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THE CONCEPT OF CREATIVITY WITHIN FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S ÜBERMENSCH

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Article History:

Received: 2025-11-03

Accepted:2025-11-03

Published: 2025-11-03

Keywords:

Creativity; Nietzsche; Übermensch

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Abstract: This article examines how Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch positions creativity not as a peripheral trait but as a fundamental condition for human transformation in the face of moral collapse. By tracing Nietzsche's critique of slave morality, the death of God, and the emergence of nihilism, this study identifies creativity as the essential force enabling the revaluation of values. Employing a qualitative method through literature review, it analyses Nietzsche's philosophical narrative alongside Robert J. Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Creativity, which defines creativity as the courage to defy the crowd, defy the spirit of the age, and defy oneself. This theoretical lens is used to evaluate whether Nietzsche's process of value creation can be understood as a creative act in both psychological and existential terms. The findings confirm that Nietzsche's philosophical imperative aligns with contemporary psychological criteria for creativity, demonstrating that the will to create is not merely symbolic but functionally central to the emergence of the Übermensch. Consequently, creativity in Nietzsche's thought constitutes the condition of becoming rather than its result, bridging existential philosophy and modern psychology. However, this study remains limited to the exploration of creativity within the framework of the Übermensch and does not extend to other potential dimensions of creativity in Nietzsche's broader philosophical corpus.

Introduction

Creativity is one of the fundamental capacities that distinguishes human beings from other creatures. It allows individuals to imagine, construct, and sustain symbolic realities that give order and meaning to life (Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2021). Throughout human history, religion has stood as one of humanity's greatest collective creations, a symbolic framework through which people gave order and meaning to the world. Religion, in this sense, was one of humanity's earliest and most powerful creative achievements, transforming the imaginative impulse into collective order and shared belief (Harari, 2014).

Yet over time, this creative power has often solidified into rigid institutions that suppress the very imagination that once gave them birth. What originally emerged from the human capacity to create collective fictions and symbolic orders has frequently transformed into systems that demand obedience and uniformity. In this transformation, the religious ideal of asceticism and self-denial gradually replaced the freedom to interpret, innovate, and create meaning. Thus, the creative energy that once generated civilizations became confined within the boundaries of moral and dogmatic control (Harari, 2014).

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The decline of creativity under religious morality has produced a profound cultural and existential stagnation. Values that were once dynamic have become static, reducing the human will to conformity and obedience. Empirical studies show a negative correlation between religiosity and creativity, indicating that higher religiosity often diminishes one's willingness to take risks or challenge dominant norms (Liu et al., 2018). Consequently, the modern world faces not only a moral crisis but also a creative one. Humanity has lost its courage to construct meaning autonomously and remains trapped between two extremes, the rigidity of dogmatic faith and the emptiness of nihilism.

Robert J. Sternberg conceptualizes creativity as the capacity to "defy the crowd, defy the Zeitgeist, and even defy oneself". This definition emphasizes creativity as a process of autonomy, courage, and continual self-overcoming, rather than as a mere display of novelty. Creativity, in this light, transcends aesthetic invention; it is a reflective and transformative act that allows human beings to recreate their relation to meaning. It involves not only the birth of new ideas but also the inner strength to sustain them against social and psychological resistance (Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2021).

It is precisely this creative power that Friedrich Nietzsche sought to awaken through his critique of religious morality. Nietzsche argues that Christian asceticism and the glorification of weakness transformed vitality into guilt and imagination into submission (Nietzsche, 1997). In response, he introduces the figure of the *Übermensch*, the human being who transcends inherited values and dares to create new horizons of meaning after the "death of God". The *Übermensch* is not a metaphysical being but a symbol of human autonomy, representing the capacity to affirm life and generate new values beyond the ruins of traditional morality.

In this sense, Nietzsche's Übermensch represents the highest form of human creativity, a being who transforms nihilism from resignation into affirmation. The destruction of old values becomes the condition for the birth of new ones (Nietzsche, 2004). When viewed through Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Creativity, Nietzsche's concept of value creation corresponds to the psychological dimensions of creativity: autonomy of thought, defiance of convention, and the courage to reimagine meaning (Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2021). The Übermensch thus unites philosophical and psychological conceptions of creativity, standing as a bridge between existential transformation and scientific understanding.

Previous studies have explored the *Übermensch* from various perspectives. For example, Taneo et al. examine the *Übermensch* as a critique of religious institutions (Taneo et al., 2024), while Wiguna highlights the social aspects of nihilism in modern society (Wiguna, 2023). In contrast, studies on creativity have developed independently, such as the work of Osei et al., who situate creativity within humanistic psychology and connect it to Maslow's theory of self-actualization (Osei et al., 2022). However, these studies have yet to directly or explicitly link creativity with Nietzsche's transformative project.

A review of literature from the past five years reveals that discussions of the *Übermensch* remain focused on morality, nihilism, or the will to power, without explicit reference to creativity. This research seeks to address this gap by examining creativity as the central axis of human transformation in Nietzsche's philosophy.

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By asking what triggers the emergence of creativity in Nietzsche's thought and how creativity operates as a central force in the transformation towards the *Übermensch*, this article aspires to contribute both theoretically and practically. It not only aims to enrich the philosophical study of Nietzsche by placing creativity at the core of human transformation, but also to serve as a reflective resource for individuals confronting crises of meaning in modern society, encouraging a more critical, creative, and authentic approach to self-determination and value formation.

Research Methods

The type of research applied in this article is qualitative research. The research is conducted through a library study without any fieldwork involved. The qualitative approach emphasizes conceptual reflection and philosophical interpretation. This allows the researcher to explore and reconstruct the structure of Friedrich Nietzsche's thought, particularly his ideas concerning the *Übermensch* and the act of value creation, within their textual and intellectual context. This approach is considered appropriate because it prioritizes depth of understanding and the process of meaning-making within natural and historical settings (Wekke, 2019).

The methodological approach used in this research is descriptive-analytic. This method is selected to systematically describe, interpret, and reconstruct the conceptual structure of philosophical thought without intervening in the object of study (Soendari, 2012). Through this method, the study examines the relationships among Nietzsche's core philosophical ideas such as slave morality, the death of God, nihilism, and value creation, and how these ideas contribute to the formation of the *Übermensch*. The same approach is also applied to analyze the relevance of Nietzsche's thought to the characteristics of creativity described in Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Creativity.

While Sternberg's Triarchic Theory provides a useful psychological framework, it also has limitations in addressing Nietzsche's notion of existential creativity. Sternberg's model primarily explains creativity in terms of cognitive and motivational processes, whereas Nietzsche conceives creativity as an existential act grounded in courage, self-overcoming, and confrontation with nihilism. To account for this distinction, the descriptive-analytic method in this study incorporates an interpretative dimension that goes beyond cognitive explanation, allowing for an understanding of creativity as an existential and philosophical phenomenon rather than a purely psychological one.

The data in this study are obtained through written sources only. The primary data consist of Nietzsche's original works, including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, and *The Gay Science*. These texts are analysed to understand his critique of morality, diagnosis of nihilism, and conception of human transformation. Secondary data include scholarly commentaries, journal articles, and academic books offering critical interpretations or conceptual elaborations of Nietzsche's thought, along with insights from contemporary creativity studies. This combination broadens the conceptual scope, strengthens the interpretation of primary texts, and ensures a solid theoretical foundation for analysis (Mann, 2015).

Data collection employs two techniques: document analysis and systematic literature review. Document analysis involves close reading of Nietzsche's texts to identify and categorize key conceptual themes (Nilamsari, 2014). The systematic literature review (SLR) is used to identify, select, and synthesize academic literature on Nietzsche's philosophy and the concept of creativity,

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providing a strong theoretical basis for analysis (Andriani, 2022). The use of both techniques ensures thematic focus and interdisciplinary depth throughout the research process.

The data analysis process follows the model developed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Relevant passages from Nietzsche's works and supporting literature are selected and organized based on major conceptual themes such as moral inversion, absence of transcendence, nihilism, and value creation. These findings are then presented in a coherent narrative connecting Nietzsche's philosophical vision with creative action. Finally, the conclusions are refined throughout the analysis to ensure logical consistency and interpretative clarity (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Through this methodological design, the study aims to provide a structured and reflective discussion of how Nietzsche's concept of value creation can be understood as an existentially creative act, and how this perspective reveals the philosophical foundation of human transformation toward the ideal of the *Übermensch*.

Results and Discussion

The Triggers of Creativity in Friedrich Nietzsche's Thought

Although Friedrich Nietzsche never explicitly discusses creativity in the modern psychological sense, his philosophical project, particularly the creation of new values and the transformation of moral paradigms, can be understood as a process that embodies the essential features of creativity. According to Robert J. Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Creativity, creative acts involve the courage to defy the crowd, defy the spirit of the age, and defy oneself (Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2021). Nietzsche's reflections reveal a continuous movement of revaluation and self-overcoming that resonates with these dimensions of creative defiance.

The discourse on creativity in Nietzsche's philosophy arises from a deeply personal and historical context. Nietzsche was raised in a devout Lutheran family, under the shadow of his father's early death and surrounded by a culture dominated by Christian moral orthodoxy. His loss of faith and his lifelong confrontation with the rigidity of religious dogma became fertile ground for his critical examination of morality and meaning (Hollingdale, 1999). In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche declares that "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him" (Nietzsche, 2001, §125). This proclamation does not merely signify atheism but marks the collapse of the transcendent sources of meaning that structured Western civilization. Nietzsche's "madman" laments that humanity has lost the sun that once guided it, yet few realize the depth of the loss. This existential rupture inaugurates a demand for creativity. With no divine order left to dictate meaning, humanity must become the creator of new values.

The first crucial trigger of creativity in Nietzsche's thought is found in his critique of slave morality. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche distinguishes between master morality, which arises from the affirmation of power and vitality, and slave morality, which is born from ressentiment and weakness (Nietzsche, 2004). Nietzsche writes that "slave morality begins when ressentiment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values" (Nietzsche, 2004, p. 20). This creativity, however, is inverted. It negates strength by redefining it as evil and exalts weakness as good. What appears as moral invention is in fact reactive inversion, a creativity of resentment rather than affirmation. As long as morality arises from reaction rather than creation, genuine creativity is suppressed under guilt and fear of self-assertion (Huddleston, 2021).

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Christian morality, for Nietzsche, represents the triumph of this reactive creativity. The virtues of humility, forgiveness, and self-denial serve as mechanisms to cope with impotence, not as expressions of life's strength (Nietzsche, 2004). In this condition, creativity is domesticated into obedience. The human being is prevented from affirming life as a generative force; values are inherited rather than created. Thus, Nietzsche's critique of slave morality is not only moral or social but creative. It exposes how the human potential to create meaning has been turned against itself.

The second trigger of creativity in Nietzsche's thought arises from the death of God and the ensuing experience of nihilism. In *The Gay Science*, the death of God creates a void that no pre-existing belief can fill. The world loses its transcendent anchor, and human beings are forced to face what Nietzsche calls "the wasteland of meaning." He writes, "Are we not straying through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?" (Nietzsche, 2001, §125). This confrontation with emptiness is the birthplace of what may be called existential creativity, the courage to affirm life and construct meaning even when no metaphysical foundation remains.

However, Nietzsche warns that this void often leads to passive nihilism, a state of resignation and comfort-seeking in the face of meaninglessness. This condition finds its most vivid illustration in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where Nietzsche presents the image of the last man: "We have invented happiness, say the last men, and they blink" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 17). The last man avoids suffering, risk, and greatness. He prefers the comfort of the familiar to the challenge of creation. In this figure, the creative impulse collapses into contentment; humanity forgets its capacity to create.

This passive nihilism marks both a crisis and a turning point. Nietzsche interprets it as the exhaustion of reactive life, the endpoint of a civilization that has lost its capacity for self-overcoming. Yet within this exhaustion lies the seed of transformation. The creative potential that has been repressed under centuries of moral conformity can reawaken, but only if humanity dares to face the abyss. Nietzsche writes, "One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 46). Here, chaos symbolizes both the dissolution of old certainties and the raw material for new creation.

This confrontation with chaos gives rise to active nihilism, the third trigger of creativity in Nietzsche's thought. Active nihilism is not despair but an act of will, the decision to destroy decayed values to make room for new creation (Nietzsche, 2001). It is destructive only as a precondition for creation. In contrast to passive nihilism's resignation, active nihilism demands existential courage. The individual must endure uncertainty, abandon inherited meaning, and construct value from within. Nietzsche conceives this as the supreme act of freedom: to become one's own lawgiver.

Thus, Nietzsche's path from slave morality to the death of God, from passive to active nihilism, outlines a progression in which creativity becomes both necessity and destiny. It begins in negation but culminates in affirmation. The destruction of old values is the condition for the possibility of new creation. Creativity, in Nietzsche's sense, is not limited to the psychological framework of creative defiance described by Sternberg but extends to the existential act of confronting nothingness and transforming it into meaning. It is the courage to live as if one were both artist and artwork, forging new values amid the ruins of the old world.

The Role of Creativity in Becoming the Übermensch

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Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, introduced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is not a static ideal but a figure of transformation that emerges through humanity's overcoming of itself. In the prologue, Zarathustra envisions the human being not as a destination but as a passage, like a rope stretched over an abyss between the animal and something greater. Nietzsche writes that "so shall man be to the *Übermensch*: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 13). The human being, still bound to inherited norms and declining values, must be surpassed. The *Übermensch* signifies what lies beyond, the one who reclaims the power to create and revalue existence (Harris, 2021).

Within this vision, the will to power becomes the dynamic force that shapes creation itself. Nietzsche describes it not as domination but as a generative activity. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he states that "life itself is will to power" (Nietzsche, 1998, §259). The will to power affirms life by imposing form upon chaos and transforming disorder into expression. It is the creative force of existence through which humanity learns to shape meaning rather than merely preserve it.

The emergence of the *Übermensch* takes place in the aftermath of metaphysical collapse. In *The Gay Science*, the declaration that God is dead signals the unravelling of transcendent guarantees that once stabilized moral life. Zarathustra's meeting with the hermit who still worships God dramatizes a world that has not yet understood this loss, and his later affirmation in solitude confirms that the task of meaning now falls to humanity itself (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 13). This moment is not a proclamation of atheism but a call to creative responsibility, where the burden of meaning is transferred from heaven to humankind (Harris, 2021).

The rupture is further dramatized in Zarathustra's encounter with the tightrope walker, a figure suspended between animality and a higher possibility. When the performer falls, Zarathustra consoles him by denying Hell and afterlife, stripping the event of fear and judgment (Nietzsche, 1997). The image shows that ascetic ideals must be abandoned so that creative life can arise. This passage illustrates that liberation requires the courage to create values without appeal to transcendence.

Through the parable of the three metamorphoses, Nietzsche articulates the internal process of transformation: the camel, the lion, and the child. The camel bears the burden of obligation under the command "Thou shalt", embodying endurance without freedom (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 24). The lion appears to negate this command, declaring "No" to the great dragon of morality: "Thou shalt' is the great dragon" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 25). Yet destruction alone is insufficient. The child emerges as "a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a sacred Yes" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 26).

The child thus symbolizes the highest creative power. It is not moral innocence but imaginative freedom, the ability to generate new values without appealing to prior justification (Issembert, 2023). In this stage, the spirit no longer reacts to the world but becomes formative, transforming existence through the play of creation. As Nietzsche writes, "A sacred Yes is needed for the play of creation" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 26). The transition from lion to child marks the point where negation becomes affirmation, and affirmation becomes creation.

From this structure, it becomes evident that creativity is not an outcome of transformation but its essential condition. Without creative power, the spirit cannot move from negation to

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affirmation. Nietzsche's phrase that "the spirit now wills its own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 26) captures the act of self-authorship that defines the *Übermensch*. It is the moment when humanity transforms existence itself into an act of continual creation. In this process, the *Übermensch* embodies the full range of creative defiance described by Sternberg, overcoming the crowd's conformity, the age's dogmas, and one's own limitations, thereby realizing creativity as both inner rebellion and affirmation of life.

The path to such creativity is unstable. The movement from camel to lion to child demands the courage to lose certainty and dwell in confusion. It requires endurance in disorientation and the willingness to live without ready-made answers. Creativity in this sense is not artistic novelty but ontological risk. Nietzsche's insistence on the child as a "sacred Yes" affirms that creation is a stance toward life that embraces chaos as its very ground (Nietzsche, 1997).

The *Übermensch* represents not only personal overcoming but also a cultural act of reclaiming meaning through creative formation (Harris, 2021). The will to create becomes indispensable as both individuals and societies face the dissolution of shared values. The figure of the child, standing as the final metamorphosis, marks the threshold where creation and affirmation converge. Without creativity, the *Übermensch* is inconceivable, and without the will to create, there is no one to cross the bridge from human to what lies beyond (Issembert, 2023).

The *Übermensch* is not merely the culmination of transformation but the living process through which value itself is continually created. The figure of the child, standing as the final metamorphosis, marks the threshold where creation and affirmation converge. Without creativity, the *Übermensch* is inconceivable, and without the will to create, there is no one to cross the bridge from human to what lies beyond.

The Creation of Value as an Act of Creativity

Robert J. Sternberg, through his Triarchic Theory of Creativity, defines creativity as the courage to defy the crowd, defy the Zeitgeist, and even defy oneself (Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2021). Each of these dimensions is vividly reflected in Nietzsche's philosophical narrative and in Zarathustra's journey toward the creation of new values. Although Nietzsche never formulated a systematic theory of creativity, his concept of *Übermensch* embodies the essence of creative agency: the courage to affirm life and generate meaning after the collapse of transcendent guarantees.

The first dimension, *defy the crowd*, appears in Nietzsche's portrayal of the marketplace as the central setting of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra, who first seeks solitude in the mountains, ultimately descends into the marketplace to proclaim the vision of the *Übermensch*. The marketplace symbolizes mass mentality and the comfort of conformity, where sameness, false equality, and victimhood dominate collective life. Zarathustra's descent signifies a bold confrontation with mediocrity and complacency. Through the allegory of the tightrope walker, Nietzsche depicts the existential risk of confronting the crowd: the walker dares to rise above, yet falls due to misunderstanding and pressure from the masses. The rejection of herd morality and the courage to face the crowd mark the first act of creative defiance, opening the space for authentic creation.

The second dimension, *defy the Zeitgeist*, is manifested in Nietzsche's and Zarathustra's challenge to the dominant values of their time. Zarathustra does not merely announce that "God is dead" in a religious society but dismantles the moral and metaphysical structures sustained by that belief. If once "all men were equal before God", Nietzsche invites humanity to move beyond

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that false equality and create new values autonomously. Zarathustra also denies the existence of heaven, hell, and eternal punishment, freeing human life from the chains of fear. When the tightrope walker trembles before death, fearing damnation, Zarathustra consoles him by affirming that there is no devil, no hell, and no eternal punishment (Nietzsche, 1997). In this moment, Nietzsche presents a radical refusal of the spirit of the age, replacing the comfort of religious certainty with the demand for creative responsibility.

The final dimension, *defy themselves*, appears both in Nietzsche's personal life and in his philosophical concept of transformation. Biographically, Nietzsche broke away from theological education, rejected Wagner's influence, and chose solitude, embodying a consistent refusal to remain bound by inherited identity. Philosophically, the process of becoming *Übermensch* requires the courage to renounce the old self. To become "more", one must first become a camel that bears the weight of tradition, then a lion that learns to say "No" to the great dragon of morality, and finally a child that embodies creation, renewal, and playfulness (Nietzsche, 1997). This sequence of metamorphoses represents the cycle of denial, creation, and rebirth, where the human being learns to create meaning from within.

Through these three dimensions, the *Übermensch* emerges as the highest expression of creative existence. While Sternberg's Triarchic Theory helps illuminate the structural elements of creativity, Nietzsche's thought exposes its existential foundation. Creativity is not merely the production of ideas but the transformation of one's being through the act of affirmation. It is the courage to create meaning without metaphysical guarantees and to become the source of value in a world that has lost its certainties. In this sense, Nietzsche's philosophy affirms creativity as the very condition of becoming, where the act of creation itself becomes the essence of human transformation.

Conclusion

This study reveals that creativity in Nietzsche's philosophy arises not as an aesthetic talent but as the existential courage to confront nihilism and create meaning after the collapse of traditional morality. Through the analytical framework of Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Creativity, the process of becoming the *Übermensch* fulfils the essential dimensions of creativity: defying the crowd, defying the spirit of the age, and defying oneself. Creativity thus stands as the condition of transformation rather than its result, the power that enables humanity to overcome stagnation and affirm life through self-generated values. By positioning creativity at the center of Nietzsche's philosophy of becoming, this research introduces a new interpretive dimension to Nietzsche studies, opens a dialogue between philosophy and modern psychology, and offers an alternative framework for understanding creativity as an existential act of freedom in response to the crisis of meaning.

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