



Creativity in the Ancient Greek Philosophy: The Politics of *Demiourgein*

ABSTRACT

Where does creativity come from and what is its purpose? The paper revisits these ever-turning questions to correct the prevalent but, arguably, inaccurate historical interpretation of *creativity* as a concept that emerged in modernity. First, I substantiate that a close study of the ancient Greek texts suggests that although *creativity* seems to occupy a peripheral position in the ancient philosophical thinking, it is a central, yet, hidden, subject of speculation. Second, I overturn the worn-out view that the ancient Greek philosophy conceives *creativity* as a God-given talent breathed into a fortunate few. Last, I demonstrate that a more encompassing understanding of creativity is implied by several Greek philosophers. To achieve this, (a) I discuss the contemporary interpretations of the ancient notion; (b) I examine the historical origin and etymology of the Greek term *demiourgein* (“to create”) to discuss its relevant uses; and (c) I develop a nuanced framework for conceptualizing ancient creativity and its interrelation to human agency, politics, and social life.

Keywords: creativity, ancient Greek philosophy, emergence of creativity, history of creativity, conceptual evolution.

Even though a plurality of manifestations of human creativity, such as esthetic items, decorative pieces, tools, daily-use objects, and scientific ideas, has been displayed since the prehistoric times (Cropley, 2019), *creativity* is considered “a very modern concept” that came to signify the *ability* to bring something *new* into existence by a *human creator* (Mason, 2003; Storr, 1991). Several scholars have established that the history of the notion of creativity is very recent and emerges out of specific “historical moments shaped by the discourses of politics, science, commerce, and nation” (Nelson, 2010, p.1). Creativity is seen as a “child” of the current era (Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2019), the offspring of the modern capitalistic society (Weiner, 2000), and a reality of contemporary commercial democracies (Hartley, 2003).

According to this dominant modern narrative, the concept emerged in the 15th century and spread widely in the 18th century (Nelson, 2010; Weiner, 2000). It is often claimed that the term *creativity* first appeared in the English language in 1875 (Cropley, 2019) before entering the common vocabulary between 1934 and 1961 (Kriesteller, 1983; Nelson, 2010). Negus and Pickering (2004, p. 2) argue that it was only in the late 19th century that “creativity could be explicitly named as such” and Nelson (2010) explains that it was in the 1950s that the Anglo-American term *creativity* was imported into European languages, such as French and German. Further to this, Nelson (2010, p. 21) boldly states that “[...] in reality, the discourse of creativity is not even two hundred years old. It is more likely less [...] the important period for the formation of the discourse might even be the twentieth century.” This raises the paradoxical question: If the manifestations of creativity pre-exist modernity, what is the reason for this late date of the emergence of its conceptualization and discourse?

Reflecting on this enigma, another cohort of academics supports that the phenomenon and conceptualization of creativity have a longer tradition that can be traced back to ancient cultures, such as Egypt, Israel, India, China, and Ancient Greece (Cropley, 2019; Niu & Sternberg, 2006). However, there is limited research on the historicity, linguistic formations, and discursive constructions of creativity as well as their strong or looser connections to modern meanings. As a result, the term is often mistreated, and the notion remains ill-defined (Kriesteller, 1983).

Despite the poor philosophical and historical evidence regarding this concept, a few previous studies suggest that the first use of the term was a reference to Shakespeare’s poetic creativity in Adolphus William Ward’s *History of Dramatic English Literature* (Weiner, 2000, p. 89). Later, it is argued that the term was

used in 1927 by the philosopher Alfred North White in his work *Religion in the Making* and in 1929 in his publication *Process and Reality* (Kriesteller, 1983). Etymologically, the English term of creativity is derived from the verb “to create” and the hypothesized Indo-European root, *ker, kere* (to grow), via the Latin *creare* (Weiner, 2000). The dominant modern narrative is grounded on the premise that “there was no word equivalent in meaning to ‘create’ in Ancient Greek” (or, I suppose, in any other pre-modern Western or non-Western contexts!) (Nelson, 2010, p. 7). According to this reading, the only “word corresponding to *creation* and *creator* in ancient Greek is that for *invention* (*poiein*)” (Niu & Sternberg, 2006, p. 21), which, in fact,¹ can be better translated into *making*. Adding to this, Glăveanu and Kaufman (2019, p. 6) characteristically claim that “the Latin language, unlike Greek, had two separate words for *making* and *creating*, ‘*facere*’ and ‘*creare*,’” which suggests a significant difference between the divine and the human maker bringing us closer to the main point of the present paper.

The linguistic difference between the terms “*creare*” (create) and “*poiein*” (make) is highlighted by the advocates of the modern narrative as a reflection of the essence of the concept. Based on this account, from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, creativity was conceived as the outcome of an external to the human power, such as divine inspiration (Dacey, 1999; Kearney, 2009). However, this conception of creativity was challenged in the Renaissance and was completely replaced during the Enlightenment when the locus of creativity became the human subject (Albert & Runco, 1999; Hanchett Hanson, 2015). “The history of thinking about creativity can be largely seen as one of gradual individualization, starting from the Renaissance, accelerating during the Enlightenment and the Romantic period, and peaking within the neoliberal, capitalist societies of today” (Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2019, p. 14).

This paper looks at some of the early instances of the genealogical journey of creativity, in the Foucauldian sense of the term, with the aim to overturn the worn-out view that creativity is a modern concept and discursive construct. I aspire to show that multiple, overlapping and even contradictory ideas that can be traced back to some of the earliest philosophical discussions on this subject have given shape to the contemporary notion(s) and discourse(s) of creativity. Though, it is important to highlight here that my purpose is not to discover the roots of the concept or a unique threshold of its emergence—a homeland of the idea of creativity—but to elucidate the trajectory of its dissipation and subsequent contemporary discontinuities (Koopman, 2013). In essence, the paper aims to show that there are more continuities than we first imagine between ancient and modern understandings around this idea to argue that the notion of creativity is not completely and utterly modern, and thus unique to our era.

My aim was to investigate the philosophical heritage of the concept in the West focusing my attention on the ancient Greek world. By examining historical sources, linguistic formations, and literary/philosophical texts from the ancient Greeks, I shed some light on the theoretical inheritance of the concept, some of its early implications, functions, and interests. More specifically, I am interested in understanding how creativity was *perceived* in the ancient Greek culture. What did ancient Greek societies regard as creativity and how did they understand the *source, form, purpose, and domain* of creativity? My intention is neither to explore the manifestations, values, and acts of creativity in Greek antiquity, nor to discuss creative production processes, products, or individuals in antiquity but rather to explore how creativity was constructed through discourse. Therefore, I attempt an interpretive synthesis of what has been written about creativity by the ancient Greeks themselves to highlight the impact of these early perceptions in subsequent underlining conceptual and discursive evolutions, twists, and turns. As it is expected, my inquiry will be neither exhaustive, nor complete but rather indicative of the argument put forward.

First, I look at contemporary interpretations of the ancient understanding of creativity to demonstrate that the ancient Greek philosophical speculation into this notion was more multifaceted and sophisticated than what dominant scholarly accounts present. Second, I show that today’s understandings of creativity are based on diverse premises, meanings and perspectives that can be traced back to different ancient philosophical trajectories. Third, I correct the prevalent but inaccurate historical interpretation of *creativity* as a contemporary concept, discourse and phenomenon that emerged in modernity.

A careful genealogical examination of the notion of creativity could help us understand how cultural axioms, conceptualizations and discursive constructs inherited from the past have historically shaped current beliefs, understandings, and debates as well as contemporary creative practices, policies, and institutions.

¹ Based on my fluent knowledge of the Greek language as well as leading Greek dictionaries and sources.

CREATIVITY AS PATHOS: THE HETERONOMOUS MODEL OF CREATIVE PRAXIS AND THE CREATIVE GENIUS RHETORIC

Remarks about creativity have always seemed secondary in the Greek philosophical thinking. However, readers can engage with this notion in ancient texts concerned with aesthetics, such as poetry, painting, theater, literature, and music (Cropley, 2016), theology (O'Brien, 2015) and limited secondary literature that explores analogous semantic fields, such as *imagination*, *inspiration*, *virtue*, *novelty*, *innovation*, and *originality* (D'Angour, 2011; Gaut & Kieran, 2018).

How and why do we create? This is the philosophical question underlying my investigation into the ancient Greek texts. A common pattern found in the philosophical engagement of the ancient Greeks with the idea of creativity is its relation to individual praxis. *Does creativity come from individual agency or is it externally inspired?* To enable a critical evaluation of the prevailing interpretations of the ancient Greek understanding of creativity, a *praxis theory* framework is developed.

The dominant reading of the ancient Greek texts suggests that humans are too vulnerable to autonomously act and take personal responsibility for their deeds since external forces that lay beyond human control direct and limit human action (Rader, 2009). This rather deterministic interpretation of human agency is grounded on the popular view that humans are viewed as passive marionettes in the ancient Greek literature and philosophy, lacking consciousness, personal autonomy or free will because Gods intervene in mortals' lives and dictate human destinies (Müller, 2016; Snell, 1946). In short, individual action is *heteronomous* since it is directed by supernatural and unseen powers that are merely assumed or imposed on humans. Consequently, creativity, as the outcome or process of individual action is also understood as heteronomous and other-directed; external intervention limits how and what humans create. The embedded emphasis on the heteronomous creative theorization in the ancient philosophy can be summarized, in my interpretation, in three prominent themes that work in parallel to construct the prevailing *Creative Genius* rhetoric: (a) divinity; (b) spiritual inspiration; and (c) madness. The resilient rhetoric of the *Creative Genius* suggests that creativity is a special quality found only in a tiny number of individuals. Let's unpack the three prominent themes that construct the *Creative Genius* rhetoric.

THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE

The dominant view about the ancient Greek conceptualization of creativity is grounded on a cosmic worldview. Based on the belief that all things exist independently of human action, the ancient Greek creativity is understood as of divine origin; creativity emanates from one God or multiple Gods (Niu & Sternberg, 2006). This suggests that humans cannot bring something new into being; only God(s) do(oes).

In this perspective, creativity is a rare attribute that lays outside the human and is externally "inserted into," "sent down to," or "breathed into" the minds of a small number of exceptional individuals by higher powers. Creativity, thus, involves the impact of supernatural forces on individual capacity (Tsanoff, 1949). A creative person is divinely gifted with extraordinary abilities that enable them to make novel things (Cropley, 1967). Being capable of making original things is a heaven-sent talent, a special aptitude granted by an abstract power with the aim to communicate symbolic messages to the mortals (Albert & Runco, 1999).

Homer is probably the first writer to imply this idea in *Illiad* (630 BC) when he describes Hephaestus, the God of smithy, crafting Achilles' shield (Weiner, 2000). Plato also talks about the divine source of creativity in his major dialogue *Phaedrus* (370 BC/2003), where he has Socrates revealing his thoughts on poetic inspiration to Phaedrus.

My breast is full, you might say, my friend, and I feel that I could add to what Lysias said on the subject [of love], and do no worse than he did too. But awareness of my own ignorance makes me certain that I didn't gain any of these ideas from my own resources, and so the only alternative, it seems to me, is that I have been filled, like a jug, by streams flowing from elsewhere through my ears. But I've actually forgotten – under the influence of my stupidity again – how and from whom I heard them.

Πληρὲς πως, ὃ δαίμονιε, τὸ στήθος ἔχων αἰσθάνομαι παρὰ ταῦτα ἂν ἔχειν εἰπεῖν ἕτερα μὴ χεῖρω. ὅτι μὲν οὖν παρὰ γε ἑμαυτοῦ οὐδὲν αὐτῶν ἐννεόηκα, εὖ οἶδα, συνειδῶς ἑμαυτῷ ἀμαθίαν· λείπεται δὴ οἶμαι ἐξ ἄλλοτριῶν ποθὲν ναμάτων διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς πεπληρωσθῆναι με δικὴν ἀγγείου. ὑπὸ δὲ νοθείας αὖ καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐπιλέλησμαι, ὅπως τε καὶ ὄντινων ἦκουσα.

Plato, Phaedrus, 235c-d

In this tradition, creativity is brought out only through the intervention of inexplicable forces and acts as a communication tool at the hands of God(s). For example, Glăveanu and Kaufman (2019) envision the Greek Gods enjoying life on Mount Olympus while projecting ideas to mortals. In this sense, creators were the uniquely chosen messengers of higher powers (Cropley, 2016). This is an idea that is met again in Plato's *Ion* (380 BC/1984).

[...] not by art does the poet sing, [...] but by power divine [...] God takes away the minds of poets, and uses them as his ministers [...] God himself is the speaker, and that through them he is conversing with us. [...] In this way, the God would seem to indicate to us and not allow us to doubt that these beautiful poems are not human, or the work of man, but divine and the work of God; and that the poets are only the interpreters of the Gods by whom they are severally possessed.

[...] ἄτε οὖν οὐ τέχνη ποιῶντες, [...] ἀλλὰ θεῖα μοῖρα [...] διὰ ταῦτα δὲ ὁ θεὸς ἐξαιρούμενος τούτων τὸν νοῦν τοῦτοις χρῆται ὑπηρέταις [...] ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ λέγων, διὰ τούτων δὲ φθέγγεται πρὸς ἡμᾶς, [...] ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ δὴ μάλιστα μοι δοκεῖ ὁ θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι ἡμῖν, ἵνα μὴ διστάζωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἀνθρώπινά ἐστιν τὰ καλὰ ταῦτα ποιήματα οὐδὲ ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ θεῖα καὶ θεῶν, οἱ δὲ ποιηταὶ οὐδὲν ἀλλ' ἢ ἐρμηνῆς εἰσιν τῶν θεῶν, κατεχόμενοι ἐξ ὅτου ἂν ἕκαστος κατέχεται.

Plato, *Ion*, 534c-e

This reading differentiates the creative person from the average and sees the creative individual as “a breed apart from mere mortals” (Cropley, 2019, p. 12). Creativity is reserved for a limited number of individuals and creators are to be distinguished from ordinary artisans or public servants; creators are the privileged and precious messengers of God(s). In fact, poets could publicly claim that the content of their creative ideas derive directly from a superhuman level, legitimizing, in this way, their work, expertise and social role (Giardini, 2020). Due to this divine communication, creators in the ancient Greek world were admired, praiseworthy and highly regarded in their society. They were recipients of social recognition and status, financial support but also wider public tolerance (Wittkower & Wittkower, 1969).

The divine account implies that creativity in the ancient Greek world was not conceived as a human act but as a manifestation of an outside spirit. Creative greatness could only be achieved intermittently through divine agency (Stern-Gillet, 2004). Humans couldn't create and couldn't learn to create (Niu & Sternberg, 2006); they could only follow God's ready-made instructions. Individuals were seen only as a conduit, a “jag” to be filled. They were vulnerable God-led *makers* lacking creative motivation, agency, and responsibility (Kottler, 2006). Based on this reading, the *source* of creativity points outside of the person to the supreme and unparalleled creative power of the God(s) and the *nature* of creativity is mystical, a prerogative heavenly ability and divine manifestation (Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2019).

THE MUSE-INSPIRED PRINCIPLE

In the ancient Greek world, some authors would argue, there wasn't only one God or the concept of the “God's creation” (Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2019; Tatarkiewicz, 1977). Ancient Greeks had a Polytheistic religion system and held the belief that there are many divine forces from where things originate (Niu & Sternberg, 2006). In the case of creativity, new ideas were also seen as being transmitted to the individual not only through the Olympian Gods but also through the mediation of the Muses, some mysterious mythological entities who were generally defined as the *Goddesses of Inventions*. The Muses were the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne and were perceived as supernatural female deities that acted as an intermediary for the Gods and as the main source of creative inspiration for humans providing them with endless original ideas (Tatarkiewicz, 1977).

Although there are various stories about the origin, nature, number, and role of the Muses, the most popular view coming from Hesiod suggests that there were nine Muses in Greek antiquity, each of whom presided over a different domain of human creativity.²³ These inspirational Goddesses were responsible for

² Even though the Muses were conceptualized as separate entities, they functioned as one and they were all jointly associated with creative inspiration (Porter, 2010).

³ Calliope (the chief Muse) was the source of inspiration for epic and heroic poetry, whereas Erato was behind the inspiration for love poetry. Euterpe was the Muse for music and lyric poetry and Polymnia was responsible for inspiring new songs, mime, and hymns. Terpsichore was the Muse of dance, Melpomene was associated to tragedy and Thalia to comedy. Last, Clío was the Muse for history and Urania for astronomy.

spiritually guiding a few fortunate individuals to make things that an ordinary person wouldn't know how to make (Weiner, 2000). Creativity, thus, wasn't a skill to be obtained; it could only be "put in one's mind" or "planted into one's heart" by the analogical Muse.

The first reference to the *Muse* can be found in Homer's famous opening lines in *Illiad* and *Odyssey* "Sing in me, Muse... so that this song can be sung." Homer typically begins his poetic creations with a cry; an invocation; a plea to the Muses. This isn't just an invitation for guidance but a request for the Muse's presence in his own mind, body, and soul. Cook (2013, p. 7) comments: "He could have asked the Muses to sing the story *to* him, but he begs them to sing *in* him instead, and his words express a desire to become the channel for the Muse-song so that he might convey that which seems to exist externally from himself." The invocation to the Muses is a form of pray for divine intervention and heavenly blessing. But it is also a plea for possession of the creator's self that forges a rare and intense relationship between the Muse and the creator. In most cases, Homer's Muse is invisible, abstract, and omnipresent; she can see and hear everything (von Solms, 2003).

In Homeric tradition, the creator seems as dependent to the power of the Muse. Poets are depicted as the narrators of the events that Zeus causes and the Muse acts as the eyewitness who guarantees the song's truthfulness to the audience (Puccio, 2017). It is important to highlight here that Mnemosyne, the Muses' mother name, means *memory*. The Muses inherit the gift of witnessing and transmitting past events from their parents so that mortals can learn from history; they achieve this by offering the creator wisdom, knowledge as well as complex details about events that the poet has never experienced (Ustinova, 2012). Therefore, Homer praises the Muses as Goddesses who hold the truth about past events contrary to mortals who cannot know anything: "Tell me now, you Muses, who have dwellings on Olympus—for you are goddesses, and are present, and know all things, but we hear only a rumor and know nothing [...]" ("ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι: ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαὶ ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα, ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδὲ τι ἴδμεν [...]" (Illiad 2.484-486).

Similar ideas about the necessary role of the Muses in the creative process can be found in Hesiod's *Theogony* (730–700 BC/1999). Hesiod's Muses resemble the Nymphs of the wild forests and dwell on Mount Olympus (Ustinova, 2012). The Muses for Hesiod are "mistresses of words," who act as mentors for the poets and teach them the art of fine singing but also reveal stories about the life on Olympus. In contrast to the Homeric tradition, the Muses in Hesiod are visible, intimate, and tangible. They become rustic and sensual, and they physically interact with the creator. The contact of the creator with the Muses is seen as the guarantee of truthfulness for the poet's narration of events and a means to establish credibility (Cook, 2013).

Next, we find the proposition of the Muse-inspired creativity in the work of Pindar (1968, 1978), whose first lines in his odes usually start with a reference to the Muses. For example, in his Nemean Odes (Poem 4, Line 1, 4.1), he states: "The best healer for struggles of pain . . . is happiness; and wise songs, daughters of the Muses, stroke one with hands of gentleness" ("ἄριστος εὐφροσύνα πόνων κεκριμένων ἰατρός: αἱ δὲ σοφαὶ Μοισᾶν θύγατρεις αἰοῖδαὶ θέλξαν νιν ἀπτόμεναι"). In the ancient texts, Pindar explains that he receives the Muses' creative ideas and then shapes them to share them with the mortals and say something new. For instance, in his Olympian Odes (Poem 3, Line 1, 3.1), he clarifies: "Even so, I ween, hath the Muse stood beside me, when I found out a fashion that is still bright and new" ("Μοῖσα δ' οὕτω ποι παρέστα μοι νεοσίγαλον εὐρόντι τρόπον").

The Muses are also presented as the primary source for poetic inspiration in several of Plato's work.

Plato in *Ion* believes that creativity shouldn't be accredited to the individual because (s)he is only a carrier of "sweet sounds," the Muses' mouthpiece and a "servant" of the Gods.

[...] In the same manner also the Muse inspires men herself, and then by means of these inspired persons the inspiration spreads to others, and holds them in a connected chain. [...]

For the poets tell us, I believe, that the songs they bring us are the sweets they cull from honey-dropping founts in certain gardens and glades of the Muses—like the bees, and winging the air as these do.

[...] οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἡ Μοῦσα ἐνθέουσι μὲν ποιεῖ αὐτή, διὰ δὲ τῶν ἐνθέων τούτων ἄλλων ἐνθουσιαζόντων ὄρμαθος ἐξαρτᾶται [...] ὅπερ αὐτοὶ λέγουσι. λέγουσι γὰρ δῆπουθεν πρὸς ἡμᾶς οἱ ποιηταὶ ὅτι ἀπὸ κρηνῶν μελιρρῦτων ἐκ Μουσῶν κήπων τινῶν καὶ ναπῶν δρεπόμενοι τὰ μέλη ἡμῖν φέρουσιν ὥσπερ αἱ μέλιττα, καὶ αὐτοὶ οὕτω πετόμενοι.

Plato, Ion, 533d-534b

Creators don't have self-directed knowledge; they are only possessed by the Muses who leave them bereft of reason but enrich their senses to make things they otherwise couldn't achieve through mere human skill (Weiner, 2000). Or, in *Phaedrus*, we find similar ideas:

[...] for my part, Phaedrus, I can only blame this on the local deities, and perhaps the Muses' representatives who are singing over our heads might also have breathed this gift into us, because I certainly don't have any expertise at speaking.

[...] καὶ ἔγωγε, ὦ Φαίδρε, αἰτιῶμαι τοὺς ἐντοπίους θεοὺς· ἴσως δὲ καὶ οἱ τῶν Μουσῶν προφήται οἱ ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς ᾧδοὶ ἐπιπεπνευκότες ἂν ἡμῖν εἶεν τοῦτο τὸ γέρας· οὐ γάρ που ἔγωγε τέχνης τινὸς τοῦ λέγειν μέτοχος.

Plato, Phaedrus, 262d

In short, the Muses are mysterious deities that are rarely seen but whose silent presence is powerfully felt (Cook, 2013). Their visitations are brief and gently; they offer a moment of epiphany, whisper a story, and enable humans to tell an original tale. This reliance on the Muses offers not only a privileged status to creators but also reliability. Based on the Muse-inspired principle, creativity remains subordinate to spiritual inspiration and is externally controlled (Weiner, 2000). There is no conscious human mind responsible for the creative outcome. In this reading, the creator is still a passive instrument, who holds no individual knowledge or capabilities. Therefore, individual creative appetites can be equally constructive and destructive depending on the alignment of the creative execution to the Muse's call (Albert & Runco, 1999). As it is often claimed, the Muses would not tolerate blasphemy. A creative impulse beyond the external will of the Muses could be regarded as evil, potentially dangerous to society or immoral (Weiner, 2000). In those cases, creators would be punished or excluded from the state (Murray, 1981; Plato, 375 BC/2007).

THE MADNESS PRINCIPLE

Last, ancient Greek creativity is frequently read as madness making the connection between creative genius and psychopathology popular throughout history (Kaufman, 2005; Koh, 2006; Post, 1994; Rothenberg, 1990; Trilling, 1950). Even though the modern notion of madness wasn't familiar to the Greeks (Maieron, 2017), we identify the term *mania* in some important texts including Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Plato's *Phaedrus*, *Ion* and *Timaeus*.

The concept of *mania* covers a wide range of conditions that deviate from an ordinary state of consciousness, such as passionate manifestations of inner feelings, disturbances of conscience, states of ecstasy, trance and loss of consciousness (Maieron, 2017) but also mental illness, demonic possession and melancholia (Becker, 2001). Mania was conceived as a particular abnormal mental state imposed by exterior divine sources during which a rare form of revelation, *ethousiasmos*, could be achieved (Ustinova, 2012). More precisely, creative madness was seen as a dispossession of human rationality (Gaut, 2012) that cancels the poet's intentional thoughts (*διάνοια*) (Weineck, 1998). Ustinova (2012) uses the visual representation of Aeschylus in the *Frogs* as a madman rolling his eyes in a terrible frenzy to suggest that creators for ancient Greeks were "no longer aware of themselves" but "violently excited" when making art.

Plato also talks about an "inspired madness" and a "divine frenzy," without which any creative attempt would remain hollow and transient (Weineck, 1998). In *Ion*, for instance, Socrates contends that rhapsody is created in a state of possession from a demon devoid of reason, knowledge, and skill.

[...] just as the Corybantian worshippers do not dance when in their senses, so the lyric poets do not indite those fine songs in their senses, but when they have started on the melody and rhythm they begin to be frantic, and it is under possession—as the bacchants are possessed, and not in their senses, when they draw honey and milk from the rivers—that the soul of the lyric poets does the same thing, by their own report [...] For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer with him; their intellect is not in them [...]

[...] ὡσπερ οἱ κορυβαντιῶντες οὐκ ἔμφρονες ὄντες ὄρχονται, οὕτω καὶ οἱ μελοποιοὶ οὐκ ἔμφρονες ὄντες τὰ καλὰ μέλη ταῦτα ποιῶσιν, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴν ἐμβῶσιν εἰς τὴν ἁρμονίαν καὶ εἰς τὸν ῥυθμόν, βακχεύουσι καὶ κατεχόμενοι, ὡσπερ αἱ βάκχαι ἀρύονται ἐκ τῶν ποταμῶν μέλι καὶ γάλα κατεχόμεναι, ἔμφρονες δὲ οὐσα οὐ, καὶ τῶν μελοποιοῶν ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦτο ἐργάζεται, ὅπερ αὐτοὶ λέγουσι [...] κούφον γὰρ χρῆμα ποιητῆς ἐστὶν καὶ πτηνὸν καὶ ἱερόν, καὶ οὐ πρότερον οἶός τε ποιεῖν πρὶν ἂν ἔνθεός τε γένηται καὶ ἔκφρων καὶ ὁ νοῦς μηκέτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνῆ· ἔως δ' ἂν τοῦτι ἔχη τὸ κτῆμα [...]

Plato, *Ion*, 534a-d

In *Phaedrus*, creativity is also discussed as madness, which...

[...] takes hold of a delicate, virgin soul and stirs it into a frenzy for composing lyric and other kinds of poetry, and so educates future generations by glorifying the countless deeds of the past. But he who without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good poet by art, meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madmen.

[...] λαβούσα ἀπαλὴν καὶ ἄβατον ψυχὴν, ἐγείρουσα καὶ ἐκβακχεύουσα κατὰ τε ᾠδὰς καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ποίησιν, μυρία τῶν παλαιῶν ἔργα κοσμοῦσα τοὺς ἐπιγιγνομένους παιδεύει ὅς δ' ἂν ἄνευ μανίας Μουσῶν ἐπὶ ποιητικὰς θύρας ἀφίκηται, πεισθεὶς ὡς ἄρα ἐκ τέχνης ἱκανὸς ποιητῆς ἐσόμενος, ἀτελής αὐτός τε καὶ ἡ ποίησις ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν μαινομένων ἢ τοῦ σωφρονούντος ἠφανίσθη.

Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245a

Further, Aristotle in the *Problemata* (953a10) argues that “all extraordinary men in philosophy, or politics, or poetry or the arts are evidently melancholic” (“Διὰ τί πάντες ὅσοι περιττοὶ γεγονασιν ἄνδρες ἢ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ἢ πολιτικὴν ἢ ποίησιν ἢ τέχνας φαίνονται μελαγχολικοὶ ὄντες”). Or, as Langsdorf (1900, p. 90) puts it, Aristotle understands creativity as a “tincture of madness” without which no great genius has ever existed (Karp, 1984). Also, Plutarch in his description of Archimedes, the great geometrician, comments:

[...] how, continually bewitched by some familiar siren dwelling within him, he forgot his food and neglected the care of his body, and how, when he was dragged by force, as often happened, to the place for bathing and anointing, he could draw geometrical figures in the oil with which his body was anointed, being overcome by great pleasure and in truth inspired of the muse.

(Plutarch cited in Eysenck, 1995, p. 126)

The dominant “mad genius” principle implies that madness is the sole guarantor of creativity’s greatness (Dietrich, 2014; Kyaga et al., 2011). It is this creative instability that makes creators extraordinary urging them to think and act inventively and imaginatively. Creators blessed with holy madness experience a temporary, incomprehensible, and uncontrolled condition; they receive a secret and superior knowledge through an episodic contact with the divine sphere (Giardini, 2020). Hence, creative madness is again perceived as the outcome of heteronomous action and control; human creators are not aware of what is happening in the moments of mad inspiration and cannot claim authority of their work. When in the state of *enthousiasmos*, the creator is out of their senses, in an exalted conduct. Creativity can only be attainable in these undefinable, parodic, and mysterious states of mind (Becker, 2001; Rosen, 1969). Thus, creators cannot dispose creativity at will and do not have the ability to repeat the act of creating (Giardini, 2020). In other words, the madness account views creativity not as the outcome of rational deliberation, systematic learning, or dialectic inquiry but as a form of externally imposed frenzy revelation (Ustinova, 2012).

The *Creative Genius* rhetoric that has given shape to the modern Western concept of exceptional creativity—an ability that is rare, extraordinary, and special—is grounded on the heteronomous creative praxis model. In this reading, subjects cannot create by themselves. Creativity can be only obtained externally from outside forces and not from the self; it is something that remains subordinate to outwardly imposed inspiration (Weiner, 2000). Thus, the creative process cannot be initiated, performed, or controlled by the creator, and, consequently, individuals aren’t responsible for their creations (Stokes, 2008). In short, creativity is a received *experience*; it is a *pathos* brought to the subject not necessarily with their will, intention, or

agreement. Creativity only *happens* to someone suddenly, temporarily, and unpredictably (Schlesinger, 2009), often in dreams or reveries (Stokes, 2008). In this *passive* reading of creative praxis, the subject receives an action from someone else (*heteros*) and creativity becomes an external undertaking. Creativity can only be viewed as supernatural, crazy, and abnormal, something that has little to do with human agency, everyday life, and community (Cropley, 2016).

In my view, this conventional interpretation provides us only with a few superficial misconceptions of the ancient understanding, which can be overturned by disclosing a hidden fate of the ancient Greeks in the socio-political dimension of creativity. Please let me elaborate on another less discussed rhetoric.

THE NOTION OF *DEMIOURGEIN* AND THE PUBLIC WORKER RHETORIC

Although it has not been broadly discussed yet, the notion of creativity in the modern Greek language is conveyed through the linguistic construct of “δημιουργικότητα,” which has its origins in the ancient Greek term *δημιουργός*, infrequently found in some texts of Homer, Plato and Aristotle amongst others. The etymology of *δημιουργός* (*dēmiourgós*) is rooted in the words *δημος* (*dēmios*, public) + *ἔργον* (*érgon*, labor, work), connoting the *worker* for the *people*.⁴ The concept of *demiourgos* and its relationship to creativity has not been studied before. The deepest studies of the notion come from Van den Oudenrijn (1951), Murakawa (1957), and Jeffery (1974) who attempt to examine the socio-political function of this category in the ancient Greek world. More specifically, Van den Oudenrijn uses literary and epigraphical sources to explore the use of the notion in three main periods: the Homeric society, the Age of Colonization, and the Classical Times. Jeffery explores the early history of *demiourgoi* when the term referred mainly to highly ranked magistrates, while Murakawa studies literary passages, epigraphical evidence, and inscriptions of the fifth century and earlier to explore the former social function of *demiourgoi*.

From these studies, it has been established that in Homeric society, the term *demiourgos* indicates “a man who does things for the whole people, not only for his own *oikos*” (Visser, 1956). The term appears twice in *Odyssey*. The first mention comes from Eumaeus when he sees Odysseus entering the palace (17.382): “Whoever seeks out and invites a stranger from abroad, unless he were one of those that are *demiourgoi*, a seer or a healer of ills or a builder or an inspired bard who can delight all with his songs? These are the men that are welcome all over the boundless earth” (“τίς γὰρ δὴ ξείνον καλεῖ ἄλλοθεν αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν ἄλλον γ’, εἰ μὴ τῶν οἱ δημιουργοὶ ἔασι, μάντιν ἢ ἰητῆρα κακῶν ἢ τέκτονα δούρων, ἢ καὶ θέσπιν ἄοιδόν, ὃ κεν τέρπησιν ἀείδων; οὗτοι γὰρ κλητοὶ γε βροτῶν ἐπ’ ἀπείρονα γαῖαν”). Later, Penelope also implies that heralds belong to a special category of *demiourgoi*, and, therefore, should be treated with respect and fed like strangers and suppliants (19.135). From these two early remarks, we assume that the notion of *demiourgos* could refer to two key ideas. First, the concept denotes a skillful artisan in Homeric society (Francotte, 1916; Guiraud, 1900; Waltz, 1914). *Demiourgoi* were professional, skilled in an art or craft men, specialists of public things, such as singers, poets, soothsayers, physicians, priests, heralds, bards, or healers (Finley, 1954). Second, it refers to anyone “performing a public function,” no matter their social or economic class; *demiourgos* could be “anyone who works for a community” (Murakawa, 1957). For example, Homer describes Odysseus as the master of creation when he crafts the couple’s bed, but also mentions that heralds and high-ranking statesmen are *demiourgoi*.

In later Greek texts, *demiourgos* primarily means a craftsman that can be applicable to various occupations, such as carpenters, woodworkers, potters, bakers, cooks, seers, butchers, smiths, or gilders (Durand, 1980; Glotz, 1926; Schoeffer, 1901). As Jeffery explains, *demiourgoi* were “skilled workers of public things,” or, as Visser puts it, “artisans or men who exercised professions socially rated on the same footing as trade and handicraft.” Similarly, Sophocles in *Ajax* (440 BC/1984) interprets this notion as artisans or workers and Aristophanes in *Peace* (421 BC/1900) uses the adjective *demiourgikos* (creative) to refer to Hermes, the God of inventions.

During the Archaic period, and especially in the Classical Age, there is an evident proliferation of the “craftsman class” and *demiourgoi* (Palmer, 1955). For example, Plutarch in *Theseus* (cited in Figueira, 1984) explains that *demiourgoi*, in this period, become very popular and, according to Thomson (1949), the rise of *demiourgoi* lies on the increase of productivity after the appearance of metal utensils, the interchange of commodities and the craftsmen expert skills, which were much needed by the community. In addition, Stewart’s analysis (Stewart, 2016) demonstrates that during this period, there is a commodification of poetry and expert artisans start offering their services as commercial goods in the market. This growing number

⁴ For a detailed semantic analysis of the term, you can refer to Bader (1965).

and popularity of demoiourgoi in conjunction with the realization of their economic power enhances their socio-political role (Van den Oudenrijn, 1951). In the sixth cen. B.C., the term denotes craftsmen as well as officials in charge of public affairs and from the fifth to the second centuries B.C. demoiourgoi become involved in the management of public cults and festivities. It is, therefore, argued that state officials adopted the appellation of craftsmen because of their social appeal, economic prosperity, and political power (Murakawa, 1957). In short, demoiourgoi are seen as honorable members of the community, who are experts in a creative field and in charge of works of public interest.

Further, Plato's *Republic* (375 BC/2007) and *Timaeus* (360 BC/2008) in contrary to *Ion* and *Phaedrus*, provide a picture of poetic creativity as a skill comparable with the craft skills that are useful to the state. Plato's initial idea here is that the creator of the cosmos is a *demiourgos*, who works upon pre-existing material and makes the world according to eternal ideas. The world maker is not a divine genius but an ordinary craftsman in the service of the people. Plato's portrayal of demoiourgos reminds us of a busy artificer, who constantly molds and shapes the cosmos. However, he can never achieve a perfect imitation of the eternal ideal archetypes; his job is endless, relentlessly revising, mending, and repairing his creation (Crites, 1979).

[...] but when the *artificer/creator* of any object, in forming its shape and quality, keeps his gaze fixed on that which is uniform, using a model of this kind, that object, executed in this way, must of necessity be beautiful; but whenever he gazes at that which has come into existence and uses a created model, the object thus executed is not beautiful.

[...] ὅτου μὲν οὖν ἂν ὁ δημιουργός πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ταῦτ' ἔχον βλέπων αἰεὶ, τοιούτῳ τινὶ προσχρόμενος παραδείγματι, τὴν ιδέαν καὶ δύναμιν αὐτοῦ ἀπεργάζηται, καλὸν ἐξ ἀνάγκης οὕτως ἀποτελεῖσθαι πᾶν· οὐ δ' ἂν εἰς γεγονός, γεννητῶ παραδείγματι προσχρόμενος, οὐ καλόν.
Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a-b

This image of demoiourgos emphasizes the active role of the creator. Demourgein is not a passive process, it is the constant engagement with ideas and the prodigious act of crafting. Hence, creators actively mold and shape, make decisions, redirect, and pull things together. Gradually, Plato adapts the term *demiourgos* to mean an ordinary producer, builder and designer applied to the everyday world (O'Brien, 2015). More specifically, in *Timaeus* (360 BC/2008) and in *Kritias* (433 BC/2008), Plato argues that demoiourgos is a public skilled workman, an ordinary handicraftsman who works for the city. Kalkavage (2000, p.16) explains that the Platonic understanding of the creator is built on "a humble, everyday word and refers to anyone who crafts anything whatsoever." In this reading, the creators and poets could be seen as everyday skilled craftsmen in charge of and responsible for their works.

[...] but he, in the first place, set all these in order, and then out of these he constructed this present universe, one single living creature containing within itself all living creatures both mortal and immortal. And he himself acts as the *creator* of things divine, but the structure of the mortal things he commanded his own engendered sons to *create*.

[...] ἀλλὰ πάντα ταῦτα πρῶτον διεκόσμησεν, ἔπειτ' ἐκ τούτων πᾶν τότε συνεστήσατο, ζῶον ἐν ζῶῳ ἔχον τὰ πάντα ἐν ἑαυτῷ θνητὰ ἀθάνατά τε. καὶ τῶν μὲν θεῶν αὐτὸς γίγνεται δημιουργός, τῶν δὲ θνητῶν τὴν γένεσιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ γεννήμασιν δημιουργεῖν προσέταξεν.
Plato, *Timaeus*, 69c

Aristotle in *Politics* (350 BC/1981) indicates that the term denotes a high-ranking statesman responsible for public duties, such as judges, theoroi, proxenoi, presbeis (Jeffery, 1974). Demoiourgein for Aristotle is a form of intellectual virtue, a rationally driven and goal-directed attempt for socially oriented novelty (Gaut, 2012; Wolff, 2008). For example, in his *Poetics* (330 BC/1996), Aristotle implies that creativity can only be brought out through the employment of particular means, tools and strategies, leaving behind the idea of divine inspiration. For Aristotle, the source of creativity is the human nature. Human beings are born with *ἐμφυτα* (innate) traits but are also capable of acquiring *ἐπίκτητα* (acquired) traits through effort, reflection, and education (Richard, 1970). In my interpretation, Aristotle understands creativity as something more complex, a "symfoito" trait (Lypourlis, 2006), something that we are not born with or that is not acquired externally but coexists with us and can be brought out naturally through *ἑξις* (*hexes, habit*)

(McNally, 1971), the repeated practice of the appropriate action that fuels an active knowing already at work within us and allows us to develop the necessary technical skills under the guidance of rational thought (Pollitt, 1998; Rodrigo, 2014). Creativity, in this sense, in as aptitude brought out through a series of improvisations and improvements.

Through time, the etymological base of *dēmiourgein* developed in three interrelating directions. *Dēmiourgos* came to refer to an everyday craftsman; a magistrate in several Greek states; and the original creator of the cosmos.⁵ The common thread underlying this triplet interpretation is the idea of creating something new for a social purpose. In the first two secular cases, demoiurgoi are highly skilled, free, and indispensable members of the society who are frequently based beyond the boundary of the local community (Francotte, 1916; Murakawa, 1957). As regular practitioners of a specialist skill, they are considered professionals artisans and their services get widely in demand (Stewart, 2016). The specialist nature of their creative skills is also demonstrated by the fact that not all communities have these expert craftsmen; hence, demoiurgoi are called from abroad as “public workers,” whose particular beneficial skills can contribute greatly to the community.

In return for their beneficial services, demoiurgoi receive hospitality, special status, in kind rewards and financial gain (though material rewards are not the main motivation behind their work). This professional identity of demoiourgos emphasizes their valuable specialist skills, their continuous labor and their personal input in the service provided. Demoiourgein, thus, becomes a source of honor, claim and respect in the ancient society (Stewart, 2016). From that, we infer that *creators* in the ancient Greek world are not only seen as God-led artists and makers but also as knowledgeable experts who actively work on their ideas to produce something new and valuable for the community.

These three narratives of demoiourgos—everyday craftsman, magistrate, world creator—shape the *Public Worker Rhetoric*, which provides an alternative understanding of the *source, form, purpose, and domain* of creativity. Creativity is seen here as demoiourgein: a human action that is socio-politically driven, inseparable from craft traditions and directly linked to ordinary practice. In this reading, the creator’s abilities are not conceived as a divine gift but as a combination of character, intelligence and hard work that allows individuals to develop expert skills through regular practice and training, through continuous effort, reflection, and strategic decision-making. Most importantly, the notion of demoiourgos reveals the social-political nature of creativity for the ancient Greeks and their consciousness of belonging to a community, something that hasn’t been highlighted before; creativity is seen as a social good that reinforced the communal feeling. Murakawa (1957, pp. 408) characteristically claims: “The wide spread of the word ‘demiourgos’ shows how intensely the earlier Greeks felt about the fact of their community. The craftsmen were not called by a term which contains, for example, the words ‘hand’ or ‘technique’ as component parts, but by a term which stressed that they were part of the community.” Adding to this, this socio-political orientation of the concept of demoiourgein reveals, in my view, the *intentional* and *conscious* nature of creativity for the ancient Greeks, which remains rarely discussed today.

Essentially, the *Public Worker Rhetoric* offers an alternative answer to the question of authorship regarding the creative praxis: To what extent is the individual responsible for the creative outcome in the ancient Greek world? Is creativity a suffering or a self-willed action? Is it something that happens to us (*pathos*) or something that we actively and intentionally do (*perform*)?

CREATIVITY AS ENERGEIA: THE MODERN DISCOURSE OF CREATIVITY AND THE SELF-GOVERNING MODEL OF CREATIVE PRAXIS

How does the modern idea of creativity differ from previous conceptualizations? The main assumption underlying the modern discourse highlights that in modernity the locus of creativity, in contrast to previous creative theorizations, becomes the individual (Hanchett Hanson, 2015). Building on Foucault, scholars supporting the modern emergence of the concept, suggest that in early modernity—what has been widely understood as the *Age of Reason*—the human subject for the first time is seen as a self-governing and self-controlled entity. Modernity is an age of secularization, atomization, and reflection where the line between divine and human is blurred, and the reflective and imaginative abilities are relocated from God to the individual mind (Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2019; Nelson, 2010). The absence of substantial determinants—God(s), Muses, faith, state, family, etc.—means that the self-governing individual is fully responsible for the human’s narrative. Under the influence of the Enlightenment, people begin to exalt individual capacities,

⁵ This paper is not intended to concentrate on the richness of the philosophical inquiry into the third theological perspective.

powers, and rights to formulate knowledge and direct their destiny (Albert & Runco, 1999; Szczepanski, 1978). Based on Nelson (2010), in the 18th century, there is a fundamental fracture in the discourse of the mind and the Romantic era brings a “Copernican revolution in epistemology.” Isolated individuals are seen as powerful, reasoned, and imaginative, responsible for their identities, decisions, and actions. Nothing is out of the individual control and there is nothing that humans cannot freely act upon (Wood, 2008).

The modern understanding of creativity reflects the general consciousness of modernity. The creator in modernity is typically constructed as a fully autonomous and self-determining agent, reflective and sovereign. Individuals are the absolute creators of their destiny and the authors of their life narratives (Watts, 2021) but also the creators of all things imaginative and novel—societal, scientific, and material. The changing epistemological emphasis on human reason also brings a radical transformation to the discourse of creativity and establishes a new foundation for an individual notion of creativity. Pope (2005) argues that in modernity there is a shift in the notion’s meaning which reflects the recently manifested “human sense of agency.” The ancient divine inspiration is now replaced by extraordinary individual imagination, intellectual synthesis, and action. As Nelson (2010, p. 18) strongly states: “Imagination, once regarded as a poor cousin to reason—at best, passive, and at worst, a dangerous faculty that led to madness or delusion—becomes the primary faculty of the human.”

Expanding on this idea, it is also argued that the modern shift towards radical individualization has been linked to industriousness; individuals are now expected to be creative to live a fulfilling life and contribute to economy and society (Reckwitz, 2017). Creativity is celebrated for its functionality but also the democratization of the individual potential. Whereas in ancient societies there is only the God(s) who is/are seemingly capable of creating, in late modernity, all reasoned beings are conceived as potentially creative subjects (Weiner, 2000).

To summarize, the modern conceptualization of creativity is based on four key *discursive* elements that concern the *source*, *nature*, *purpose*, and *domain* of creativity. First, the *source* of creativity is the individual; creativity derives from the power of the human mind and imagination (Negus & Pickering, 2004). Second, creativity is about the generation of something completely new that has never existed before (Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Wight, 1998). Third, the *purpose* of creativity is instrumental; creativity is functional and useful in economic, societal and/or political terms (Wallace & Gruber, 1989; Weisberg, 1992). Last, creativity in late modernity is not something extraordinary but mundane. Everyone can be creative, and the creative common man can be found in every *domain* of human activity, such as in the arts, sciences, politics, business, and everyday life (Kaufman, 2002; Simonton, 1997).

Does the modern self-governing model of creative praxis provide an alternative paradigm of creativity that pre-modern understandings do not offer us? Let’s go back to our previous analysis to reflect on this question.

IS CREATIVITY A TRULY MODERN CONCEPT?

Supporters of the modern discourse ground their thesis on the assumption that the Greek language uses only the word *poiein*—making—to connote the meaning of creativity having no other word equivalent in meaning to *create*. According to this view, the *source* of creativity is divine, and, thus, heteronomous. Second, ancient creativity is interpreted by contemporary commentators as a *form* of imitation, a mechanical process that copies things that already exist in nature. The *purpose* of creativity is seen as merely aesthetic, and its *domain* is viewed as exclusively concerned with aesthetics and the arts sphere. On the contrary, the modern conceptualization of creativity is about: (a) human agency, (b) novelty, (c) social value, and (d) everydayness. Paying attention to these *four discursive elements*, we observe that they stand at the extreme poles of a conceptual spectrum—*Divine vs. Human*, *Imitation vs. Novelty*, *Aesthetics vs. Politics*, *Art vs. Mundane*—and propose two opposite types of creativity—*genius vs. everyday practice*.

Even though new interpretations have attempted to highlight alternative dimensions of the ancient notion, such as motivation (Kieran, 2014), rationality (Gaut, 2012), virtue (Gaut, 2014), and agency (Stokes, 2008), the *Genius* rhetoric prevails. However, the notion of *demiourgein* demonstrates that there isn’t an overarching concept of creativity in the ancient Greek culture and, consequently, the mainstream modern narrative provides an incomplete interpretation. In fact, despite the variety of ideas found in the texts concerning creativity, there is an unchangeable essence that can bound the ancient and the modern conceptions together. To argue that there is continuity between the classic essence and the modern discourse of creativity, I provide a distinct reading of how Greeks conceptualized *creative praxis*.

Let's return to the first discursive element, the *source* of creativity. I shall start by offering an alternative reading of the *Genius* rhetoric. While the conventional reading assumes an external power directing the creator, a deeper interpretation of the sources reveals a hidden sense of human agency in the creative process. For example, Homer asks for the support of the Muse only to begin his song; Hesiod asks for truthfulness and Pindar seeks assistance in receiving information about past events. None of these creators asks for inspiration or guidance on how to create a story; the aid received concerns the factual content of their work. Creators know how to tell a story; they have the necessary creative skills, but they desire to know more about past facts; they desire knowledge. As Murray (1981) points out, the Muses never provide creative vision or know how. Further, in Hesiod, even though the beginning and end of the creative process is attributed to the Muses, the creator is skilled in ending arguments that have been inspired by the Muses (McHugh, 1993). According to Davison (cited in McHugh, 1993, pp. 7–8), “The Muses never speak through the lips of the poet. Poetry, though ultimately the gift of God through the Muses, comes immediately from the poet himself; what the Muses teach him must be blended with the products of his own mind into a harmonious whole.”

Also, in Pindar, the Muses are like music; they comfort, inspire and aid but don't direct (McHugh, 1993). In this sense, the Muses are not the sole source of creativity; they play the role of a guardian spirit, a helper, who doesn't exclusively determine the creative outcome. Creators can decide whether they want to respond and follow the Muses' call addressed to them or not (Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2019). Even though the Muses might provoke the first idea triggering the creative process, typically, after the invocation, they seem to fade away (Cook, 2013). The creative trigger may not be exclusively human, but the execution of the creative idea is a human act.

Most importantly, even the existence of the Muses relies on the creators' invocation towards the Muse, which is itself a human creative act. The Muses are *self-appointed* guardians whose subsistence depends on the creative imagination of the mortals. Creators, in this sense, were not admired necessarily as the chosen recipients of a heaven gift but mainly as the performers of the creative process. Let's not forget here that the Polytheistic Greek religion assumed that the actions, thoughts, and wills of Gods were unpredictable, and, in cases, conflicting, meaning that humans didn't have a predetermined set of rules to follow (as in later religious systems), which allowed them to exercise their own will, judgment and agency. In fact, according to Finkelberg (1990), the Muses were an excellent symbolic alibi for creators to experiment and exercise their creative freedom in front of a live audience. Here, I am sympathetic to Ustinova (2012) and von Solms (2003), who propose that the notion of the Muse has been used by the Greeks as a useful metaphor and personification for the dialogue between the creator's inner self and inherited tradition, the relationship between past and present, their personal experience and cultural memory. The Muses acted as a symbolism of memorized repository from which the creator had to deviate to create something new (Havelock, 1986; Kane, 1998; Nagy, 1989).

Further, in my view, there is an insightful passage in Plato's *Ion* that reveals the conscious and self-directed creative action experienced in the ancient Greek society.

Soc: And are you aware that you produce similar effects on most spectators?

Ion: Only too well; for I look down upon them from the stage, and behold the various emotions of pity, wonder, sternness, stamped upon their countenances when I am speaking: and I am obliged to give my very best attention to them; for if I make them cry I myself shall laugh, and if I make them laugh I myself shall cry when the time of payment arrives.

ΣΩ. οἶσθα οὖν ὅτι καὶ τῶν θεατῶν τοὺς πολλοὺς ταῦτά ταῦτα ὑμεῖς ἐργάζεσθε;

ΙΩΝ. καὶ μάλᾳ καλῶς οἶδα· καθορῶ γὰρ ἐκάστοτε αὐτοὺς ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ βήματος κλάοντάς τε καὶ δεινὸν ἐμβλέποντας καὶ συνθαμβοῦντας τοῖς λεγομένοις. δεῖ γὰρ με καὶ σφόδρ' αὐτοῖς τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν· ὡς ἂν μὲν κλάοντας αὐτοὺς καθίσω, αὐτὸς γελάσομαι ἀργύριον λαμβάνων, ἂν δὲ γελῶντας, αὐτὸς κλάσομαι ἀργύριον ἀπολλύς.

Plato, Ion, 535e

While the *Genius* rhetoric suggests that creating in the ancient Greek culture was a non-agentic, irrational, and uncontrollable condition, the above excerpt reveals that Ion's performance is the outcome of a consciously staged creative act. Ion is not possessed by divine powers or madness but is rather consciously

observing and manipulating his audience motivated by his economic interest (Tigerstedt, 1969). As Murray (1996, p. 123) sharply comments: “Ion’s words show that, despite his emotional transport, he is nevertheless in control of his faculties [...] But the readiness with which Ion reveals the true object of his concern, viz. money, and the flippant manner in which he makes his point undercuts any idea of the rhapsode being divinely inspired.” In other words, divine agency was a symbolic device appropriated so that creators in Greek Antiquity could gain social prestige, credibility, and the freedom to experiment; creativity was not a completely passive act.

Moving on to the concept of *demiourgein*, we also see that the *Public Worker* rhetoric views creative praxis as a conscious act strategically deployed to benefit individuals but also the community. The source of *demiourgein* is not an external power but an individual potentiality that can be exercised through hard work, experimentation, and improvisation.

ANCIENT GREEK CREATIVITY AS INTERMEDIATE PRAXIS

An alternative reading of how ancient Greeks conceptualized creativity lies between the conventional *heteronomous* and the *modern self-governing* model and sees creative action as neither heteronomous nor autonomous; neither an external experience (*pathos*) nor an intentional performance (*energeia*). It is true that in the ancient Greek world, subjectivity was not fully developed, and the substantial categories—God(s), Muses, faith, state, family, etc.—didn’t leave much room to the subject’s self-determination. Thus, creators could not be conceptualized and presented as fully conscious and reflective entities.

In my interpretation, creative praxis for this early society was understood as an intermediate situation between action and passivity; creativity was found in the delicate interplay of *pathos* and *energeia*; cultural and personal (Watts, 2021). The creator was neither conceived as a passive receiver of external ideas, nor as a subject fully in charge of the creative action. Creative agency could be better perceived as indeterminacy, or what Han-Pile (2020) calls *mediopassive*. Creators were probably conceptualized as lacking complete control of the creative process (*pathos*), but they would still be seen as participants in the creative process (*energeia*). Creativity was not seen merely as a fated heaven-sent gift but as a highly involving performance which had to be rehearsed, worked upon, staged, and justified. Creators were not perceived just as mediators to communicate divine messages but rather as actors who actively engage with an internal process of creative doing.

In this sense, creators in Greek antiquity were aware of their role as the medium of the creative process, and they had a motivational intention to create something new. For example, they would intentionally invoke the God(s) and the Muses or would undertake *demiourgika* responsibilities for the community. As Murray (1981, p. 88) fairly comments, “Although the initial inspiration appears to come to the poet as if from some source other than himself, the subsequent composition of the poem depends on conscious effort and hard work.” Although creators would not seem to have full control over the creative process, they would still have some power over the conditions of the creative process, the techniques applied and the direction of their work. Thus, creators would still feel partially responsible for their decisions and the authorship of the final work (Stokes, 2008). To decode this, creators were probably seen in their times as active artificers in the sense that they were aware of their engagement in the creative process but also passive in the sense that they *surrendered* themselves to the creative act and the supernatural inspiration and support. This idea of the intermediate creative praxis allows us to reconceptualize creativity in the ancient Greek world as a process between passivity and activity, autonomy and heteronomy, sovereignty, and subordination (Schrag, 1997).

Moving to the second discursive element concerning the *form* of creativity, we notice an oversimplified debate between the concepts of imitation and novelty. The conventional reading concentrates on the idea that creators in the ancient Greek culture could only imitate eternal and unchanging ideal forms that reside in the mind of God(s). This means that creators would always be ordained to produce something based on a pre-established plan and set of rules but not through imagination, self-direction, or mastery. They would become skilled imitators of the real world by producing images that already exist in nature or mundane life, but nothing could be created *ex nihilo*. Often, even poets, whose creativity was supposed to generate genuine novelty, were seen as copiers of past life events (Weiner, 2000). In this reading, creativity in Greek antiquity was mimetic and mechanical. However, my study suggests that creativity was also conceived as a process of crafting (see the discourse of *demiourgein*). While novelty in modernity is often associated to an epiphany, a sudden “eureka” moment, Greeks conceptualized creativity also as a process of molding, perfecting, and tweaking. Creative praxis, in this sense, was seen as an endless revision, immersion in and breaking

from tradition; a continuous process of engagement and improvisation that brings about gradual transformations rather than radical disruptions. Hence, creative praxis was again seen as neither purely imitative nor completely original.

Based on the conventional reading, the third discursive element concerning the *purpose* of creativity is viewed as aesthetic. Artists in antiquity are seen as inconsiderate of the ethical or social value of their creations (Weiner, 2000). In fact, as Cropley (2019) claims, to emphasize the usefulness of creativity would seem almost blasphemous because human/societal functionality would devalue the purpose of divine creativity. The main motivation behind these early creators would be either divine reasons or individual interest due to the wider social appeal around creativity (Dacey, 1999). On the contrary, the modern discourse highlights the positive social and economic value of creativity placing particular interest in its functionality and utilitarian value (Wallace & Gruber, 1989; Weisberg, 1992). However, looking back at the notion of *demiourgein* allows me to argue that this is only an oversimplified position as there is an alternative socio-political dimension of creativity in the ancient Greek world; *demiourgoi* are creators who exercise a public calling, and their main purpose is to benefit the community.

The last discursive element examined is the *domain* of creativity. The standard view concentrates its attention exclusively on the aesthetic sphere offering an elitist account on who can be creative and in what domain in the ancient Greek culture. Based on this view, artistic creativity would stand separate from the social and economic spheres. In sharp contrast, the modern understanding of creativity seems more egalitarian, accessible, and inclusive. Creativity in modernity is conceived as an activity that occurs in all areas of life and is located in every “common man.” Nonetheless, the notion of *demiourgein* suggests that creativity was discussed in the context of a range of applied fields, such as crafts and daily objects, sciences, engineering, medicine, philosophy, and even governance (Cropley, 2019; D’Angour, 2011). Last, I would argue that the cultural and political dimensions of the notion of *demiourgein* resonate with what today seems to be perceived as novel socio-cultural views of creativity that are fundamentally related to politics and social life (Glăveanu, 2017; Glăveanu et al., 2020) or with today’s dominant idea of “everyday creativity” (Amabile, 2017; Ilha Villanova & Pina e Cunha, 2021) which include all areas of crafts, sciences, and state governance, rather than the early modern idea of genius that regarded creative people as those naturally and biologically gifted. The *Public Worker* rhetoric implies a more encompassing, democratic, and inclusive understanding of creativity than what the conventional reading describes, considering every member of the community as capable of crafting something new and valuable for the wider society. In this sense, it is not only the case that ancient sources can show a complexity, nuance, and sophistication, but, in some ways, they anticipate relatively recent developments that we, as community, took quite some time to re-discover and come to appreciate.

CONCLUSION

While the concept of creativity has gained popularity in recent times, this paper argues that the discourse of creativity does not originate in modernity. Contrary to the standard view, creativity was already at stake in antiquity. Hence, taking a longer genealogical view of creativity allows us to argue that the “myth of origin,” which is often criticized for establishing a fixed date of emergence of a concept (Nelson, 2010), applies not only to early historical times but also to modern accounts of “origin.” My work doesn’t contend that the concept of creativity emerged in the ancient Greek world but that we can already find varied ideas and discourses in this early context that inform contemporary discourses and practices. In other words, the paper shows that the content of what we mean by creativity might not be as radically different now than it was in pre-modern times. Particularly, the rarely discussed ancient Greek notion of *demiourgein* deserves more scholarly attention than it has so far received since it manages to challenge the position that creativity is a modern phenomenon by underscoring: (a) its individual—as opposed to its divine—*source*, (b) its generative—as opposed to its mimetic—*form*, (c) its socio-political—as opposed to its aesthetic—*purpose*, and (d) its everyday—as opposed to its artistic—*domain*.

The conventional modern narrative provides us only with a one-dimensional notion of extraordinary, divinely inspired creativity found in the Greek texts that oversimplifies this rich concept. In fact, to overlook the depth of human agency in the Greek conceptualization of creativity is to miss the philosophy of the ancient Greeks completely and equate it with the philosophical thinking of the Middle Ages. In contrast, a scrutinized study of the ancient texts shows that there isn’t a homogeneous, unidirectional, and linear understanding of creativity in the ancient Greek world; instead, there are multifaceted, parallel and, often, conflicting stories that pave the way to the formation of diverse contemporary discourses that underline

modernity. More research on how non-Western cultures have historically looked at this concept would greatly extend our knowledge in this area. Examining the genealogical lineage of creativity across cultures and chronological periods would enable us to better appreciate current conceptual formulations but also envision future discursive evolutions, sophisticated theorizations, and new valuable implications of this significant idea.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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