CHAPTER TWO

CREATIVE PRODUCT AND CREATIVE PROCESS IN SCIENCE AND ART

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I Introduction

In the past few decades, creativity has become rather like money: everyone seems to want more of it. Just as we are living in monetarily inflationary times, so too the notion of creativity has undergone a wholesale devaluation. Soon we shall not only be carting away our weekly salaries in wheelbarrows, but the very act of doing so shall come to be called a creative one. Yet however lax popular standards may become, there seems to me to be one aspect of creativity which will remain constant, and that is that creativity is something valuable, and that the notion of creativity is permeated with evaluation. To adjudge something to be ‘creative,’ in other words, is to bestow upon it an honorific title, to claim that it deserves to be highly valued for one reason or another. Hence, without standards and values, creativity ceases to exist, just as morality ceases to exist. But as with morality, how high (or low) we set the standards is partially a matter for our decision. In this essay, then, I shall adopt a fairly restrictive standard, and in consequence limit the notion of creativity to Science and Art. I hope that by doing so I do not prejudge any important issues, except

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2 A similar point has been made by Vincent Tomas in his article “Creativity in Art,” reprinted in Creativity in the Arts, ed. V. Tomas (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 97–109.
one upon which I insist: namely, that creativity is something we value, and that the notion of creativity is an evaluative one.

II  Creativity: Possibility or Necessity?

For all our valuing of creativity, it appears to be, not least of all to creative scientists and artists themselves, a kind of mystery, a kind of miracle. Thus, Mozart writes of his best musical ideas: “Whence and how they come I know not; nor can I force them.” In a similar vein, Tchaikovsky writes that “the germ of a future composition comes suddenly and unexpectedly”; while Helmholtz reports that his ideas often “arrived suddenly, without any effort on my part, like an inspiration.” Equally, Gauss, in referring to an arithmetical theorem which he had for years tried unsuccessfully to prove, writes: “Finally, two days ago, I succeeded, not on account of my painful efforts, but by the grace of God. Like a sudden flash of lightning, the riddle happened to be solved.”

Such quotations could, in fact, be multiplied almost indefinitely; so consider finally, and more lightly, Desmond Morris’s recent report that a journalist once asked Picasso: What is creativity? Picasso answered, “I don’t know, and if I did I wouldn’t tell you.”

Now I certainly do not want to claim to know more about creativity than does Picasso, but it does seem to me that the mysteriousness and miraculousness of creativity is, in effect, an important datum about it. It is, I think, something from which we can learn, and which we should try to explain. Yet if we do assume that creativity is a mysterious miracle, then it becomes one of the most mysterious of all miracles—for it is (pace Hume) a repeatable miracle. How, then, can we make rational sense of this ‘miracle’? How, in other words, is creativity possible?

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4 Ibid., 57.