

What is the relationship between
creativity and spirituality?
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How do we discuss a relationship between two words whose sources and very definitions are, ultimately, an unsolvable mystery? How do you “know” that which is inherently mysterious?

Science and academia have a penchant for wanting to define that which is inexplicable, quantify that which is unquantifiable, and predict that which is eternally beginningless and spontaneous. Alas, science and academia can only be what they are, yes? After all, the entire human race can share one thing in common: we all seek to know the truth. I suspect it must be that the source of these two words---creativity and spirituality----wherever that source may be, is continually smiling at the thought that man, after so many thousands of years, is still unable to leave mystery alone and simply allow her to be. But for the moment, we suspend that desirable permission, even if only in our illusory minds, and jump head long into a discourse on both.

From a non-positivistic approach, creativity and spirituality share five things in common: 1. they both derive from a mysterious, ubiquitous source, 2. despite volumes of speculation, people have varying definitions and beliefs about them, 3. both are comprised of varying levels, 4. both can derive from, or be understood as existing within, either the conscious or unconscious realms, and 5. there seems to be inexhaustible interest in them. In my theoretical model of the Psyche/Soul, I define spirituality as “the authentic, ontological, phenomenological merging of cognition, affect and will whereby the individual actualizes Soufulness, is subsumed by the numinous and whose consciousness results in an overall joyful loving awareness and a general acceptance, compassion and goodwill for all existence” (Woodward, p. 131). Creativity is one of the

four primary domains (or aspects or functions) of the Soul or Psyche, other than knowledge, love and wisdom, which eternally moves toward, and constellates around, Spirit. With creativity being one aspect of the essence of Spirit, Woodward believes creativity functions as an agency which creates form, whether that is within consciousness or in the external world, and that at the most transcendent realms, the creativity of the Soul always seeks to use this agency to create beauty via that form. Thus, the form that creativity seeks to manifest is a symbol or projection of Spirit. Said another way, Spirit uses itSelf to manifest a morphic representation about itSelf so that Spirit can know itSelf. The function of creativity is the agency which Spirit uses in order to imagine itSelf and to “see” itSelf if it were matter, if it were material form.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines creativity in terms of imagination and inventiveness and differentiates creativity from the “merely critical, ‘academic,’ journalistic, professional, mechanical, etc., in literary and artistic production”. Barron (in Richards, 2006) preferred to use “originality” and “meaningfulness” as descriptors of creativity and he wrote about the awe that accompanies being in a creative conscious state. Interestingly, “awe” is an experience of all the sages, seers and mystics throughout the millennia who have touched transcendent realms. Lao Tzu writes about the Tao, the Buddha speaks of Nirvana, the writer of the Upanisads seems to be whispering about the breath of the eternal and Sri Ramana Maharshi shares his thoughts of Brahman or “the Self”. These are glimpses of people who have experienced the awe of the mystery of Spirit. Many philosophers and scientists have also had similar subjective experiences. Einstein (1931) rejected orthodox Judaism, but wrote about the ineffable:

The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a

snuffed-out candle. It was the experience of mystery—even if mixed with fear—that engendered religion. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, our perceptions of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which only in their most primitive forms are accessible to our minds: it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitutes true religiosity. In this sense, and in this alone, I am a deeply religious man. (p. 5).

To Kierkegaard (1946), there were three evolving stages of human consciousness: 1. aesthetic, 2. ethical, and 3. religious. At the highest consciousness level, the religious stage, the essence of the religious experience of God was a subjective one where the presence of spiritual essence was both a phenomenological and epistemological understanding. For Kierkegaard, this transcendent stage was where soul met Spirit and the awe and wonder of God became alive and was made manifest in the consciousness of humankind.

Dreams and writing are frequently cited when discussing creativity. Dreams are a rich source of creative essence while writing is an expression or outpouring of creativity. Many noted individuals---inventors, artists, scientists, philosophers, saints and mystics---have left clues about the role that dreams or visions played in the genesis of their creativity.

Freud believed that dreams are always a product of the irrational part of the human psyche where the dream represents an unconscious striving, a wish or unfulfilled desire (in Fromm, 1951). In short, the dream world was an unhealthy domain according to Freudian theory.

Departing from Freudian theory, Jung posited that dreams represented a language of symbols that the healthy psyche was attempting to convey to the conscious mind. Jung (1989) was one of the most prolific thinkers and writers about the numinous and about the archetypal realm, the realm of the Collective Psyche where primal images and

symbols abounded. In speaking about his writings, Jung stated that they “all....may be considered tasks imposed from within; their source was a fateful compulsion. What I wrote were things that assailed me from within myself. I permitted the spirit that moved me to speak out” (p. 222). Aniela Jaffe’, colleague and friend of Jung, tells us that Jung “thought it wise to let the inexplicable elements that always cling to psychic realities remain as riddles or mysteries” (in Jung, 1989, p. xiii). Jung (1989) felt most deeply himself while spending time in solitude at “the Tower”, the home he built himself at Bollingen in Zurich, where he experienced many visions and dreams. He would interpret his own dreams as a rich source that gave meaning and purpose to his life and as an avenue by which the numinous could be explored and understood. He did the same when analyzing the dreams of his patients.

Symbols have long been recognized as the inner silent language in which the soul communicates to us. Indeed, the Talmud tells us that dreams that are not interpreted are like unopened letters. Fromm (1951) believed that dreams can be an expression of both the lowest and most irrational, along with the highest and most valuable, functions of the human psyche and that they all have one thing in common: they are not logical according to our waking conscious state. In spite of this, he tells us that our dreams are real while we dream and that there is “no ‘as if’ in the dream. The dream is present, real experience” (p. 5).

Edwards (1999) believes there are two styles of creative writing which are presumed to be connected to a divine force and which are synonymous with spiritual practice. *Via Creativa* “is a way of life in which a person creates in order to discover a deeper sense of self in relationship to the cosmos” (p. 4). This creative life force expresses itself in two ways: through the *Via Positiva* and *Via Negativa*. The *Via*

Positiva, or Right-Hand Path, is the predominant expression whereby an extroverted person utilizes external objects such as those in nature or art to inspire the written word. The *Via Negativa*, or Left-Hand Path, utilized by mystics and seers, is a lesser traveled, introspective path in which the person explores deeper aspects of one's Being to develop inspiration. As Edwards compares the creative styles of writers John Updike and Ursula Le Guin, both are different in their objects of focus for inspiration, yet both speak of how writing is of their essence, who they are at the deepest levels of being. Interestingly, both authors articulate the importance of seeking truth through their stories.

For Miller and Cook-Greuter (1999), the most exalted forms of creativity derive from the archetypal realm, muses or divine inspiration. They further posit that extraordinary creativity seems to manifest within individuals whose psychological maturity is positioned at a higher stage of consciousness, where the individual has transcended the personal, egoic level and evolved to the transpersonal stage of selfhood. While they acknowledge creativity exists at all stages of consciousness, from lower to higher, they believe that the transpersonal realm is actually the creative ground regardless of whether a person is consciously aware of that transpersonal realm. All people have the capability of accessing this creativity because, according to these authors, this is the ubiquitous realm out of which our Being, our essence, emerges. (p. xviii).

Although prior psychiatrists such as Freud, Jung and Milton Erickson utilized psychotherapeutic techniques which allowed their clients to enter into, self-reflect upon and analyze different states of consciousness, Maslow was one of the first in the mental health field to study and make connections between higher states of consciousness and creativity. In talking about the "creative attitude", Maslow (1971) stated:

“the creative person, in the inspirational phase of the creative furor, loses his past and his future and lives only in the moment. He is all there, totally immersed, fascinated and absorbed in the present, in the current situation, in the here-now, with the matter-in-hand.....this ability to become ‘lost in the present’ seems to be a *sine qua non* for creativeness of any kind. But also certain prerequisites of creativeness—in whatever realm—somehow have something to do with this ability to become timeless, selfless, outside of space, of society, of history”. (p. 59).

He also distinguished between primary creativity which is the inspirational phase and secondary creativity which follows the energetic, trance-like state with the actual discipline and hard work of bringing a creative endeavor to fruition in some form.

(Maslow, 1971, p. 57). Articulating the nascent idea that creativity, as it had been studied up until that point, was being perceived through a masculine bias, he also admonished others to begin to study feminine creativity as it was more process-oriented than goal-oriented. Maslow understood fully the similarities between the phenomenological experience of the mystic and that of the individual in a highly creative state.

It is always described as a loss of self or of ego, or sometimes as a transcendence of self. There is a fusion with the reality being observed....a oneness where there was a twoness, an integration of some sort of the self with the non-self. There is universally reported a seeing of formerly hidden truth, a revelation in the strict sense, a stripping away of veils, and finally, almost always, the whole experience is experienced as bliss, ecstasy, rapture, exaltation. (p. 60).

He speaks of the “fascination, concentration, or absorption” during the peak experience which, interestingly, is also shared by the highly creative person. These transpersonal states are ‘temporary fluctuations’ in awareness and knowing and engage the individual with a temporary access to the ‘source’ (Boucouvalas, 1999). The term “source” has been used to refer to the Ground of Being or what the Advaitans refer to as *saccidananda*, Being/Consciousness/Bliss, the divine essence, the spiritual essence of our higher nature (Indich, 1980). If our essence is, indeed, knowledge, creativity, love and wisdom as my

theoretical model posits, then these would be the “fruits of the spirit” that the Christian religion speaks of and would also be parallel with the mystical states of consciousness that Christian mystics such as St. John of the Cross, St. Bernard of Clairveaux, St. Teresa of Lisieux and St. Teresa of Avila experienced and wrote about. To read their writings is to immediately understand the nature of their elevated consciousness and the knowledge they had of inner truths, the love they felt toward all that exists, the creative desire to put their inner experience in writing and the divine wisdom which forever sees and wills pure goodness toward the all. Socrates’ inner “daemon”, a transcendent connection, was acknowledged by him as the source of his wisdom and that which guided him morally and ethically toward “the Good”.

In my theoretical model of the Soul/Psyche, once a person accesses the transcendent realm or the high creative realm, there is a sort of merging experience where cognition, affect and will are conjoined and are indistinguishable, much like all the colors are joined in the color white. Blue is different from yellow, but they cannot be separated. In the transcendent realms and in a state of pure creativity, subject and object become one, epistemology implies phenomenology which implies ontology. The essence of Being is the combination of all spiritual “fruits”, the world of the unseen: creativity, love, knowledge, goodness, beauty, truth and wisdom. This inner experience manifests a psychological knowingness for the beholder where the feltness of that now moment was love itself because the pure experience of creativity *is* love and love *is* truly beautiful. This is who “I AM” and not only a bundle of neurons. The pure experience of beauty, when beheld, cannot but also manifest an affective response of love and goodness. And when these are phenomenologically experienced, one “knows” that this is the deepest truth, the innermost authenticity, the most central, yet expansive integrity of our

Beingness, what Rumi referred to as “the Beloved”. When we awaken and are alive with the epistemological truth of “this is who I AM”, in my deepest essence, before time was born. This is who “I AM” forevermore and not a bundle of unfulfilled desires. This phenomenological truth is boundless and timeless and sits in its own knowingness, where object and subject become one, where knowledge of the Truth, the creation of true Beauty, the Love of Pure Goodness and the Wisdom to use the human Will actually marries the Divine Will----the Will for the Good of The All. This is who “I AM” and who I was before I was born. This is my deepest Truth which I have sought to know since before the mists of time. And I can only know it when I realize it. And I realize it when I know it and can “Be” it. This is who “I AM”. *Tat tvam asi: That Thou Art.*

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