

# Desire Deranged: A Theological Requiem for the Natural<sup>1</sup>

Paul J. Griffiths, Duke Divinity School

A lecture to inaugurate the Warren Chair of Catholic Theology  
Delivered at Duke Divinity School on 10 October 2008

"This is the monstrosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confined, that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit." (William Shakespeare, 'Troilus and Cressida', 3.2.88-90)

My title, "Desire Deranged: A Theological Requiem for the Natural," is perhaps obscure, though I hope pleasingly and perhaps even tantalizingly so. Obscurity has some value: theologians must think that some matters of intellectual interest are and will remain mysterious, at least here below—we see, after all, all divine things as well as most important and interesting human things now only as in a glass, darkly, and any clearer sight of them belongs under the sign of the theological virtues of faith and hope. Obscurity may also be suggestive in ways that clarity is not, and this too is a good thing when a topic needs richness and complexity rather than simplicity. Theological discourse needs often to be more like poetry than mathematics or predicate calculus because what it is about—God—can be depicted only in chiaroscuro. This is not to say that theologians should value obscurity for its own sake, even though some of our writings and utterances might suggest that mistake. Instead, we should seek clarity where it can be had, and especially meta-clarity, which is to say clarity about what cannot be made clear and why it cannot.

One of the great gifts that belongs to being a Catholic theologian, perhaps less evident for theologians working from within other ecclesial settings, is that theological thought is done from within a context of magisterial teaching. To think as a Catholic theologian is to think with the church, and in so doing to contribute in some small way to the clarification of the church's mind about the tradition with which it has been entrusted. This gives the theologian an extraordinarily rich collection of conversation-partners, and when a position is argued for as a properly or even possibly Catholic one, this must be done in part by assessing it in light of the deposit of scriptural and dogmatic teaching. But there is also a speculative moment proper to the theological enterprise, in which the theologian thinks through a position aloud, entertaining it to see where it might lead, filling it out as an experiment in thought. This can often be intoxicating, for it is in these speculative moments that the delights of theological thought are evident in their purest form. An instance of speculative theology is what I'm offering you tonight. What I'll say is not identical with any of the relevant dogmatic teachings of the Catholic Church, and does not explicitly engage with any of those teachings—nor, indeed, except by way of occasional illustrative reference or half-buried resonance, with anything scriptural, either.

---

<sup>1</sup> Drafted 2-10 Oct 08. Thanks to Judith Heyhoe for a careful edit.

I intend rather simply to offer you something speculative in full awareness that the development of what is here offered in a fully and properly theological direction would require much more than what I do tonight; and to signal in advance that I am aware that some elements in the deposit of faith stand in what, *prima facie* at least, appears to be some tension with what I'll be arguing for.

So much for prolegomena. I'll now state with as much clarity as I can muster, the thesis that I wish to display and argue for tonight. That thesis has three parts

The first part of the thesis is that human desire can now properly have the adjective 'natural' attached to it in only one sense: that it is natural to us to desire anything we can imagine or conceive, which is to say that our desires are naturally open rather than closed, protean rather than formed, awaiting direction rather than already under orders. This part of the thesis is easily confirmable empirically: the range of things upon which human desire is as a matter of fact focused is infinite, and this is because it is plastic and ductile, capable of assuming, within the bounds of some physical limitations, any shape and being drawn out to any length. This plasticity and ductility of desire is distinctively human: it is, so far as we know, evident in other creatures hardly at all. Consider the desires of your dog, or of the crepe myrtle tree in your yard, should you be fortunate enough to have either. These are not very malleable: the range of shapes and forms and configurations they are capable of reaching is very small. The range of human desires makes, by contrast, the open range of the American West or the steppes of Russia beyond the Urals seem as small as a suburban back yard. Where thought and imagination can go—and that is almost anywhere—desire will be found in their close company. What is natural about human desire, then, is exactly and only that no particular configured desire is natural to us. I advocate, then, a meta-naturalism that denies the natural. This denial of the natural applies even to the drives given to us genetically, desires, that is, for sex and food and violence. These drive, too, are capable of formation, reformation, and deformation, up to and including the point of their own erasure. That is why we have casanovas and celibates, gourmands and hunger artists, torturers and pacifists.

This first part of the thesis belongs to anthropology, in the etymological sense of that word. It is, that is to say, a thesis that belongs to the understanding of what human beings are. It comports well with, even if it does not quite entail, the second part of the thesis, which is a prescriptive one that applies first to theological discourse and second to discourse in other spheres. If the first part of the thesis is true, that human desires are in fact as I've just described them—infinately malleable and so on—then it follows at once, or so it seems to me, that we ought not to talk as though it were false. And calling some particular human desires natural does, at first blush, exactly that. You'll hear it said, for instance, that desire for political freedom, sometimes also called democracy, is a natural human desire; or that heterosexual desire is natural; or that the desire for God is natural (theologians often say this); or that it is not natural to eat the flesh of horses and snails—the English like to say this, having in mind what they imagine French culinary tastes and habits to be; or that parental love for children is natural. And so on. We ought to stop talking like this, or at the very least if we do continue to call some of our desires natural—and such talk is sufficiently deeply rooted in the tradition to make it unlikely

that we will soon stop—we should be clear that we cannot properly mean that we are, individually or collectively, more open to some configurations of desire than others. Such talk is *prima facie* false and ought to be laid to rest. I want to make a contribution to laying it to rest tonight, which is why I used the word 'requiem' in my title. This word has a precise etymological sense, according to which I intend it: to offer a requiem for or to something is to move it from disturbance to rest, from conflict to peace, from noise to quiet. It is to provide a quietus, and in this case a theological quietus, for something which can no longer rightly be said.

'Requiem' has come to have an sense additional to this etymological one. To offer a requiem is not only to lay something to rest, but also to do so with lament for its absence. The most common context, now, for the word—in so far as it remains current at all—is the funeral, the laying of a dead body to rest with tears. I intend this sense, too, and this is the third part of the thesis. Some particular desires once were natural to us, before the fall, and will be again, after the resurrection to eternal life. That this is not so now, and that we mislead ourselves both theologically and anthropologically when we think or talk as if it were, is matter for lament. Laying those habits of speech and thought to rest, then, is something we must do with a kind of regret. This third part of the thesis, then, is the most clearly speculative of the three. To say that, here below and after the fall, in the blood-soaked and pain-threaded world we live in we no longer have any natural desires, not even the *desiderium naturale* for God, is to say something that will seem implausible to many theologians, most especially Catholic theologians, which is what I aspire to be. In what follows, therefore, I must say something by way of defense, or at least elucidation, of this speculative thesis.

The thesis then is, to repeat it in very summary form, that, as we human beings are now constituted we have no natural desires, and that we ought not talk about ourselves or others as though we did. We ought, instead, to lay such talk to rest with a moderate but plangent lament for its loss.

Before turning to objections to this thesis, and to refutations of those objections, I'd like to pay some attention to one more element in my title: I mean the word 'deranged'. To derange something is, etymologically, to disturb or destroy an arrangement already in place, to move something from a desired and appropriate order toward disorder and chaos. The verb has a definite negative connotation, as can be clearly seen in its association with madness. To call a person deranged is now not far from calling her insane. The antonym here is 'arrange': to arrange is to set in place, to make orderly and thus beautiful. To derange is to undo all this. This is part of what I mean in my title. Human desire has indeed been deranged, moved from order toward chaos, opened to the possibility of focus on the damnable as well as upon the beautiful. Following hard upon the expulsion from the garden of paradise—a place where both human desires and the things upon which they are focused are beautifully arranged, cultivated in accord with God's passions—Cain envies and kills Abel, and the human tale of desire for blood and for removing from the other what he has for no other reason than that he has it begins. From this derangement comes, in short order, desire for and practice of the great evils of slavery, rape, genocide, and abortion, together with their many insidious and less

obviously bloody cousins. It is exactly because our desires have been deranged in the sense of being removed from their proper arrangement, their properly harmonious response to the fact of being a creature, that we lack natural desire, which means that we can and do desire anything at all.

But these meanings of the term 'derangement' can be extended in a rather different direction as well, and to do so will be helpful for my purposes. Suppose we think of the noun 'range' in its post-seventeenth-century sense as meaning something like the area that can be covered by something, its proper scope or extent. In this sense we might say that her voice has a great range, or that the gray wolf's range covers hundreds of miles, or that the range of a missile is 2000 kilometres, or that his intellectual range is broad. The verb 'to range' would then mean 'to cover the territory', however extensive or limited the territory might be; and, correspondingly, the verb 'to derange' would mean to remove something from its proper range: to limit the soprano to a mere two octaves, to pen the wolf, to govern the missile's mechanisms, to constrict the intellectual's gaze to fewer things than he'd like to look at. The open range of the American West was deranged in something close to this sense when ranchers strung wire across it: in doing that, they deranged the range, closed it off, made it smaller, disciplined it, policed it. Suppose we hold this gamut of meanings—enclosure, discipline, restriction—together with the one earlier mentioned, according to which derangement means the removal of arrangement, of order and beauty. Then we have an encapsulation of the delectable paradox I'm treating tonight, which is that derangements in the direction of openness such as that undergone by our desires, providing them the capacity to focus on anything at all, to wander in an open range without limits, necessarily bring in their train a second derangement, this time in the direction of discipline and enclosure.

In its application to human desire, this yields the following picture. Our derangedly open desires can be directed to anything at all. But desire never seeks anything at all, but rather always something in particular. Your sexual or gastronomic or intellectual appetites will always be configured in particular ways, even though they may take on any configuration at all. And in order for them to be configured they will have to be narrowed, disciplined, restricted, deranged exactly from the infinitely open range they are now capable of wandering in. This happens inevitably. The question, then, is not whether it will happen, but only how, and whether the configuration will be beautiful or ugly. The first derangement, in the direction of disorder, brings a second derangement, in the direction of discipline and restriction, at once and unavoidably in its train. But because the first derangement was, in the case of our desires, in the direction of disorder, the second derangement's constraints may be in any direction at all. Our appetites for one another, to take just one example, derangedly open as they now are, may be configured in the direction of necrophilia, according to which we seek the other only as dead; or in the direction of love for the iconic face, according to which we seek others as the precisely particular *imagines Dei* each of them is. And, of course, anywhere in between. The second derangement, therefore, unavoidable as it is, may tend either toward a re-arranging reversal of the first, or towards its intensification in the direction of absence.

This meta-naturalistic rejection of the natural requires some illustration in order to be made vivid.

Consider, first, the gastronomic appetites. Certainly, all or almost all of us have an innate drive for food. The sucking reflex of the newborn is something close to a human universal. But that drive is almost weightless and formless, which means it floats almost free of response to and desire for actual, particular foods. In order to gain weight and form, it must be catechized, which is to say instructed and formed over time by careful nurture. The breast is offered to the newborn, and her positive responses to it and its gift of milk encouraged, while her rejections of it are disciplined in the direction of removal. And then, as she grows, her tastes are formed by local habit, custom, and discipline until she becomes, for instance, someone who appreciates and desires a dozen raw oysters washed down with a crisply citrus-tinged Pinot Gris, while also someone revolted by a dinnertime offering of roast cat; or someone disgusted by cheese while eager to eat plantain fried in peanut oil. Intimate with these configured gastronomic desires goes the rococo edifice of culinary theory and practice, in which, within the constraints of what it is physically possible for human beings to ingest and what edible materials exist or are capable of being brought into being, every possible means of combining and preparing ingredients will be found somewhere commended and somewhere practiced. Every adult eater has gastronomic appetites of a quite fantastic complexity, every particular feature of whose complexity has among the necessary conditions for its existence local catechesis; which is to say that none among these features is natural.

Or, consider the appetite for language, which is to say for the capacity to respond appropriately to words used by others, and to generate words of your own. This appetite too is found widely, though not universally, distributed among humans, but its activation and development requires rather more by way of local catechesis than does that for food. More of us never learn to speak or understand than never learn to eat; and it is possible to live a long life without language, but not without food. But in other respects, the catechetical story is the same: your particular desires for words are, in all their specificity, the product of local catechesis. Perhaps you are a native speaker of Italian with a taste for writing and reading sestinas, or Dante-esque *terza rima*; or perhaps you are a native speaker of English with a taste for the rhythms of rap; or perhaps you are an illiterate virtuoso of the oral performance. In the case of words, just as with food, there is an edifice, vast and echoing, of verbal performance, and of theory about verbal performance, in resonant response to which particular desires for words get configured. And as with the culinary and the gastronomic, configured verbal desires which give delight to some are to others boring or disgusting or puzzling. The kind of oral activity we're engaged in tonight serves as an instance. Taking pleasure in using words in this way—desiring to hear or read or write or speak words of this kind—is a configured verbal desire which very few have—for which the proper response is probably thankfulness.

I could go on to speak of the range of particular, configured human sexual desires, which can also be focused on just about anything, including the inanimate, the dead, and the nonhuman. None of these configured desires is natural to us: each has to be learned by the assiduous development of habit. Or of the range of particular, catechized desires for

political action or for the deployment of violence or ... well, this is no place for a catalogue. The illustrations I've just given are meant only to enliven the fundamental theoretical point, which is that our appetites in every sphere of human activity are naturally inchoate, naturally open to formation in any imaginable direction. What is natural is what is inchoate; every formed and configured desire is a local gift, which may participate in or remove itself from God's fundamental and universal gift. That universal gift is of being out of nothingness and of remaking what has been unmade; the fact that local gifts can cooperate with or oppose that universal gift is a function of freedom and its effects.

A useful figure for understanding this distinctively human feature of desire, according to which the only natural thing about it is its openness to any configuration at all, its inchoateness, is that of excess. Speaking etymologically, this word means to pass beyond some boundary or another, to overstep the bounds. In ordinary usage, to say that one has an excess of something is to say that one has more than one needs of it. Such usages ordinarily have a negative connotation: to have more than you need might be taken to mean that you should get rid of the excess, and if you've overstepped—exceeded—the proper bounds of some activity, then it might seem that you'd better stop. But I intend no such straightforward and un-nuanced negative connotation here. To say of human desires that they are excessive is first to repeat what I've already said, which is that they are open to an infinitude of particular configurations. But it is also to focus attention on the insatiability of desire: the human effort to configure and reconfigure and extend and elaborate the gastronomic or sexual or verbal desires is constantly transgressive exactly because it is excessive. Gastronomic desire finds no rest when adequate nutrition is assured—if it did there would be no chefs, no restaurants, no shelves groaning with diet and recipe books; sexual desire finds no rest when procreation and loving intimacy are given and received—if it did, there would be no adulterers, no pornography, no poetry of romance; and verbal desire finds no rest when the communication necessary to survival has been mastered—if it did there would be no songs, no poetry, no invective, and no universities.

Human desire is, then, openly excessive, and incapable of reaching configuration without local stimulus, for which the best Christian name is catechesis. So far I have been describing what I take to be the way of things, how it is with our appetites. Suppose we now shift to the normative, to the question of discrimination of those configurations of our excess which we want to encourage from those we want to discourage.

Almost all of us have been catechized in such a way that we have a meta-appetite, an appetite for disciplining our own appetites and those of others into particular configurations. That is, most of us want to encourage some appetites and discourage others, both in ourselves and in others, though judgments about which are to be encouraged and which discouraged are much less widely shared.. You might, as I do, find lamentable those whose desires are configured in such a way that it seems delightful to them to chew gum in public, or to torture other human beings—though even if you do find both of these configured desires problematic, I hope you do not find them identically so; if you do, then your own appetites have been badly distorted. If you do find these

configured desires problematic, disgusting, perhaps, or in some other way undesirable, then you're quite likely to find yourself trying to persuade those who exhibit them that they'd better not, and your persuasion might extend to the point of advocating legal sanctions or even violence against those who do advocate or exhibit them. Parents and teachers and doctors all have reasonably well-developed ideas about which configurations of appetite they hope to nurture and which to make wither on the vine—though of course they do not agree about which are which. Most parents, for instance, prefer to catechize out of their toddlers a desire to display and share their own excrement, a desire which most show at one time or another. Most teachers work hard to encourage the habits of discipline and thought that they think will nurture the development of particular desired skills—literacy, let's say, or the capacity to judge the validity of an argument—and to discourage those that will hinder the development of those skills. And doctors work hard to change patterns of appetite, most generally those for a style of life which comports well or is directly productive of disease and death. That in significant part is what it means to be a doctor. These examples are of people trying to reconfigure the desires of others; it is, though, just as common to find one's own appetites in need of (re)-configuration, and to catechize oneself about that matter, whether about something as trivial as an appetite for nicotine, or as important as one for self-aggrandizement or world-domination.

Judgments of these kinds, and the catechetical activities that go with them, are normative: they imply an understanding of what human flourishing and its opposite—let's call it corruption—are like. Christians are like everyone else in this. We too have a particular understanding of what human flourishing consists in, and we too catechize in an attempt to order our own appetites and those of others in such a way that we flourish more. Jesus Christ came in order that we might have life and have it more abundantly; and this can be paraphrased without significant loss—except in pithiness—by saying that Jesus Christ came in order that our appetites might be configured in some particular way, our desires lent a certain weight, a weight that will turn us from death and fit us for life.

These judgments and the catechetical activities that go with them share another important feature. It is that they are teleological: they understand human appetites to be inevitably subject to change over time, and to be moving in a certain direction. Each particular configuration of appetite has temporal impetus: it is an element in a habitus, a mode of being in the world, which disposes those who inhabit it to continue to move along its track. There is no inevitability about such movement. It is possible for a well-established habitus to be suddenly and radically reconfigured—the drunk may suddenly cease to drink, the generous may become miserly, the violent peacable, the devout a despiser of religion, the ambitious content with obscurity. But this is not the usual story. The usual story is that of continued movement in the direction of one's heading. The ten-year-old reasonably proficient speaker of Japanese in a context where that language is widely spoken is likely to become a more proficient and polished user of that language; the man practised at inflicting pain on others will, in the right context, become more practised at that devilish skill. And so on. The weight of your catechized appetites, to use the standard Augustinian metaphor, drags you in a certain direction: the eyes of the glutton follow the food, those of the devout the traces of God. And there is always an implied goal, which is

the full development—which might also be the maximal development—of the tendency in question.

Normative judgments about which configurations of appetite are desirable and which undesirable go, then, with catechesis intended to bring the desirable ones about and thereby to minimize or remove the undesirable ones. And it does so in light of a teleological understanding of where the desired configurations point and will likely take those fortunate enough to develop them. For Christians, this teleological understanding will be intensified in the direction of eschatology, which means that the patterns of appetite we think good cannot be fully developed here below, and will find their full and final development only when we see God face to face and know as we are known. For which eventuality we do not hold our breaths. This modulation of the teleological into the eschatological suggests another formulation of the linguistic part of my thesis: where the adjective 'natural' has been or might be used to modify some pattern of appetite, we Christians might do well to substitute a phrase such as 'to be cultivated in response to divine gift.'

In the case of the so-called natural desire for God, the substitution works well: the desire for knowing and seeing God is a configuration we can nurture or oppose; it can increase or wither because of what we do or refuse to do; and its cultivation is undertaken with an eye to what thereby becomes of the one in whom it is cultivated—which is exactly to say with an eye to heavenly result. We are, it is axiomatic for Christians to say, disposed to configure our appetites in a God-directed way, but no more than to configure them otherwise; this is in part why it is improper to speak of our desire for God as natural to us. It is just one among the infinitely many configurations of appetite possible for us, no more natural to us than its opposite, which is a desire for the lack that is God's absence. Cultivating the desire for God is of course, from a Christian point of view, exactly what we should do: to desire God is good for us because it prepares us for intimacy with him, which is what we are for; to configure our desires in such a way that the desire for God becomes progressively less possible for us is, then, to damage ourselves, to make ourselves less than we can or should be. Its extreme case is damnation.

The question of agency in this talk of response and cultivation is important: the way I've been putting things might make it seem as though I take the only agents in this complex process of cultivating desire, of giving appetite its weight, to be human ones. But it is not so simple. Divine agency and human agency are, from a Christian point of view, noncompetitive. It's not that when we undertake and perform something God does not do it, or that when God does something, we do not. It is, to put a difficult matter much too briefly, that when we humans act for the good, which in the case that interests me here is in such a way as to configure our desires as response to divine gift, then we act as participants in God's prevenient agency in such a way that our desire is ordered to his and increasingly becomes harmoniously congruent with his. And, correspondingly, when we act for the bad, we assert ourselves as agents independent of God with the inevitable result that we do not really act: we perform action's negative image, whose only result is to damage both its agent and her environment. The cultivation of the desire for God, then,

is not a human work independent of God; it is, rather, an instance of responsive gratitude to the gift of the very possibility of action.

But this raises another fundamental question about the line I've been taking here. If, as I've been arguing, there are no natural human desires but only inchoate ones, from which it follows that desire is open exactly because it is excessive in the meaning of that term already sketched, then is it that this openness, this inchoateness of desire, its readiness for formation and malformation, is a good or a bad thing about us? Is this feature of human existence here below and after the fall something to be lamented and corrected without remainder, or are there threads in it that warrant rejoicing, threads that make it possible for the images of God that we are to be more fully conformed to him than would otherwise have been the case?

This is a counterfactual question, for the universal inchoateness of human desire is a fact, not a matter of speculation. And like all counterfactuals, it may have no answer. Some very respectable philosophers think that counterfactual statements have no truth-value, from which it would follow that no answers to counterfactual questions could be true or false, either. But in order to finesse that objection we might understand the question as one about, first, what human beings were like before the fall; and second, what we will be like in heaven. This reconstrues the question as a thought-experiment, and does so in standard Christian form. It is an utterly standard pattern of patristic thinking to consider what human beings are like and may become by considering them in these two modes, which we may call the paradisial and the heavenly. Such thought is speculative, of course; but none the worse for that.

In paradise, then, before the fall, human desires were not inchoately open in the way they now are. As soon as Adam's and Eve's eyes were opened, their desires were focused upon God without need for catechesis. Then it would have been proper to speak of a natural desire for God: to desire God would then have been as natural as a heartbeat. A concomitant of this natural focus, however, would inevitably have been a reduction in the range of desire's texture and possible formation. There would then have been neither need nor occasion for the range of gastronomic, verbal, or sexual appetites, well- and malformed, unavoidably open to us now. The same is true in heaven. There too, our desires are indefectibly fixed upon God, formed in the single and maximally beautiful shape of praise. There is and can be no other possibility: desire's heavenly range is therefore in one sense very small exactly because it has a single focus; but since that to which it is turned, namely the Lord, is in every sense infinite, desire's removal from the open range of possibility here below is not in fact a derangement in the direction of loss, but rather one in the direction of infinite gain.

This thought-experiment suggests that in paradise and in heaven desire for God is like breath to us, natural in just that way. But the grammar of the faith requires us to say that there are nevertheless deep differences between paradisial desire and heavenly desire. The difference is not one of range but rather of history: a history has intervened between paradise and heaven, one of sin and death, violence and blood, a history in which each of us, excepting only Mary and Jesus, is fully implicated. It is a history that includes the

cross, and so the difference between heaven's natural desires and those that belong to paradise is fully and properly crucial. The absence of tears in heaven, for which there is deep scriptural warrant, does not mean that this history has been erased or forgotten. Its weight remains because the events that constitute it are real, not a shadow-play which can be washed away by heaven's radiance. Those who love God in heaven are healed sinners, killers and rapists and torturers and the ordinarily but deeply and manipulatively mean—which means, by the way, me and you—while those in paradise had not (yet) sinned and were not (yet) soaked in blood violently shed. God's embrace of each kind of lover is therefore also and correspondingly different. If it is true that there is more heavenly rejoicing over the lost sheep who is found than over those who have not strayed, then this is one important sense in which the history that began with the eating of forbidden fruit in the garden and will end in the heavenly city is a good one. It is one way of explaining the fault of the garden and the consequent removal from us of a natural desire for God as a *felix culpa*, a happy fault. To say this neither explains nor justifies sin and death. It simply indicates one thing that follows from the fall's derangements which should not be lamented but rather rejoiced in.

There's more to say on this, I rather think, though it is inevitably still more speculative. Desire's derangement in the garden issued in the opening of human desire into an infinite range of possibility by making it inchoate; the secondary derangements of which I've been speaking catechize this inchoateness into a vast variety of particular configurations. Each of these particular configurations is to some extent damaged, blood- and violence-threaded, idolatrous, lured by lack and absence. But not each to the same extent: my desire to sing the Sanctus and to receive in humility the body and blood of Christ in the company of my brothers and sisters in Christ is not in these respects on a par with my desire to dominate by intellectual violence my brothers and sisters in the university—I've been catechized into both desires, and both are alive and active in me, but one conforms me more closely to God and the other damages me by separating me from him. Catechized, secondarily deranged desires, are, then, theoretically locatable in a hierarchy of goodness, though never easily, and never without qualification and ambiguity. But if this is true, and I think it is, then it is hard to avoid the conclusion that some among the products of desire deranged are goods that would not otherwise have been. Consider the recently-deceased contralto Lorraine Hunt Lieberson singing the Bach cantata "Ich habe genug"; or the flying buttresses of a gothic cathedral; or the poetry of George Herbert; or the embrace of lovers long-separated; or the gift of time and love to the dying; or, paradigmatically, the Christian assembly on its knees as the bread and wine are consecrated on the altar—all these are intimate with desires well-catechized and divinely beautiful, and they are goods that would not have occurred without the fall. They will, in some fashion, be taken up into heaven, and their beauty and complexity and order is the reason why our theological requiem for the natural is not one of lament without remainder, but rather one of lament linked with joy. In this it is like all requiems: when we mourn the dead we also, and at the same time, if we know what we are doing, rejoice in their new intimacy with their God.

There are many objections to what I've been saying here tonight. Some are exegetical: that what I've said doesn't sit well with Scripture or magisterial tradition. I take those

objections seriously, and it is certainly the case that in order for this thought-experiment to find a place in the fabric of Catholic theology, they would have to be addressed and seriously argued through. I mentioned earlier my delight in aspiring to be a Catholic theologian because of the depth and range of interlocutors whose deliverances I take seriously and to whose discipline I am subject: the need now to engage this speculative proposal with those interlocutors and that discipline brings with it more delight. Think how barren and destitute the theological enterprise would be if it were carried out only as a science on the battlefields of the university with nothing more than wit and energy as guide!

There are also systematic objections to what I've been saying tonight: that it stands in tension with or in outright contradiction to other things that the Catholic tradition strongly affirms—claims, perhaps about natural law, or about the necessity for the postulation of nature in order to make sense of grace, or about the importance of maintaining the identity of human persons as such even through their remaking in redemption. These objections can, I think, be met, but if they are to be further addressed tonight it will have to be in discussion.

And a final point. Among the strongest currents of thought abroad among us now is one that encourages us to discover who we are and to act accordingly, to gaze with the inward eye upon our glassy essence and respond to what we find there. That gaze yields a vast range of identities—of gender, of sex, of ethnicity, of trait and temperament and passion. If what I've been arguing is right, what we find when we attempt to discover who we are in that way is only phantasms, creatures of the imagination that wither when we turn our imaginations away from them. It is, then, an additional benefit of the position here defended that it bars that sort of talk and that sort of enterprise, opening to us instead the truth, which is that we are creatures, inchoate, unformed, hovering over the void from which we were made and seeking either to return there or to find happiness in the arms of the one who brought us therefrom. There is no glassy essence to discover, nothing but an unformed gaze that receives form only by looking away from itself and receiving the gift of being looked at by God's gaze. Making this view seductively beautiful is among the principal gifts we Christians have to give to the world.

"This is the monstrosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confined, that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit." (William Shakespeare, 'Troilus and Cressida', 3.2.88-90)