Research Statement

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My research interests are in aesthetics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of action, and Kant, with a special focus in each area on questions about creativity. Is having a creative idea an exercise of mental agency? Is being motivated to pursue creative work an expression of rational agency? Are intuitions about the direction creative work should take—that is, creative intuitions—a type of epistemic attitude, a species of metacognition, or something else? In pursuing these and related questions, my work explores the unusual and unexpected ways in which core philosophical concepts, like *rational agency* and *self-consciousness*, interact with creativity phenomena. My philosophical aim throughout this work is twofold: to find ways of shedding new light on the core concepts, and to reveal the distinctively philosophical aspects of creativity phenomena.

My largest research project is a philosophical examination of what Graham Wallas called the "illumination" phase of the creative process.[1] It could equally be called "creative inspiration." During this phase, the person creating has an idea for something new, and, before any conscious assessment of its value, the idea seems promising and worth exploring. Philosophers have not had much to say about creative inspiration is. When they the concept does appear in philosophical discussion, it is often treated as of mainly psychological interest, e.g., "a mysterious process whereby ideas simply 'pop' into someone's mind."[2] This neglects the various philosophically interesting questions one might ask about it.

Suppose that someone has an idea for something new. The idea may be an image or theme for a poem. It may be proposition to figure in a philosophical argument or mathematical proof. Then she not only has the idea. She also finds it promising or worth pursuing; she has a *hunch* about it. She also—presumably because it seems promising—is motivated to pursue it.

My work articulates and defends a collection of claims about these distinguishable aspects of creative inspiration. The mental events of having the ideas are not exercises of mental agency. Acting on the motivation to pursue the ideas is not an exercise of rational agency. The self-consciousness one has during the mental event is different from the kind one has while, for example, thinking through a simple logic problem. The "self" of which one is conscious when having creative ideas is not quite the self who engages in everyday thinking and reasoning.

Taken together, these claims form what I tentatively call a *selfless* account of creative inspiration. At present, the account takes shape over several papers; my plan is eventually to incorporate them into a book.

"Creative Intuition and Creative Feeling" (under review) develops ideas that are at the heart of the account. Creative people in many different disciplines have *creative intuitions*. These are experiences that make some idea or ideas seem likely to lead to valuable new

[1] Wallas, Graham. (1926). *The Art of Thought*. J. Cape: p. 86.
[2] Livingston, Paisley. (2005). *Art and Intention*. Oxford University Press: p. 31.

results, but before any conscious evaluation of those ideas takes place. Think again about the poet I described above: She has various images in mind that she can work into a poem, has no determinate sense for what the final poem will be like, but judges, nonetheless, that it is worth sitting down to write. This poet has had a creative intuition about what to write.

I argue that, when someone has a creative intuition, they rightly ascribe an aesthetic property to the mental activity they are engaged in while having the intuition. This implies, among other things, that the experience of having the intuition is an intrinsically rewarding one. It also implies that the mental activity they are engaged in while having the intuition satisfies norms of aesthetic evaluation; the mental activity is aesthetically as it ought to be. I argue for this claim by contrasting it with the claim that creative intuitions should be understood exclusively in terms of *epistemic* feelings and attitudes, such as feelings of knowing or certainty, rather than aesthetic feelings and attitudes.

The argument in "Creative Intuition and Creative Feeling" is *domain-neutral*. It concerns creative intuitions in art, mathematics, and science. The papers I describe in what follows are focused on specifically artistic creativity.

According to the argument in "Creative Intuition and Creative Feeling," when an artist has a creative intuition, she rightly ascribes an aesthetic property to her mental activity. Something about this experience is motivating. It initiates the process of making new work. How so exactly? I answer this question in "Creative Motivation."

The answer I develop in that paper has its foundation in Kant's aesthetic theory. When artists ascribe aesthetic properties to their mental activity, they take pleasure in that mental activity. Furthermore, I argue, this pleasure is *disinterested* in the sense Kant develops in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. When an artist takes disinterested pleasure in an idea for new work, she has no salient beliefs about the idea's causal history. This means, among other things, that she does not experience herself as the mental agent of he idea—a phenomenological claim that is widely supported by the way artists describe their creative experiences. I go on to argue that this account of creative pleasures yields an account of creative motives, acting on which does not constitute an exercise of rational agency.

Some part of "Creative Motivation" is concerned with mental agency, namely the phenomenological claim that artists do not *experience* themselves as the mental agents of their ideas for new work. That paper does not argue for the stronger claim that artists really do not exercise mental agency over those ideas. "Aesthetic Insight and Mental Agency" (forthcoming, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*) argues for this stronger claim.

In that paper, I argue that artists do not exercise mental agency over their creative intuitions, or as I call them in the paper, "aesthetic insights." I defend the claim that an artist's having an aesthetic insight is not something the artist does for a reason. The argument turns on general principles about responding to reasons, as well as principles about the particularity of aesthetic evaluation—that is, the absence of general rules for determining whether something has aesthetic value.

"Inspiration and Self-Consciousness" pursues one of the quintessential observations about creative inspiration, namely that artists often have the sense that their ideas come from something other than themselves. The Muses, for example, were a very early suggestion about what that "something other" might be. I argue that claims of this kind are

best understood as reporting a distinctive kind of self-consciousness. As in "Creative Motivation," my argument here is rooted in Kant, but largely in claims he makes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, rather than in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

In the first *Critique*, Kant claims that conceptually-structured mental activity of a certain kind helps explain the consciousness we have of ourselves as thinkers, distinct from any of the particular thoughts we have. Such conceptually-structured mental activity helps explain that particular type of self-consciousness. I argue that, during experiences of inspiration, mental activity is not conceptually-structured in the same way it is during episodes of thinking, but it is nonetheless structured enough to support a kind of self-consciousness, which I call *alterior self-consciousness*. This type of self-consciousness specifies the content of the artist's experience that her ideas come from something other than herself.

I have other papers in progress on closely related issues. "Impersonal Expressions" examines the role of self-expression in creating art. While some artists encourage aiming at self-expression in the creative process, others caution against it. What are they disagreeing about? What alternative do the cautious have in mind? After critically discussing some potential answers, I argue that the artists who caution against self-expression are recommending a different way—an *impersonal* way—of expressing feeling in the process of creating art. Expressing feeling in this impersonal way does not lead to self-knowledge in the same way that self-expression does.

In "Lucky Artists" (under review), I argue that artists, and performers especially, exercise a distinctively non-practical type of control over their bodily movements, which I call *receptive control*. Think of a pianist who doesn't need to carefully monitor her bodily activity because of her skill and training. I argue that, to affect fine-grained details of her performance, such as tone and dynamics, she listens to her playing as she plays, and she imagines the way she wants it to sound, and that neither of these are practical—control-oriented—attitudes taken toward her playing. Neither are intentions to play a certain sequence of notes, for example, or even intentions to play the passage in such-and-such a way. Each nonetheless recruits bodily activity. Both listening and imagining in this way are, I argue, instances of exercising receptive control.

Most of my work has been focused on artistic creativity, however I will eventually apply it to activity in other domains. I said above that the claims I argue for in "Creative Intuition and Creative Feeling" are domain-neutral. They concern any case of creative intuition, whether that intuition concerns a work of art to be made or a mathematical proof to be given. If the creative mental processes in both cases are aesthetic in the ways I claim they are, then some of the claims I have made about artistic creativity may be extended to activity in these other domains. This may bear on the extent to which mental and rational agency are involved in philosophical work itself.