Creativity and Philosophy (2018, Berys Gaut and Matthew Kieran eds, Routledge: New York)

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Penultimate Version, forthcoming in the British Journal of Aesthetics.

When I was a child, my mother sometimes served a special dish: sausages cut lengthways, stuffed with mashed potato and baked with cheese atop. She called these 'dream boats', in part because of their vaguely boat-le appearance, in part because (so she claimed) the idea came to her in a dream. This to me was a singularly creative act: my mother had dreamt up a unique dish which was both delicious and exclusive to our family. Cynics may very well point out that stuffed sausages are no discovery exclusive to my mother (a quick internet search more than confirms this) and indeed might scoff, claiming that mashed potato and cheese are hardly a radical, edifying or original thing to stuff sausages with. Well perhaps, but for me my mother's culinary invention ranked with the greats: it was novel (I hadn't heard of such a thing before), it was valuable (both for taste and exclusivity) and it was the act of a creative person (or at least someone wise enough to listen to her dreams). Creativity is not the exclusive realm of genius or so-called 'creatives' (as those eking a living in certain industries sometimes call themselves). Being creative is a normal, ubiquitous part of human lives, our interactions, and our wellbeing. Creativity is both mundane and wonderful.

As such, the philosophy of creativity ought to be wide-ranging and flourishing. However, despite garnering attention from philosophical mainstays like Plato and Kant, philosophy in the analytic tradition has been pretty quiet regarding creativity, certainly in comparison to notions like beauty, truth, knowledge, morality and so on. In accordance with this surprising philosophical inattendance, a fair bit of the philosophical work on creativity has been consigned to the Davy

Jones' locker of collected volumes, where the risk of sinking without a trace is, I get the impression, often amplified.

Berys Gaut and Matthew Kieran's new edited volume is the fourth on the philosophy of creativity in the last 15 years (the last being Paul & Kaufman's 2014 *The Philosophy of Creativity: New Essays*) and is at base an attempt to overcome this inattendance, drawing more philosophers to the philosophy of creativity. As such, it is ambitiously wide-ranging, with twenty chapters and an introduction. The chapters take us on a trajectory from what we might think of as the 'core' of the philosophy of creativity—analyses of what creativity is, what value it holds, and so forth—into more indirect discussions of creativity's role in mathematics, philosophy, politics and art, as well as its evolution. The collection's ambitious number of chapters is balanced by each chapter's short length, although this can be a two-edged sword. While the snappiness of the papers make for a less taxing read, there is the occasional sense of missing depth in the analyses, of too many ideas arriving all-in-a-rush, of arguments sketched rather than made. Having said this, the richness of the ideas themselves go a long way towards the book's aim: a strong argument for creativity taking a more central place in philosophical attention. Only time will tell if we'll reach the cacophonous research-racket which philosophical reflection on creativity deserves, but if it does this collection can take some of the credit: many of the chapters are excellent and all at the very least open up new areas of discussion. The book is, at a minimum, a demonstration of how much work there is for us philosophers to do on creativity.

Describing each paper in a collection of this variety would not make for a very interesting read. Instead, in addition to considering the book as a whole (I'll below critique the lack of historical and comparative analysis, hopefully pointing to other areas of philosophical analysis), I want to highlight some papers I found particularly stimulating and exciting.

The received philosophical view on creativity is readily applied to my mother's culinary invention: dream boats are creative if they are (1) original, (2) valuable and (3) the result of an act

of agency. There is a lot of room to dispute just what forms of originality, value, and agency are relevant, and indeed a fair number of chapters in *Creativity and Philosophy* do just this. But some chapters alter aspects of the received view quite radically, or deny them outright. Alison Hills and Alexander Bird tackle the second condition, denying that creativity must be valuable, Michael Wheeler stretches the third condition in order to consider embodied and even extended models of creativity and, most excitingly for me, Margaret Boden breaks the third condition outright.

Margaret Boden's entry, *Biology and Creativity,* is fascinating. Her influential account of creativity has relied on a distinction between *psychological* and *historical* creativity: the former being something which is new for its creator, the latter being new generally (Boden 2004) (these are sometimes also referred to as 'subjective' and 'objective' creativity respectively). My mother's stuffed sausages were likely not historically creative (although I imagine the name 'dream boats' was!) but may have been psychologically creative for her, and certainly were for me. Boden's distinction, and her work up until this point more generally, relies on creativity being understood in computational or psychological ways. But what if we want to say that, for instance, evolutionary processes can be creative? Boden broadens 'psychological' to 'individual'—new *for that individual*, rather than *for that psychology*. This de-psychologizing allows her to include biological events in the sphere of creativity. Individual organisms and perhaps lineages, then, can embody both historical and individual creativity. This doesn't just include the most obvious example—the arisal of new species and traits in a lineage—but the individual development of each critter.

> Ontogenesis, unlike the evolution of a new species, doesn't involve first-time novelty. *Every* embryo was once a single cell. Similarly with life-cycle transformations: *every* butterfly was once a caterpillar and *every* species-hopping parasite (such as a liver fluke) transforms its bodily form as it passes from one host-species to another. In all these cases, however, the novelty of each stage relative to its predecessor is evident—and

> astonishing. The creativity here is I-creativity, not H-creativity. But to deny its creative aspect would be wrong-headed (Boden 2018 176).

I've been struck by, on the one hand, the importance of attaching agency and personhood to creativity (Berys Gaut perhaps captures this most clearly) and on the other hand the (to my mind) undeniable creativity of evolutionary processes—processes which we likely don't want to attribute agency to. Boden's chapter provides a way forwards in this respect.

Tim Mulgan's entry discusses moral imaginativeness and moral creativity. The former involves, as it were, thinking up new first-order moral ideas, the latter involves putting them into practice. It's important to distinguish this from what normative moral philosophers are typically up to: analysing existing moral concepts and considering how to apply them. They rarely actively generate *new* moral concepts (some exceptions, as Mulgan notes, being 'increasing the circle' moves in animal liberation and environmental ethics). Moral concepts are dynamic and context-sensitive, arising in light of particular cultural, political, economic and environmental situations. Thus, new moralities must be forged as those new situations arise. This has important upshots for both our capacity to make predictions about the future and for moral pedagogy. Considering the former:

> The fact that future people will themselves have to exercise moral creativity reinforces the impossibility of *predicting* the future. If future events depend on future moral creativity, then we can only predict them if we can attach *probabilities* to all credible exercises of future moral creativity. And that seems hopelessly optimistic (Mulgan 2018, 362).

And concerning the latter:

> Different possible futures raise different imaginative challenges. We therefore cannot side-step the need for future moral creativity by pre-programming future ethics. We can

only equip our descendants with moral imaginativeness – and hope they exercise it well (359).

Mulgan's position is challenging, evocative and presents a *historicized* notion of morality. This latter feature—applied to creativity—is something I found lacking in the collection overall.

Historical studies by, for instance, Patricia Fara (2004) and Ti DeNora (1995), (on Newton and Beethoven respectively) emphasize how notions of creativity have a particular history, in this case built from the secularization of religious concepts regarding divine creation. This explains the heroic flavour of creativity: the creative genius is romantic, generating new ideas through often inexplicable intuitive leaps. This is perhaps most clearly reflected in Kant's view of creative genius, which in the collection Christian Wenzel argues applies to mathematical creativity, and which Maria Kronfeldner, Al Hajek and Hills & Bird all nicely skewer. Of Newton, Fara says "Elevating Newton into a singular solitary genius ran counter to the concept of cooperative experimental research, and denied the myth of cumulative scientific progress" (Fara, 220). The conceptions of creativity analysed in *Creativity and Philosophy* are the result of a particular history, and this history suggests the contingency of those conceptions—different histories could have led to different notions. And this, I think, matters for many of the papers in the collection due to reliance on quite traditional philosophical appeals to intuitions.

Jonathan McKeown-Green (2004) has recently argued that the context-specificity and historicity of music concepts puts pressure on philosophical accounts of music which appeal exclusively to intuition or classificatory practices, these "only work if the *nature* of the thing being defined is determined by our *conception* of it, that is, by the way we construe it—the features we take it to have in virtue of being the thing it is" (394, italics in original). However, because conceptions of music are highly sensitive to temporal (and for that matter cultural) context, "any such definition tells us, *at best*, what we *currently* take to be music, and this information proves to have little practical value" (Ibid, 393, italics in original). Similarly for

creativity: if our conceptions are parochial, very particular to a romantic European and Judeo-Christian history, it is unclear why we should take our intuitive judgments about what counts as creative as revealing anything deep or categorical about creativity more generally. Indeed, given that problematic, heroic history, we might see good reason to reject those intuitions outright. Further, if creativity is contingent in this sense, then even more pressure than usual exists to examine how it plays out in other contexts—do other traditions have differing notions of creativity? This is another place where the collection falls short.

Although every chapter in this volume agrees that some kind of originality or novelty is required for creativity, some have argued that this does not hold in Classical Confucianism or Daoism (Niu & Sternberg 2006). Although these traditions diverge in many radical ways, some suggest that they are similar in their approach to creativity. Specifically, creation is never chalked up to the action of the individual, but instead in terms of 'co-creation' or 'assistance' (Ames 2005). For instance, in Classical Confucianism, creativity often involves the re-iteration of possibilities pre-existing within a tradition. For *creato in situ*, creation exists in a pre-existing context so that the creator and the creature are mutually implicated and continuous. Moreover, some commentators have chalked up these differences to differing mythic histories. As Weihua Niu has it:

> Simply put, whereas creativity resides in the power of the creator according to the biblical view, it is the very nature of everlasting interaction between the creator and the context that result in creativity according to the Chinese wisdom (2012, 279).

While I cannot speak to the accuracy of these interpretations, the point is that creativity is a prime target for comparative philosophy, especially in light of the highly contingent aspects of many of its features.

Having said this, it would be more than a little churlish of me to hold a lack of historical and comparative perspectives too much against a collection of twenty one diverse chapters. Perhaps the complaint is better framed as being a suggestion for one direction where I think the philosophy of creativity might happily go. Although a single collection can't do everything, Gaut and Keiran's certainly demonstrates the richness of the philosophy of creativity.

So, why has there been so little sustained work on creativity in analytic philosophy? Why has it not become as yet a central focus of our research? I have a hunch. Creativity refuses to play by philosophical rules; it doesn't slot neatly within the categories which organize philosophical research. Categories like morality, epistemology, aesthetics, metaphysics and psychology. Novelty doesn't divide itself between knowledge, morality or beauty. Talk of the necessity of creativity to generate new knowledge naturally slips into aesthetic discussion of the flair required to truly create. Understanding creativity as an aesthetic value quickly slides into discussion of imagination, personhood and virtue. Creativity is not simply aesthetically valuable, but critical for epistemology, critical for morality and critical for psychology. An analysis of creativity cannot be simply aesthetic, but is also epistemic, mental and moral. My mother's dream-boats are in a sense a fine symbol of this complexity: historically, creativity is connected with divine creation, the inexplicable, inspiration—*dreams*—but, so also is creativity a part of our day-to-day lives, something exercised in feeding our families, for instance. As such, only a more synthetic philosophy which happily shifts between these traditional categories can truly be a philosophy of creativity.

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Acknowledgements: thanks to Marta Halina and Sam Wilkinson for comments on drafts, and Ian Kidd for input on the Confucian and Daoist discussion.