodate the counterexample of the failed plot). The value of a creative product for the predicator is, according to Gaut, *conditional* since it depends on the relative injuriousness or usefulness of the type of phenomenon in question.

Hills and Bird likewise invoke the counterexample of malevolent creativity in order to contest the standard view. They convincingly reject Gaut's alternative by pointing out that any given product invariably belongs to myriad kinds, each of which it instantiates with a different degree of perfection.[19] This makes it practically impossible to establish in any objective manner the ideal kind against which a given product ought to be judged. Typically, Hills and Bird add, "the most relevant kind will be that intended by the creator".[20] Yet they refuse to admit this as a valid solution, arguing that it fails to account for the counterexample of a novel torture device that we consider to be a failure: "perhaps it causes death too quickly, without enough suffering on the way". Though it fails to fulfil the criteria of its intended kind, we would, they say, still be inclined to call it creative and affirm that creativity had been exercised in its construction.

Their idiosyncratic response to the problem is to discard the value condition altogether. To justify this radical and counter-intuitive move, they highlight the fact that creative individuals produce swathes of products that are of negligible, if not outright negative value.[21] They underscore the vast number of useless theories that have been concocted by individuals whom we call creative – for example, Nikola Tesla's output included "worthless ideas for a thought camera and a death ray".[22] It is far sounder, they claim, to conceive of creativity as a "disposition to produce many novel ideas through the imagination, and the motivation to bring those ideas to fruition".[23] Their novel conception of creativity is unfortunately not as persuasive as their criticism of Gaut. Hills and Bird take individuals whom we consider to be creative and examine the dispositions that generate the products that warrant our ascriptions of creativity to said individuals. On inspecting these dispositions they discover that many of the products that result therefrom are either useless or harmful, and they summarily conclude that creativity does not invariably generate value. This, however, is a clear-cut case of putting the cart before the horse. What we are interested in is what originally grounds our description of certain individuals as creative, and it is indubitably on the basis of the creative *products* that they fashion that we do so. Thus, we first identify products that are creative, and only then extend this label to the agent(s) responsible for fashioning said products (this is why a musician needs to write creative songs in order to be considered creative). It is arguably true that a specific set of capacities and dispositions are responsible for generating the products that justify labelling certain individuals 'creative', but it is *not* the case that once these individuals enjoy this appellation, *everything* that they produce with

[19] Hills and Bird 2018a, op. cit., p. 9; Alison Hills and Alexander Bird, "Creativity without Value", in Berys Gaut and Matthew Kieran, eds., *Creativity and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2018b), pp. 98-9.
[20] Hills and Bird 2018b, op. cit., p. 98.
[21] Hills and Bird 2018a, op. cit., pp. 7-12; Hills and Bird 2018b, op. cit., pp. 96-101.
[22] Hills and Bird 2018a, op. cit., p. 10.
[23] Ibid., p. 18.

those dispositions and capacities can then be considered creative. To claim so much is to illegitimately reduce creativity to an objectively identifiable set of behaviours and mental processes. But if we wish to understand how we predicate creativity, we need to focus on the *relation* of the predicator to specific products, independent of any knowledge that she may have regarding the relative creativity of the agent who fashioned those products. Accordingly, Hills and Bird's attempt to refute and replace the value criterion does not bear scrutiny, and the issue of malevolent creativity remains stubbornly unresolved.

## 3 The Inherent Value of (Malevolent) Creativity

Like Novitz, but for markedly different reasons, I will now defend the claim that malevolent creativity represents a pseudo-counterexample to the standard view of the value criterion. There is, as we will presently see, credible evidence that creative products, by reason of their salient originality, are perfectly capable of eliciting a positively-valenced affect. We might denote this affect 'surprise', though a particular subspecies of surprise, one that has features in common with the emotions of awe, wonder and curiosity. From the outset, I should emphasise that my claim is not revisionist in nature. I am not suggesting that creative phenomena that we previously held to be reprehensible should henceforth be viewed in a beneficent light. My contention is that we would do well to consider such phenomena as being of *net*-, instead of absolute-, negative value. If our ascription of creativity to malevolent products is conditioned by even a sliver of positive value, or even if doubt can be meaningfully cast on the absoluteness of such products' negative value for the predicator, then one could defensibly claim that predications of creativity could be conditioned by this silver lining. At the very least, malevolent creativity would lose its hitherto unquestioned status as counterevidence to the standard view.

We should begin by critically examining the evidence often adduced as proof for the claim that malevolent creativity is perceived in exclusively negative terms by predicators. As mentioned above, Cropley et al. (among others) cite the 9/11 attacks in support of precisely this claim. Closer examination, however, reveals this example to be far less damning for the standard view than might at first be suspected. In the first place, there is empirical research verifying that *curiosity* (rather than empathy, anger, fear or personal distress) was one of the principal emotions motivating many U.S. citizens to follow the media coverage of the 9/11 attacks (and curiosity, of course, is not a negatively-valenced emotion).[24] We should also consider the provocative comments made by composer Karlheinz Stockhausen and artist Damien Hirst apropos the event. Note that although neither were U.S. citizens, both were members and representatives of the liberal Occident that was under attack. The

[24] Cynthia A. Hoffner, Yuki Fujioka, Jiali Ye, and Amal G. S. Ibrahim, "Why We Watch: Factors Affecting Exposure to Tragic Television News", *Mass Communication and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2009): 193-216 (p. 210).

former scandalously claimed that the terrorists had performed "the greatest work of art imaginable for the whole cosmos":

> Minds achieving something in an act that we couldn't even dream of in music, people rehearsing like mad for 10 years, preparing fanatically for a concert, and then dying, just imagine what happened there. You have people who are that focused on a performance and then 5,000 people are dispatched to the afterlife, in a single moment. I couldn't do that. By comparison, we composers are nothing. Artists, too, sometimes try to *go beyond the limits of what is feasible and conceivable*, so that we wake up, so that we open ourselves to another world.
>
> [25]

Echoing Stockhausen, Damien Hirst commented that "[t]he thing about 9/11 is that it's kind of an artwork in its own right. It was wicked, but it was devised in this way for this kind of impact. It was devised visually." He went on to describe the spectacle of the planes smashing into the Twin Towers as "visually stunning", adding that "[y]ou've got to hand it to them on some level because they've achieved something *which nobody would have ever have thought possible*, especially to a country as big as America".[26]

We might question the earnestness of these inflammatory statements, and it's certainly worth noting that during the ensuing furore, both Hirst and Stockhausen apologised for, and partly retracted, their respective remarks. We might further seriously doubt the extent to which these views reflect the typical liberal Westerner's experience of the attack. To be sure, Hirst and Stockhausen massively overemphasise the positive aspects of the event, and yet I would nonetheless submit that their views are to some degree comprehensible to those who identify an element of creativity (as opposed to one of pure evil) in the attacks. As insensitive and hellaciously unpalatable as their comments might be, this does not make them absurd or nonsensical.

What Hirst's and Stockhausen's remarks at least make clear is that the absolute negative value of the attacks is not self-evident. What is particularly germane to the argument I develop below, and what I would therefore like to accent, is Stockhausen's and Hirst's appraise of the terrorists for having performed something previously thought impossible. With an air of awe and wonder, Hirst thus claims that he was "stunned" by the events, and Stockhausen describes the perpetrators as having gone "beyond the limits of what is feasible". As author Ian McEwan has aptly put it, 9/11 "outstrips the imagination". McEwan also pertinently reports how he himself, in the face of this previously unimaginable experience, "hungrily, ghoulishly" consumed

[25] Quoted in Richard Schechner, *Performed Imaginaries* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 57 (emphasis mine).

[26] Quoted in Rebecca Allison, "9/11 wicked but a work of art, says Damien Hirst", *The Guardian*, September 11, 2002. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/sep/11/arts.september11 (emphasis mine).

media coverage of the event, how he became "an information junkie", fixated, "*in a state of sickened wonderment*".[27]

Hirst, Stockhausen and McEwan are not the first to associate that which appears grievously harmful with the positively-valenced affects of awe and wonder. This nexus has been remarked time and again by theorists of the sublime.[28] Burke, Kant and Schiller (among others) consistently make two empirical observations. First, they stress that overwhelming terror, horror and threat of destruction very often elicit quasi-positive affects, counter-intuitive as this may be. Recalling McEwan's "sickened wonderment," they hold experiences of this sort – that is, of the sublime – to be associated with an *amalgam* of agreeable *and* disagreeable emotional responses. Schiller, for instance, states that the sensation of the sublime is of a "dual sort", comprising an admixture of melancholy and joy.[29] Others have further remarked that this positive affect is not to be confounded with pleasure in any simple sense of the term. Kant states that the "delight in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respect", or what he calls later in the third *Critique*, "negative delight".[30] Tamworth Reresby equates the sublime with "the marvellous" and with that "which produces a certain admiration mixed with wonder and surprise" (i.e. not with pleasure in any straightforward sense).[31] John Dennis takes a slightly different line, arguing that the "great enthusiastic terror" typical of the sublime is not to be confused with "ordinary" terror, which, in turn, we should take care not to equate with fear. Ordinary terror is distinct from fear insofar as it is "more sudden" and marked by a sensation of surprise in response to "an approaching evil, threatening destruction or very great trouble"; by contrast, "great *enthusiastic* terror" evokes the affects of wonder and astonishment.[32] The purpose of this cursory survey of the philosophy of the sublime is to illustrate that even phenomena that we consider astoundingly harmful and of *net*-negative value often elicit positively-valenced emotions – emotions that are intrinsically valuable. This possibility has been conspicuously overlooked by existing analyses of dark creativity, all of which paint a simplistic picture of how we affectively and evaluatively respond to phenomena that we consider injurious.

The term 'sublime' is, to be sure, unapt in the vast majority of instances of malevolent creativity. Few would invoke the grandiose vocabulary of the sublime to refer to torture devices, terrorist attacks or the inventive chicanery of corrupt businessmen; yet there are strong grounds for supposing that if these are *saliently* original

[27] Ian McEwan, "Beyond Belief", *The Guardian*, September 12, 2001. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/12/september11.politicsphilosophyandsociety (emphasis mine).

[28] Indeed, the way in which Stockhausen's comments resonate with notions of the sublime has already been treated in some detail by Christine Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 21.

[29] Friedrich Schiller, "On the Sublime", in Friedrich Schiller, *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry and On the Sublime*, trans. by Julius A. Elias (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1975), p. 198.

[30] Kant, op. cit., p. 76, p. 99.

[31] Tamworth Reresby, *A Miscellany of Ingenious Thoughts and Reflections*, in Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds., *The Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 43-4.

[32] John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, in Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds., *The Sublime*, op. cit., pp. 36-7 (quoted in Battersby, op. cit., pp. 5-6).

to the predicator of creativity, they nonetheless evoke a positively-charged affect. As our review of the sublime implied, we should not think of this affect as being straightforwardly *pleasurable*. The relative weakness of this affect is irrelevant, as is the fact that in cases of malevolent creativity it tends to be outweighed by other, negatively-valenced affects. The mere fact of its plausible existence within the overall calculus involved in determining the value of malevolently creative products is sufficient to demonstrate that such products do not so simply contravene the standard view of the value criterion.

But what evidence is there to support the thesis that the evocation of this positively-valenced affect conditions our ascriptions of creativity? All that has so far been established is that these affects *can* be elicited by phenomena that we deem harmful and of net-negative value. In order to address this question, we should examine the relation between the perception of novelty and the affects of surprise, awe and wonder. Margaret Boden maintains that in addition to originality and value, the ability to elicit *surprise* constitutes one of the defining criteria of creative products.[33] Gaut, however, rejects surprise as a valid criterion.[34] He objects that the condition for something new being considered original is that it must surprise us, that is, it must have "salient newness". As such, on his reasoning, the surprise criterion merely restates the formal originality criterion in affective terms. To call something 'original', is precisely to affirm it *as* surprising. What Gaut's criticism of Boden inadvertently reveals is that there are *conceptual* grounds for claiming that a positively-valenced affect conditions our ascriptions of creativity. In saying that we find something creative, we are expressing an emotional response of surprise, and it seems out of place to construe this surprise in negative terms (Boden certainly does not), even in the case of malevolent phenomena.

To be sure, surprise often denotes a negatively-valenced affect, such as in the case of shocks and nasty surprises for example. Nevertheless, surprise can also take a positively-valenced form. As we have seen, it is what lends the sublime its appealing note. This agreeable species of surprise is standardly referred to as either wonder or awe. Further, in Boden's words, "[w]onder is intimately connected with creativity. All creative ideas are, by definition, valued in some way. Many make us gasp with awe and delight".[35] Relatedly, Nico Frijda glosses wonder as a receptive state of "surprise and amazement" that we experience in "response to unexpected stimuli".[36] Boden helpfully elaborates on the precise species of "unexpectedness" that underpins creative surprise.[37] It is, she tells us, an affective response to having a "conceptual space" transformed, or in other words, perceiving something we previously

[33] Margaret Boden, *The Creative Mind. Myths and Mechanisms* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

[34] Gaut 2010, op. cit., p. 1039.

[35] Boden 2004, op. cit., p. 278. See also Margaret Boden, "What is Creativity", in Margaret Boden, ed., *Dimensions of Creativity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 74-117. For a critical analysis of Boden's position, see Novitz 1999, op. cit.

[36] Nico Frijda, *The Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 18. See also Jonathan Haidt, "The Moral Emotions", in Richard J. Davidson, Klaus Scherer, and H. Hill Goldsmith, eds., *Handbook of Affective Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 302.

[37] Boden 2004, op. cit., p. 3, p. 9, p. 41.

thought impossible, something that doesn't fit within our established conceptual vision of the world.[38] Similarly, Haidt and Keltner theorise that awe is occasioned by phenomena that demand *accommodation*, where

> [a]ccommodation refers to the Piagetian process of adjusting mental structures that cannot assimilate a new experience […]. Prototypical awe involves a challenge to or negation of mental structures […] when mental structures expand to accommodate truths never before known […].[39]

Reading this alongside the comments of Boden and Frijda, we can conclude that perceiving an object as saliently original – i.e. as demanding accommodation – elicits an intrinsically valuable affect: we feel *amazed*, that is, captivated and transfixed in an agreeable manner, even if other sentiments might be mixed in with, or even overwhelm, this emotional response.[40]

This indicates that salient originality bears an inherent value for us insofar as it elicits an affect of surprise, akin to wonder and awe. The unexpected upshot of these observations is that now the value condition of creativity appears to be superfluous, it being met *a fortiori* with the satisfaction of the originality condition, provided this latter condition is taken in the strong sense of *salient originality requiring accommodation*.

This brings us back to the problem of "original nonsense", which supposedly testifies to the fact that we do not in fact experience creative surprise in the face of everything that we perceive as original. However, we ought to ask whether we *genuinely* perceive the originality of the madman's novel ramblings. It would, I think, be more accurate to say that we merely acknowledge the *probable* uniqueness of deranged gibberish, just as we can say a fingerprint is original without this originality being truly *salient* to us. Furthermore, a deranged exclamation is in fact quite easily subsumed under the concept of "mad gibberish", in spite of its probable novelty – we might say that we acknowledge its token novelty, but not its type novelty (which is what would demand accommodation). Genuinely perceiving originality means recognising that relevant classificatory criteria have been bent or broken, and, as a result, temporarily failing to conceptually subsume the phenomenon under consideration – these are the conditions for having what I have called an *appropriate experience* of a creative phenomenon. In cases of "original nonsense" we do not *perceive* originality in the thicker sense required for the evocation of surprise.

[38] Boden 2004, op. cit.

[39] Jonathan Haidt and Dacher Keltner, "Approaching Awe, A Moral, Spiritual, and Aesthetic Emotion", *Cognition and Emotion*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2003): 297-314 (p. 304).

[40] Here is not the place for a comprehensive analysis of the precise epistemic conditions that need to be satisfied in order for a particular perception to transform our "conceptual space" and thereby qualify as *saliently* original. For more on the nature of the novelty that underpins creative surprise, I refer the reader to Boden's extensive work on the topic. See esp. Boden 2004, op. cit.; see also Livingston, op. cit.

### 3.1 Objections to the Inherent Conception of Creative Value

The conception of creative value *qua* inherent value needs to be defended against a number of potential objections. Let us begin with the most obvious of these. The reader is liable to protest that neither she, nor any other right-minded people, experience any intrinsically rewarding affect in the face of many malevolent phenomena that they nonetheless feel quite justified in labelling 'creative'. For example, a colleague of mine objected that she believed that the crimes to which Bernie Madoff pled guilty in 2009 were sufficiently novel for her classify them as 'creative', and yet while considering them she did not experience any kind of intrinsically rewarding affect. When pressed, though, it transpired that my colleague could not in fact pick out how Madoff's complex Ponzi scheme broke with the conventions of investment fraud. Consequently, she could not legitimately claim to have had an appropriate (i.e. informed) experience of the Madoff case. Her response was that such experience was unnecessary since she'd read in a reputable broadsheet that this was indeed an instance of "creative fraud", and that she therefore had the fact on good authority. She added that even in lieu of this she could *infer* from Madoff's evident proficiency in exploiting loopholes and evading detection that his actions were creative in kind.

Neither of her counterarguments falsify my thesis. In fact, they both inadvertently vindicate my position. The subtext of her second response is that *were* someone familiar with the intricacies and conventions of investment banking – which is to say, someone informed, and therefore capable of *appropriately* experiencing the novelty of Madoff's scam – to examine the forms of agency that issued in the scandal, that person would surely remark saliently original activity. Aside from this, her second response is unacceptably inductive. Her first response, on the other hand, which cites a broadsheet, involves a legitimate testimony-based predication of creativity; nonetheless, much like her second response, it too presupposes the validity of my thesis. In this instance my colleague's grounds for ascribing creativity are, it turns out, parasitic on somebody else's (alleged) perception of salient originality – that of a financial journalist possessing the specialist knowledge required for an appropriate experience of the case at hand. And to be sure, we find that someone who not only became intimately acquainted with the Madoff case, but who was himself actually swindled in the fraud (viz. John Maccabee), was indeed surprised: "Somebody asked me if I'm angry and I'm not. I'm *amazed* by the complexity, the lunacy, the absolute pathological lunacy".[41]

There are various other cases in which our ascriptions of creativity are parasitic on previous, or hypothetical experiences of surprise. For example, Boden distinguishes between historical creativity (H-creativity) and psychological creativity (P-creativity). Whereas the former describes instances of creative novelty that are without historical precedent, the latter comprehends instances of creativity in which, though not without historical precedent, an agent fashions a creative product without

[41] Jerry Oppenheimer, *Madoff with the Money* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p. 96 (original emphasis).

any prior knowledge of the historical precedent.[42] When Richard Fosbury pioneered the 'Fosbury Flop' – a manner of performing the high-jump that involves jumping over the bar back-first – it was an H-creative act. On the other hand, when, two years later, Canadian athlete Debbie Brill developed a similar technique without any prior knowledge of Fosbury's innovation, this was P-creative but not H-creative.[43] When we make attributions of P-creativity with knowledge of the H-creative precedent, it might be argued that we experience no surprise because no accommodation is required; however, the ascription is nonetheless parasitic on the surprise elicited by the precedent. We identify that there is a structural analogy between the two cases, and infer that it *would have* evoked surprise if the contingent global-historical context had been otherwise. It is therefore not strictly necessary that every ascription of creativity supervene on the predicator's direct experience of surprise, but even under the aforementioned circumstances, ascriptions of P-creativity are nonetheless still *indirectly* conditioned by the perception of the salient originality of H-creativity. As such, the perception of salient originality conditions *all* ascriptions of creativity, though it can do so either directly – i.e. when we appropriately experience a creative phenomenon – or indirectly – as in the case of ascriptions that are parasitic on H-creativity, or, as we saw above, in the case of legitimate testimony-based ascriptions.

Another potential objection is that it's patently incorrect to assert that people invariably have positively-valenced experiences in response to suffering creative torture. Further, is it not psychologically possible, indeed quite plausible, that some creative criminals – drug addicts for example – could fail to experience any positively-valenced affect when they think through or remember their own creative criminal behaviour, which they engaged in out of weakness of will? These objections can be defused without too much difficulty, since it does not seem likely that either the torture victim, or the akratic, narcotic-benumbed criminal would make an ascription of creativity in these circumstances. Their perception is either too overwhelmed by pain or disrupted by psychotropic substances for them to care. They are incapable of appropriately experiencing their own ingenuity. Just because the majority of people, or an authoritative group to whom that majority defer, ascribe creativity to a particular phenomenon does not mean that *every* individual faced with that phenomenon necessarily experiences a positively-valenced affect, or, correspondingly, ascribes creativity to said phenomenon.

One might also disagree with the way in which I am proposing that we collapse the value condition into the originality condition. We do not consider everything that defies easy accommodation, and thereby elicits surprise, a creative product. Natural phenomena are a case in hand: the astoundingly novel and awe-inspiring experience of viewing the Alps for the first time does not warrant denoting them a creative product (though creationists would no doubt feel inclined to do so). Likewise, were we to discover a cowpat resembling the Mona Lisa, we might marvel at the coincidence, but we would not be inclined to call it a creative product. This illustrates that

[42] Boden 2004, op. cit., p. 43.

[43] Livingston, op. cit.

we do indeed need to stipulate another condition of predicating creativity, namely, that we possess the justified belief that the salient originality under consideration is the result of purposeful agency. Related to this is the possibility of discovering that a product that elicited creative surprise was in fact the result of *imitative* agency – that the responsible agent had merely *copied* the creative agency of another. Where this occurs, the creative value is transferred to the product that we consider the prototype. We therefore should expand the aforementioned condition, stipulating that the purposeful agency concerned must be *non-imitative* (where imitation is understood as unmodified replication).

Finally, it is worth noting that some have convincingly argued that originality is not an aesthetic value – that is, that *aesthetic* value does not necessarily accrue to originality.[44] Sibley, for example, distinguishes between the "novel" and "original," where the former "more often hints at the trivial, the gimmicky, the mere thrill of the new, the quickly exhausted than 'original' does".[45] Original artworks, he continues, give us an enduring sense of their substantive contribution relative to other artworks; however, even this does not constitute the aesthetic merit of such works, which resides in other intrinsic (i.e. non-relative) qualities. Originality only *amplifies* the value of these qualities. While I agree that it's crucial to observe this distinction, it does not jeopardise the inherent conception of creative value. My claim is not that creative value entails aesthetic value; indeed, creative value can accrue to superficial novelty within the parameters of the inherent value model, which allows for individuals to label a work 'creative' while holding it to be of negative aesthetic worth.

From the above, we can conclude that those who predicate creativity to particular (malevolent) products are justified in doing so only when the following two jointly necessary and sufficient conditions have been met:

1. They perceive such products as saliently original (i.e. requiring accommodation and eliciting surprise);
2. They possess the justified belief that such products have resulted from purposeful, non-imitative agency.

Having posited these conditions, it's worthwhile underscoring that my purpose has not been to construct and defend an essentialist conception of creativity; indeed, creativity is a notion that we would do well to consider as being marked by an ineradicable degree of wooliness. For one, its use is constantly evolving – for example, as creationism goes out vogue, we become correspondingly less inclined to refer to natural phenomena as creative products. Moreover, the debate is still very much live as to what counts as an agent capable of purposeful action (thus it remains moot whether non-human animals or evolutionary processes can legitimately be referred to as 'creative' without implicitly attributing represented ends to these objects). And

[44] Sibley, op. cit.; Bruce Vermazen, "The Aesthetic Value of Originality", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1991): 266-79.
[45] Sibley, op. cit., p. 175.

there will no doubt be myriad borderline cases, where the legitimacy of ascriptions is open for debate. While the conditions that I've provided can, as I have argued, hold as plausible general criteria for identifying legitimate ascriptions of creativity, their primary function is to shed light on the kinds of human creativity in which we have a real practical interest (in fostering or foreclosing). The particular strength of these criteria is that they are able to comprehend both malevolent and non-malevolent creative products under a single concept of creativity – one that demands the modifcation, but not rejection, of the standard view.

I should restate that my position must not be confused with the claim that acts of malevolent creativity, such as the 9/11 attacks, are of positive value. This is patently not the case. My point is rather that even when confronted by acts that we judge to be depraved and of overwhelmingly negative worth, we can still be said to experience a measure of positive affect if we deem them saliently original. This also resolves Gaut's 'foiled terror plot' objection to Cropley et al. insofar as it explains why we would be inclined to call the terrorists' plans creative even if they had failed. These plans need not have fulfilled their instrumental function in any measure in order to meet the two above-mentioned conditions.

The example of 9/11 is regrettably recent and sensitive in nature, and is therefore not conducive to impartial inquiry. This said, it does not seem controversial to claim that our evaluation of any object involves a complex cognitive act of accounting. And where we are not hindered by the sensitivity of the examples at hand, we readily admit, and even capitalise on, people's sense of wonder in the face of malevolent products. The commercial success of museums such as the London Dungeons, for example, attests to the attractive, fascinating quality of torture devices and is completely at odds with the characterisation of such products as being of simple negative value.[46] Indeed, there is a growing body of literature investigating the positive affects associated with our experience of malevolent ingenuity and morbid curiosity.[47]

## 4 The Instrumental Value of Creative Products

In this final section we should briefly explore the possible *instrumental* value of products that we consider to be creative. This does not mean that the appreciation of any such instrumental value conditions our predications of creativity at a conscious level. As I have argued above, the most plausible candidate for creative value is the *intrinsically* valuable experience of surprise elicited by saliently original products, which themselves can therefore be designated *inherently* valuable.

The question that should function as our gambit in this closing section is as follows: Why would we have developed in such a way as to experience a species of surprise akin to wonder and awe when perceiving saliently original phenomena, irrespective of their *ostensible* instrumental value? This can be asked from both an

[46] See e.g. Gaut 2010, op. cit.; Cropley et al. 2008, op. cit.; Hills and Bird 2018a, op. cit.

[47] See e.g. Kevin Pinkerton and Shuhua Zhou, "Effects of Morbid Curiosity on Perception, Attention, and Reaction to Bad News", *The University of Alabama McNair Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2007): 129-43.

evolutionary-biological and a cultural perspective. Generally speaking, evolutionary psychologists work on the assumption that particular phenomena elicit positive affective responses because those phenomena are, or were at some point in the past, beneficial to our evolutionary fitness – that is to say, conducive to our survival and reproduction. We would therefore expect phenomena that are instrumentally harmful to our wellbeing to exclusively stimulate revulsion; and following on from this, it would appear to be intuitively the case that experiencing positive affects in response to malevolence would constitute a neurological maladaptation. Likewise, at a cultural level, why might such affective responses have been actively cultivated (instead of being suppressed), for example in the popularisation of tragic art, horror films, and torture museums? Without entering into the convolved philosophical debate inaugurated by Plato and Aristotle regarding the value of tragedy, I want to survey a number of cogent reasons that might explain why malevolently creative products elicit a positive affective response. This should also lend the conclusions of the previous section further credibility.

There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that wonder in the face of the incomprehensible (i.e. the saliently original) stimulates *learning*.[48] William McDougall was one of the first psychologists to theorise wonder as the emotional mainspring of humanity's highest cultural achievements. He goes so far as to assert that wonder "must be regarded as one of the principal roots of both science and religion".[49] He attributes this to the fact that wonder is the emotion that accompanies the affect of curiosity, which "is the source of the immensely increased power over nature and over man that we now possess".[50] Izard and Ackerman also enumerate some of the adaptive qualities of the emotion of interest, which they claim overlaps with that of wonder:

> interest motivates exploration and learning, and guarantees the person's engagement in the environment. Survival and adaptation require such engagement. Interest supports creativity because it immerses one in the object or task and cues a sense of possibility. […] [I]nterest is the only emotion that can sustain long-term constructive or creative endeavours.
>
> [51]

And as Robert Fuller emphasises, "the emotion of interest provides the motivation for […] the development of intelligence, and personal growth".[52] Fuller surmises that "[w]onder is part of the organism's strategic capacity to imbue the world

[48] For a comprehensive review of the evolutionary advantages of wonder, see Robert C. Fuller, *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Robert C. Fuller, "From Biology to Spirituality: The Emotional Dynamics", in Sophia Vasalou, ed., *Practices of Wonder: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2012), pp. 64-87.

[49] William McDougall, *Introduction to Social Psychology*, 2nd edition (London: Methuen, 1908), p. 49.

[50] Ibid., p. 215.

[51] Carroll Izard and Brian Ackerman, "Motivational, Organizational, and Regulatory Functions of Discrete Emotions", in Michael Lewis and Jeanette Haviland-Jones, eds., *Handbook of Emotions*, 2nd edition (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), p. 257.

[52] Fuller 2006, op. cit., p. 37.

with an alluring quality".[53] He further theorises that wonder drives this inquisitive orientation "because the conviction grows stronger that we have chanced on an unexplored world which, like the universe around us, appears to have no boundaries. There must, we speculate, be other discoveries to be made here by the inquiring mind".[54] Experiencing a surprised sense of wonder in relation to a phenomenon that demands accommodation can thus stimulate an adaptive yen for discovery vis-à-vis the wider world, one that promotes socio-cultural flourishing. Insofar as creative products stimulate wonder, then, they can also be said to be endowed with instrumental value for the predicator – that is, provided she affirms the end of biological fitness, or personal and socio-cultural flourishing.

Contrary to Cropley et al.'s functional model of instrumental creative value, then, when an individual judges a terror plot to be saliently original, it likely has some underlying instrumental value *for her and her collective*, namely, insofar as it stimulates inquiry – inquiry not just into the specific causes of the event and what could be done to prevent its reoccurrence, but also inquiry in a more general sense. It is worth noting that once again these insights have been anticipated by theorists of the sublime. For both Schiller and Kant, feelings of the sublime were interpreted as a provocation to *comprehend* the sublime phenomenon under consideration – that is, to "apprehend the great and sublime by means of reason".[55]

## 5 Conclusion

The principal objective of this article was to explain whether the value condition of creativity, which is intuitively correct, can be rendered consistent with the fact that we predicate creativity to an array of malevolent phenomena. We saw how Cropley et al., in order to accommodate this counterexample, reconceived the value condition in terms of *instrumental* value *for the creative agent*. Yet we found that Cropley et al. – like Novitz, Gaut, and Hills and Bird – constructed their alternative approach on the now-rebutted supposition that malevolent products are of self-evident *absolute* negative value. Although the net value of a creative product may indeed be negative, there is abundant evidence to suggest that it may nonetheless bear a modicum of positive value, and, moreover, that such value should be understood as conditioning legitimate ascriptions of creativity.

What has also been brought to light is that creative products should, generally speaking, be considered valuable in two distinct senses. First, in an *inherent* sense, insofar as they elicit a positively-valenced (though not simply *pleasurable*) affect of surprise – an affect that shares features with wonder, awe and curiosity; and, second, in an *instrumental* sense, insofar as they provoke our interest and spur us to explore the world, which, on average, fosters both socio-cultural flourishing and biological

[53] Ibid., pp. 37-8.
[54] Ibid., p. 123.
[55] Schiller, op. cit., p. 207; see also Kant, op. cit., pp. 84-5.

fitness. This said, it is only the former species of value that actively conditions our predications of creativity; indeed, we are often entirely unaware of the latter.

We have also seen that our ascriptions of creativity are conditioned by two criteria that are separately necessary and jointly sufficient, and which amount to a significant modification of the standard view: first, that a given product exhibits *salient* originality; and second, that we hold the justified belief that the the product under consideration a result of purposeful, non-imitative agency. These conclusions do not entail that creative products can only bear one form of value – thus, functional and aesthetic value are both perfectly compatible with the inherent value of creative surprise. My contention is rather that it is the inherent value of salient originality that is essential to creative products *in general*; other forms of value are merely accidental to, or distinguish particular subsets of, creative products.

The significance of this recalibrated conception of creative value is far from being purely theoretical. As McDougall once suggested, our innate disposition to wonder can grow or whither depending on whether or not it is exercised.[56] In order to profit maximally from the value specific to creative products, and to avert a regrettable pearls-before-swine-type situation, we would do well to nurture our *receptivity* to salient originality – in other words, our susceptibility to the affect of creative surprise – just as energetically as we currently promote creative agency. Acknowledging and immersing ourselves in the experience of surprise, wonder, awe and curiosity evoked by creative products – even those of a malevolent ilk – can encourage an expedient and optimistic curiosity in the world.

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[56] McDougall, op. cit., p. 59.