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# Creation Road Interview

Ci 2012 Edition #1 — Baroness Susan Greenfield

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## Baroness Susan Greenfield

Scientist, writer, broadcaster, Director of the Institute for the Future of the Mind

The Baroness has been awarded 30 Honorary Degrees from British and foreign universities and heads a multi-disciplinary research group exploring novel brain mechanisms linked to neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. In addition, she has developed an interest in the impact of 21st Century technologies on how young people think and feel, as discussed in her book, *ID: The Quest for Identity in the 21st Century* (2008).

### **What is creativity? In 2012, do we fully understand the mechanisms involved in different kinds of creativity?**

The short answer is no, not least because creativity is hard to define. My own view is that it is not so much a noun but more a verb involving three steps: first deconstruction of existing dogma secondly synthesis of new elements and thirdly this new synthesis actually having a significance.

### **Is there a creative gene? Do creative parents generally have creative children?**

No. It is very unlikely that any complex traits could be trapped inside a single molecule DNA. All a gene can do is trigger the synthesis of a protein, in fact many proteins, which then have a variety of indirect effects in the nested hierarchy of neuronal networks. Creative parents may well have creative children in that they have provided an environment that is conducive to creativity. However it is quite possible that creative parents could give birth to children that do not have that talent and conversely that uncreative parents could give birth to talented children.

### **How is it that some people are more creative than others? Can the ability to be creative be developed?**

No two human beings have the same portfolio to talents and would be

surprising if creativity was homogenous. If you buy into the suggested steps for the creative process outlined in one above, then yes this ability could be developed.

### **Why do you think creativity is associated so widely as predominantly existing in the art world?**

Creativity is widely accepted to exist not in just arts but in music and literature more, over perhaps less well understood is creativity in science i.e. the challenging of dogma and the synthesis and linking of previously unrelated events.

### **Is there a link between thinking 'visually' and being creative? Can 'non-visual' thinkers be creative too?**

I have a problem with compartmentalising thinking into visual and non visual. This idea was often extended to teaching where apparently children could be divided into visual, auditory or kinaesthetic. This idea has been largely discredited.

### **Is it true that people who predominantly use the right side of their brain are more creative?**

To the best of my knowledge this has not been established and would be quite hard to prove since you would have to quantify creativity.

### **Are imagination and creativity related?**

Since both these terms are rather abstract, it is hard to give a precise answer but it is hard to indeed imagine one without the other.

### **Are creative thoughts developed the same way for everyone? For instance, would a songwriter or novelist utilise the same brain functions as an mathematician or scientist when creating something new?**

Yes, probably. See the steps in one above, suggesting that the basic principle is the same.

### **If the ability to be creative can be enhanced, can it also be reduced? What are some of the things that might cause that to happen?**

Possible factors in reducing creating creativity: lack of confidence, negative feedback, domination of existing dogma.

### **Can the environment, an individual is in, play a role in their ability to be creative?**

Yes very much so. It is been remarked by Richard Watson, for example, that being somewhere larger in scale than yourself e.g. a lake or a mountain, could inspire great creative thought.