Despite a virtual explosion of research into creativity over the last three decades, there is still no single definition of the term itself that is acceptable to all researchers in the field. Creativity has been considered a motive (Golann, 1962), a process (Stein, 1956), a pattern of personality traits (Cattell and Drevdahl, 1955; Cross, Cattell, and Butcher, 1967), a cognitive characteristic (Guilford, 1963). The term has been linked with a wide range of concepts, including sublimation (Freud, 1908/1924), regression (Kris, 1952), self-actualization (Maslow, 1959; Rogers, 1959), and restitution for destructive impulses (Lee, 1947). It has been considered a normally distributed trait (Rogers, 1959), a field-specific ability (Busse and Mansfield, 1980), a learned behavior (Skinner, 1976).

The plurality of definitions and the disagreement among researchers about the appropriateness of any one definition are problematic for several reasons. First, to the extent that researchers find it difficult to agree upon a set of conclusions or even to communicate unequivocally among themselves, progress within the field is impeded. Second, disagreement over the meaning of the term creativity would seem to contribute to, if not in fact reflect, fundamental uncertainty about the very nature of the phenomenon. Barron and Harrington implied as much in prefacing their 1981 review of the literature with the insistence that “the term creativity stands in need of precise distinctions among the referents it has acquired” (p. 441).

Nor can we solve the problem by arbitrarily selecting a particular definition and agreeing to its exclusive use. As Barron and Harrington note, the most frequently used definitions are problematic on both methodological and conceptual grounds.

We could, alternatively, step back from the burgeoning literature and
take a fresh look at the phenomenon in question. This paper will indicate the first steps toward such a reexamination, specifically of artistic creativity,¹ based on the principles of Husserlian phenomenology. The primary aim of Husserl's method was a radical return to the phenomena themselves, as they are immediately given in experience (Husserl, 1913/1931). That such a radical return is necessary will become clear from a brief review of definitions of the term creativity, their conceptual and methodological limitations, and their grounding in a specific, constrained philosophy which Husserl termed the natural standpoint.

**Definitions of Creativity and their Limitations**

Barron and Harrington (1981) identify two general themes—meta definitions, as it were—which subsume the various criteria of creativity used in most empirical studies.

According to the first, creativity is equivalent to "socially recognized achievement in which there are novel products to which one can point as evidence, such as inventions, theories, buildings, published writings, paintings, and sculptures, and films; laws; institutions; medical and surgical treatments, and so on..." (p. 442).

There are a number of conceptual problems with this definition. For example, what constitutes "socially recognized" achievement: recognition by the individual's peers, by the contemporary society at large, by subsequent generations? Perhaps the most serious problem, however, concerns the concept of "novelty." Do we consider, for example, a painting novel simply by virtue of the collection of materials into a physical entity which has literally never before existed? This use of the term would extend the category of artworks to include any random collage of materials plucked from the garbage bin. Perhaps, on the other hand, a novel product is one that embodies a new idea. But is there such a thing as a new idea, and are all new ideas valuable per se, or do we need to add an independent criterion of value?

The novel-product definition of creativity is no less problematic methodologically. Researchers who use this definition typically rely on experts, for example, literary critics, to nominate creative practitioners on the basis of their products. These practitioners are then recruited for study. The procedure often yields reasonably high reliability; that is, experts do, by and large, agree in their nominations (MacKinnon, 1962). A more serious question concerns the validity of these nominations. Do experts indeed rely on novelty rather than value, beauty, originality, or utility as the criterion for their nominations? Do experts use product criteria at all,