# CREATIVITY AND ETHICS

A short essay

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## The Ritual

Every morning, at breakfast, I follow the same ritual. First, I make myself a coffee. I need to wake up. Then I'll get out all the other ingredients I need. Always the same ones. I sit down at the table and have my breakfast. Afterwards, a second coffee and the latest news. By then I'm usually ready for the day ahead. Routine, every morning. I need this – these automated processes. They give me stability and a sense of lived reality. I recognise myself in them. There's nothing to disturb me or take me by surprise first thing in the morning. Just habit. I feel absolutely at ease.

In such processes, in such an automated routine, creativity has no place. In fact, creativity is disruptive here, because it breaks with the familiar, that soothing routine in which I recognise myself – or at least believe I do. However, if something unfamiliar breaks this routine, the automatic pattern is disrupted, and the next step yet unclear. New strategies, new decisions and new perspectives are required. And it is precisely here, in this phase of new decisions, that the possibility of a creative solution lies.

Why only one possibility? Because human beings naturally replace what they need to replace with something familiar or something they have already experienced. So, in the breakfast ritual, they replace coffee with tea, the cup with a mug, the missing bread with crispbread, and the breakfast table with the side table next to the sofa. Nothing truly new enters the routine. From what already exists, a different, similarly structured reality is created, one that does not assign any new goals or functions to the ritual. It is like doing a craft project, where a new object is created from various materials and items. There is no real creativity here yet, or at least only a minimal hint of it, which might culminate in a creative act.

True creativity usually begins with a problem that demands an unconventional yet effective solution. The solution must be innovative; in other words, it must not be a repetition of existing solutions, but must feature a new, previously unknown element. In my view – and here I disagree with many authors – this solution need not be functional or reproducible. Nor does it necessarily have to serve humanity or be of any other practical use, although something beautiful, in its simplicity, can also be of value. The basic condition is simple: the problem at hand must be solved in such a way that it incorporates at least one completely new element or is novel in its structure or algorithm. This may include, amongst other things, new materials, new construction methods, new functions, a completely new product, or even the expansion or elimination of the problem itself. The creative act brings into being something that has never existed before, something innovative; in other words, a new

reality, a new way of being, or even a new consciousness. And this brings us to the very heart of the matter, to the essence of creativity.

**The Purpose and Aim**

We all possess creative qualities and have many an opportunity to apply them in our everyday lives. As mentioned above, the familiar is closer to our hearts than the unfamiliar, because the unfamiliar must be explored, even conquered. Venturing into the deep, dark, unknown jungle is not for everyone. What's more, the path to new solutions is often strewn with obstacles. And when faced with obstacles – especially those that are not easily overcome – most people give up. This is where the paths of the intensely creative and the less creative diverge. Very few manage to see an idea through to its realisation, that is, to go through and master every stage of a production process. It takes a great deal of courage, self-confidence, commitment and perseverance to reach one's goal. This applies equally to the creation of a book, the realisation of an intellectual vision or the manufacture of a physical product. In doing so, we have described and defined the fundamental characteristics of creative people. They are headstrong, often self-centred, if not downright narcissistic, flexible, curious, courageous and, unfortunately all too often, naïve. These characteristics of creative people are, on the one hand, very helpful for the creative processes themselves, but on the other hand, they can also be a hindrance when it comes to motivation and making use of those very same creative processes. Their selfishness, stubbornness and obsession can be a key driving force in enabling them to reach their goal at all, without being distracted or thrown off course by a thousand different influences. On the other hand, their naivety regarding the material value of their idea or its application may deprive them of the rewards of their labour or even cause them harm.

Creativity is a mental energy of unknown origin which overtakes the individual at often unexpected moments. It is a per se neutral energy. By its very nature, it is neither good nor bad. It is the individual, or rather their personality structure, which determines the direction in which this creative energy flows. The idea – the moment of realisation – is followed by development, realisation and the bringing of the idea into being in space and time. And it is precisely here, where an idea begins to take concrete form, that the creative person must not only ask themselves the following questions, but also be able to provide appropriate answers:

- What are my goals?
- What purpose does my creation serve?
- Who benefits from it?
- Who does it harm?
- What responsibility do I bear?

Creativity has been, and remains, of central importance to the evolution of humankind. Without creativity, we would probably no longer exist on Earth; conversely, with and through creativity, we may well be doomed. Where creativity has led us is a qualitative rather than a quantitative question. One that is not primarily aimed at the creative individuals themselves but embraces in particular the various

structures within humanity that have either permitted or rejected, encouraged or hindered creative output. It is a search for awareness, for meaning and purpose within political, economic, philosophical and psychological social structures.

There are countless historically documented examples of people being burned at the stake or banished because of their innovative views. Vast numbers of patents that never came to fruition. Countless ideas that never made it into the classroom. Myriads of innovations from which only a few benefit. We are currently living in a world that is changing rapidly and irrevocably, where nothing is as it seems. Technologies of unimaginable capacity are in the hands of a select few. Our thoughts and actions are constantly and increasingly influenced by these technologies. Our value system is being severely tested. We no longer know whom to believe or trust, who is guiding us and who is misleading us. A truly challenging situation, yet one which has a positive core: we are called upon to listen to our inner selves, to become creative in our own right, and to reorganise our lives for ourselves.

Creativity brings with it responsibility. Many creative people fail to live up to this reality. I would like to make special mention here of the many digital games and apps that can be purchased without restriction. Even the phenomenally rapidly expanding field of AI, which touches upon and transforms every area of our lives, is not in itself creative, but rather eclectic; its programmers, however, certainly are. There are plenty of voices raising the alarm and calling for restrictions. However, these calls are directed primarily at politicians and too little – or not at all – at the creative minds behind the technology.

Those in power co-opt creative people. As already mentioned, creative people are often naïve about the value and purpose of their creations, or about the responsibilities that come with them. They are lured with money, fame and titles, or coerced through threats and blackmail. None of this absolves creative people of their own responsibility. It is they who have produced the creative work. It is they who decide whether it should be pursued further or not. It is they who decide whether they wish to sell it on, pass it on or consign it to oblivion. The decision lies primarily with them, barring any death threats, blackmail or theft. No one should be expected to become a martyr. Yet many creative people allow themselves to be exploited all too easily for uncertain projects or inhumane activities.

The purpose and aim of creativity is individual or collective evolution. This evolution ought to lead, in accordance with moral and ethical principles, towards a meaningful life. Unfortunately, despite millennia of experience, humanity has still not achieved these objectives. Creativity should serve people in a positive sense and not harm them. And by using the word ‘should’, I am already suggesting that achieving this seems like a utopia. ‘The end justifies the means’ is a well-known saying which implies the legitimacy to do anything necessary to achieve the goal. And this legitimacy is claimed above all by those who employ unfair or destructive means. The associated purpose is disguised under a positive guise such as necessity (necessity demands it), the development and utilisation of resources, for the benefit and protection of humanity, research, etc., and rarely as a lucrative business. Creativity must not do anything simply to achieve a goal. In the wrong hands or under dubious leadership, creativity can be extremely harmful. Unfortunately, there are many such

examples, whether in global politics, various sectors of the economy or even cultural spheres. Many films and documents illustrate this ‘ends-justify-the-means’ behaviour in a very striking way. Unfortunately, human awareness has not improved significantly with regards to these processes, which often do not even take place in secret.

## The Request

Does every individual have the right to be creative and to market the resulting products as they see fit? Is ‘free will’ the supreme law? This is not the case in any country I am aware of. There are countless rules and laws that subject the individual to social norms. These norms correspond to the prevailing political, religious, cultural and social conventions. Added to this are interest groups which exert their influence right up to the highest political and legal bodies. Free will is curtailed and restricted from many quarters. And yet this freedom of will, which is also a freedom of consciousness, is a legitimate demand. Human beings have an inherent need to feel validated, be it in their abilities, needs or ideas.

Natural moral and ethical concerns arise if individual rights were to take precedence over collective rights. No one should be able or allowed to wilfully cause harm to the collective. Yet this is precisely what is becoming an established reality in our time. It is therefore necessary to set limits on the creativity of the individual. These limits, however, are not legal, political or social, but ethical. From the very outset, creativity must ask itself the crucial question of whether what is to be created aims to do good or harm, and whether the result will cause harm or be of benefit. Personal moral values must be scrutinised in this regard. What is my motivation for creating? What is the driving force behind the creative process? Who benefits from the creation? Who is harmed by it?

This critical approach is of paramount importance. Training in this area within institutions that promote creative work is essential. Such training should begin as early as nursery school, where, amongst other things, toys and stories incorporate ethical themes. In higher education institutions, it may already be too late, as moral foundations will have become firmly established and entrenched. And yet it is never too late to begin consciously fostering a sense of responsibility. Where seeds are sown, there is hope that a healthy plant will grow from them.

## The Conclusion

An individual’s right to their creativity must not and cannot be curtailed. It is an inherent part of their being and a human right to which they are entitled. The extent to which a creation should then be brought into local or global circulation is a crucial question that cannot be answered by legal or political laws and regulations. The market holds a monopoly here; it occupies a position of power. Decision-makers within the market segments determine whether a creation ultimately reaches the

market or not. The decision is taken out of the creative person's hands. And if a creation is further developed, it is not certain whether it will be made accessible to all or used in secret. If creative people voluntarily remain part of these processes, they are lured by money, fame and status – an extremely powerful force that is difficult to resist. Therefore, conscious education in morality and ethics is indispensable. I am fully aware that a neutral moral code, based on human rights, must first be actively practised. To illustrate this: the human rights, which were clearly and unambiguously set out by the United Nations (UN) on 10 December 1948, are not recognised or practised by all nations in our world.

Even the smallest, tiniest creation has within it the potential to become something great. Just as with the well-known butterfly effect[1], where a small, tiny flap of a wing can give rise to a tornado. Therefore, every creation must be subject to rigorous ethical scrutiny. Every creative person is called upon to ask themselves what motivates them and what purpose their actions serve. Such ethical behaviour would not prevent every malicious or harmful creation – that is to be expected – but it could at least reduce their scale.

People who act responsibly and in accordance with moral and ethical principles contribute to peace and well-being on our planet. Achieving the latter is not a utopian dream. If we all think, feel and act responsibly and with empathy, then this supposed utopia will soon become a reality.

I call on all creative people – whether in the fields of culture, art, technology, industry, the military, politics, etc. – to confront the questions of morality and ethics. I am not imposing any conditions regarding their decisions; however, raising the questions is urgent!

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