



## The Passions of the Unnatural

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### Abstract

Wonder, terror, and horror form a trio of passions that contains a cognitive component. In order to feel horror, terror, or wonder, one must first register an anomaly: these are the observant passions, which pick out the extraordinary against the background of the ordinary. The anomalies that evoke this trio of passions are violations of order, first and foremost natural order. They are the passions of the unnatural.

My plan in this lecture is to use the passions of the unnatural to answer a simple question: Why do human beings, in many different cultures and epochs, pervasively and persistently, look to nature as a source of norms for human conduct? In ancient India and in ancient Greece, in medieval France and Enlightenment America, in the latest controversy over homosexual marriage or genetically modified organisms, people have linked the natural and moral orders – and disorders. I want to understand *why* the moral and natural orders intermingle so irresistibly.

My line of inquiry will be to excavate the sources of the intuitions that propel the search for values in nature. In different times and places, these intuitions have expressed themselves in the most luxuriantly diverse forms – as diverse as the efflorescence of nature and culture themselves. But the core intuitions underlying all this diversity of norms grounded in nature have something in common. At their heart is the perception of order – as fact and as ideal. And this perception is deepened and heightened by the passions of the unnatural that accompany perceptions of *disorder*.