Introduction

Why a Theology of Creativity?

The word *creativity* makes a late appearance in the English language.[1] The modeling of human agency upon divine power, however, began at least during the fifteenth century.[2] For example, a new vocabulary for artistic production—including words such as *creare*, *ingenium*, *fantasia*, *imaginazione*, and *invenzione*—developed in the fifteenth century that contributed to the rising status of artists.[3] The transfer of divine creative powers to human agency continues through the modern period, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is manifested in the form of "genius."[4] In its early usage, applying language typically reserved for a divine context to a human context must have produced powerful metaphors. In contemporary usage, the words *create*, *creativity*, and *creator* are dead metaphors.

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1. The first recorded use of *creative* occurs in 1816. The word *creator* is first used to refer to human agency in 1579, and the first recorded use of *creativity* to refer to a human process occurs in 1875. See "creativity," "creative," and "creator" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. III, prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).
2. For example, Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, IV, 13.3, ed. James Hankins, trans. Michael J. B. Allen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 171–75. Ficino lived from 1433 to 1499.
3. Martin Kemp, "From 'Mimesis' to 'Fantasia': The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts," *Viator* 8 (1977): 347–98. See also Anthony Blunt, *Art Theory in Italy: 1450-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), ch. 4.
4. See chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion of the modern concept of genius.

However, the word *creativity* is not a dead metaphor because it has fallen out of conventional usage. Indeed, the exact opposite is the case. The language of creativity is overused and democratized. It is not reserved for great achievements, and so can apply equally well to the construction of a LEGO set.[5] Some even refer to the natural environment as creative.[6]

Creativity has never been more highly valued than it is today. It is considered by many today to be a highly valuable economic commodity.[7] As early as 1950, the American psychologist J. P. Guilford jump-started the psychological study of human creativity by suggesting that, in the face of technological changes, creativity would be the last frontier of human greatness.[8] Contemporary Western, and especially American, culture has high hopes for human creativity. Not only do we link creativity to human nature (what we believe humans *are*), we also hold out hope that unlocking the secrets of creativity will help us to achieve what we want to *become*.

When a metaphor dies, it may have simply run its historical course. What was once a novel and surprising association is worn out through use, and, over the course of decades, comes merely to refer to its object in a rather straightforward fashion. The death of creativity as a metaphor is also a *theological* death. In post-Christian society a robust theology of creation is no longer mapped onto the human activities commonly referred to as creative.[9] Modern science, in particular, has developed cosmologies that appear to compete with

5. See use of creation language on the LEGO home page, accessed January 30, 2012, www.lego.com.
6. For example, see Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (London: Macmillan, 1964). More recently, David Bohm, *On Creativity* (London: Routledge, 2004), 12.
7. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
8. "Eventually about the only economic value of brains left would be in the creative thinking of which they are capable." See his essay "Creativity," *The American Psychologist* 5 (1950): 444–54.
9. George Lakoff refers to this as "image mapping." Although he is critical of the concept of a "dead metaphor," he suggests that, in this particular case, it is most appropriate. See "The Death of Dead Metaphor," *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 2 (1987): 147.

the Christian notion of a personal Creator. The seeming impossibility of belief in a Creator, coupled with new ways of envisioning the cosmos, has stripped the language of creativity of its divine context. Furthermore, some argue that casting human creativity in the mold of divine creativity merely reinforces a corrupt social order, and justifies the ravishing of nature, and so, on this view, it may be best not to disturb the dead.[10]

Nevertheless, the experience of creativity continues to stretch and bend our language toward the theological. Some actually find it difficult to speak about human creativity without invoking theological categories. In a 2009 TED talk, Elizabeth Gilbert spoke about recovering the ancient concept of genius for the contemporary artist. According to Gilbert, the idea that one's creative efforts are aided by a mysterious "other" is a helpful "psychological construct" that facilitates the creative process and takes pressure off of the artist to be solely responsible for the success or failure of his/her work. It was fascinating to watch Gilbert borrow a concept that is obviously theological, and then, in an attempt to translate it for her contemporaries, try to avoid taking the theological dimension seriously. She is happy to refer to this "other's" mysteriousness, unimaginability, and even divinity, but that is as far as her theological musings go. Gilbert's experience of creative writing raises interesting theological questions, but she is not willing to take those theological questions seriously.

To take a more scholarly example, consider the following quote from William Desmond's *Art, Origins, Otherness: Between Philosophy and Art*:

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10. For the former, see Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius* (London: Woman's Press, 1989), esp. ch. 5. For the latter, the classic charge that the doctrine of the *imago Dei* has significantly contributed to the environmental crisis is made by Lynn White in "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–7.

Here's the rub. We are visited with disturbance, just in connection with the otherness of the origin that great art seems to reveal. Our powers of self-mediation, or self-determination, claiming originality, seem haunted by an elusive, often overwhelming power of origination that does not seem to belong to us univocally. In the very heart of self-determination a strange immanent otherness seems to arise again and again. We univocalize nature, and something more equivocally other still haunts us. We determine ourselves, and seem to be at one with ourselves, and yet something other, in the most radical intimacy of being creative, disturbs our being at one with ourselves.[11]

Far from being an expression of one's individuality, creativity is often an exciting discovery of one's relationality. The question is, how far does this relationality go, and how many "others" are we willing to consider?

It is surprising that so few theologians have seriously engaged with the topic of creativity. *Creativity as Sacrifice* seeks to fill this lacuna by developing a theological model for human creativity in the arts. In doing so, it is not the aim of this writer to ignore, undermine, or circumvent the concerns of other academic disciplines. The study of human creativity is a remarkably interdisciplinary affair. Christian theology should have a place at this table, and it is my goal to bring the concerns and questions of theology into dialogue with those who are writing about creativity in other disciplines.

What Is Creativity?

Most contemporary researchers adopt a working definition of human creativity as the production of something original and valuable.[12]

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11. William Desmond, *Art, Origins, Otherness: Between Philosophy and Art* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 57.
12. Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston, "The Creation of Art: Issues and Perspectives," in *The Creation of Art*, ed. Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–32. For a critique of this definition see Robert W. Weisberg, *Creativity* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), 60–70. Weisberg's critique fails because his

This definition is "product-oriented," and so some qualify it by stipulating that the creative process cannot be merely automatic.[13] This project defines a "creative practice" as any human activity that results in the production of something original and valuable through a non-automatic process.

This definition is helpful as far as it goes, but it is also extremely broad and abstract. Rather than defining creativity, this project is more concerned with developing a theological framework for the experience of human creativity that helps us to understand it more deeply, and that encourages ethical forms of creative practices. Some might argue that it makes no sense to speak of an ethical paradigm

definition of creativity as intentionally produced novelty seems to imply some form of evaluation. Do not intentions seek to justify the value of human actions by providing a rationale? Some disagree over the amount of originality involved in creativity. Margaret Boden, for example, adds the term "surprising" to her definition of creativity. "Surprising" must be understood against the background of what she calls a "generative system": a set of rules, ideas, and constraints that make creativity possible. That creativity should be surprising emphasizes the relative freedom of the personal agent with respect to a specific generative system. See "What Is Creativity?" in *Dimensions of Creativity*, ed. Margaret Boden (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 75–117. Some prefer to use language other than "value," but that nevertheless is consistent with the concept. Arthur Cropley, for example, defines creativity as "the production of relevant and effective novelty." See "Definitions of Creativity," in *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, ed. Mark A. Runco and Steven R. Pritzker (San Diego: Academic, 1999), 512. It may be that the criteria of originality and value are culturally relative, and so they cannot be taken as a universal definition of creativity. Nevertheless, they do seem to be essential to Western understandings of creativity. See Mark A. Runco and Robert S. Albert, "Creativity Research: A Historical View," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*, ed. James C. Kaufman and Robert J. Sternberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 3–19; Keith Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), ch. 8.

13. Teresa M. Amabile, in *Creativity in Context* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996), 35, includes in her definition of creativity the criterion that "the task is heuristic rather than algorithmic." By "heuristic" she means tasks that do not have a "clear and readily identifiable path to solution." Similarly, Berys Gaut argues that the creative process must involve an element that he calls "flair." To put it succinctly, flair is the use of one's skills without following a set routine. See "Creativity and Skill," in *The Idea of Creativity*, ed. Michael Krausz, Denis Dutton, and Karen Bardsley (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2009), 86. Process-oriented qualifications such as these are called into question, however, by the apparent ability of computers and machines to produce creative works. It should be noted that no artificial agent has ever produced a "creative" work without the evaluative assistance of a person, but presumably the process of a computer or machine would be "algorithmic" and not "heuristic." See Margaret Boden, *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), ch. 7; Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity*, ch. 6.

for human creative practices.[14] Such an argument only succeeds, however, by defining creativity reductively as a blind process that is "not moral or immoral, ethical or unethical, good or evil."[15] The motivation to develop an ethical paradigm for human creativity only arises when deliberation and evaluation are seen as essential to creativity.

Setting Parameters

One can approach the topic of creativity in such a broad and general way that very little would be said about particular creative practices. This approach assumes a universal creative process underlying all creative activities. For example, recent publications such as Andy Crouch's *Culture Making*[16] and James Davison Hunter's *To Change the World*[17] address questions about why and how Christians should engage in the very large task of creating culture. While there is nothing wrong with taking this approach, these books naturally have less to say about how creativity works in particular domains such as the arts, science, business, and so forth. It may be true that creative activities bear similarities regardless of their domain, but it is not at all clear that one's domain makes no difference at all.[18]

Therefore, I am primarily concerned to develop a theological model for human creativity *in the arts*. This does not mean, however,

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14. Mark A. Runco, "Creativity Has No Dark Side," in *The Dark Side of Creativity*, ed. David Cropley et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15–32.
15. Ibid., 15.
16. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).
17. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
18. For evidence of, and arguments for, domain specificity see John Baer, "Domains of Creativity," in *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, I, ed. Mark Runco and Steven R. Pritzker (London: Academic, 1999), 591–96; F. E. Sparshott, "Every Horse Has a Mouth: A Personal Poetics," in *The Concept of Creativity in Science and Art*, ed. D. Dutton and M. Krausz (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 47–73; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 71–73, 90–98.

that the reflections on artistic creativity in this project do not have wider implications for and connections to human creativity in general. After all, artistry is often taken as a metaphor for how humans relate to their world more generally.

Within the diverse and ever-changing domain of the arts, I have chosen to focus my observations on the subdomain of the plastic arts, such as painting and sculpture. In an attempt to bring theological reflection into close contact with at least one artistic practice, I will look carefully at the work of contemporary sculptor Andy Goldsworthy. Nevertheless, there are significant connections, which I will point to throughout the project, between creativity in the plastic arts and creativity in other art forms. Many other art forms also involve the crafting of a physical object, but I will also give some consideration to those that seem most different, such as literary authorship and musical composition.

This project is primarily interested in the ways that we imagine certain practices to be creative and ourselves to be creators. For this reason, I have chosen to explore several *theological models* for creativity in the arts. A model is a systematic metaphor that mediates some area of our experience. It mediates this experience by organizing it and valuing it. A *theological* model is one that draws upon the resources of a Christian theology (i.e., the Bible, tradition, worship, etc.). Theological models can make a uniquely theological contribution while also leaving room for other disciplines to bring their own insights, questions, and challenges. However, theological models do more than provide a conceptual framework for intellectual inquiry. They engage the imagination. A theological model for human creativity is like an invitation to join in the creative vision God has for the world, and to embody this vision in one's own creative work. Therefore, *Creativity as Sacrifice* does not merely articulate a conceptual framework for human creativity, it is also casts

a vision for human life as a creative response to the gracious gifts of a creative God.

There are many aspects for artistic creativity that a theological model could mediate. I have chosen to show how three different theological models mediate the artist's relationship with her traditions, materials, and communities. Let us briefly say something about each of these relationships.

Traditions include all of those ideas, words, images, motifs, themes, signs, metaphors, and, of course, symbols that artists draw upon, work with, and develop. Artists often borrow symbolic materials from other artists, and then refashion them anew in their own work. For example, images of the Crucifixion might be important symbolic materials for an artist working on a painting of the same theme. Traditions are like resonances moving through time that give an artist's work a depth and richness, and that open an artist's work to a wide and ongoing conversation. One might also think of symbolic materials as techniques for making art and rules for judging art. For example, a painter's training often involves a teacher handing down, in the form of abstract symbols, techniques for making art, and ideas about art. Traditions present to the artist an established way of doing something, and they afford a place from which an artist, and others, can judge the work.

Materials are the things the artist has at hand (such as paint, stone, paper, etc.), and that are deliberately included or excluded from the work of art. The artist's physical environment (not simply a studio, but also a town, countryside, mountain slope, etc.) and subject (still life, portrait, landscape, etc.) might also be said to shape and influence a work of art, even though it may not be possible for them to become part of the work of art. Even a cursory glance at contemporary art reveals the abundance of physical materials available to the artist.

Communities are all of those people with whom an artist, or an artist's work, comes into contact. Recent philosophy of art,[19] and also psychology of creativity,[20] has brought to light the inextricably social nature of creative work. Artists, for example, work within an "art world," which includes critics, curators, patrons, historians, and other artists who act as *gatekeepers* for that particular domain.[21] The artist's *audience* (viewers, listeners, theater-goers, etc.) also exert a significant influence upon the artist's work as the artist anticipates audience response.[22] Many artists also work with *collaborators* who exert an influence on the work of art before its reception.[23]

In spite of the distinctions just made, there are also significant ways that these constraints overlap and interact with one another. For example, it is sometimes said that the artist's materials comprise the

19. So-called "institutional" theories of art emphasize that what counts as art is socially constructed. See Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* 61 (1964): 571–84; George Dickie, "Defining Art," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1969): 253–56. For a similar view from an art critic, see Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance et al. (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2002),

20. See, for example, Amabile, *Creativity in Context*; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Society, Culture and Person: A Systems View of Creativity," in *The Nature of Creativity*, ed. Robert Sternberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 325–39.

21. This is far more complex than it may at first appear because artists are often not simply concerned to make art for the art world, but also for other communities as well. This tension has been felt, for example, in tensions between the gatekeepers of the art world and the gatekeepers of religious communities. For an excellent fictional portrayal of this tension from a Jewish perspective, see Chaim Potok, *My Name Is Asher Lev* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972).

22. In chapters four and five, I emphasized the communicative and dialogical nature of artistic creativity. This principle, rooted in a comparison with the incarnation, would also apply to the artist's relation to his audience. On this view, artistic creativity would be conceived as making a work that is completed by the creative response of others. For a philosophy of art that emphasizes the audience's participation in the work of art, see Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

23. This distinction is challenged and blurred by many contemporary artists who make works of art for audiences that, unwittingly, become collaborators. These "audiences" may not even know that they are audiences, let alone collaborators. The contemporary sculptor Dayton Castleman, for example, is pursuing an ongoing project called *Correspondence*, in which he fabricates letter "envelopes" out of wood or masonite and then sends them to recipients in the mail. The postal workers become unwitting collaborators in this project and their handling of his "envelopes" actually shapes their aesthetic appearance. See daytoncastleman.com/section/139416_Correspondence.html.

whole of reality. The artist can take anything in his or her experience, and make it a material for his creative work. The British poet David Jones writes:

> A piece of turned iron pierced at intervals, and formed at one end to handle, by which we regulate the opening of a casement-window is neither less or more contrived by *Ars* than are those juxtapositions of concepts that take material expression under the shapes of arranged lines of words, spaces, commas, points, by which poets regulate the openings of casements for us to enjoy and suffer the sights they would show us.[24]

Or, to take another example, an artist's traditions might easily be construed as just another type of community. After all, when we speak about an artist borrowing a particular technique or symbol, we are often not very concerned with the technique or symbol itself, but *who* the artist is borrowing from and that particular person's technique or symbol. Although there may be overlap between these three categories, they will nevertheless provide us with helpful concepts for attending carefully to different aspects of artistic creativity.

What brings an artist into relation with her traditions, materials, and communities? These relationships are shaped and determined by the artist's desire to make a *meaningful* work of art. The term "meaning" is used simply to denote the purpose or goal of making a work of art. One need not assume that the content of the meaning is accessible to the artist before or even during the creative process. Instead, one might think of meaning as the "special-ness" of a work of art.[25] Nicholas Wolterstorff, for example, describes that activity of making a work of art, or more specifically a representation, as

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24. David Jones, "Art and Sacrament," in *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings of David Jones*, ed. Harman Grisewood (London: Faber, 1973), 151. In more philosophical tones, Étienne Gilson remarks, "[S]ince everything that enters the structure of a work of art assumes an artistic significance, there is no a priori reason to disqualify any kind of material." See *Painting and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 55.

an action of world projection.[26] The meaning is that which sets the work of art apart from "ordinary" reality so that it appears to us as significant, purposeful, and extra-ordinary.

The artist enters into relationship with his traditions, materials, and communities, and *transforms* them into something meaningful. Reflecting, for example, on the improvisatory nature of musical cadenza, Trevor Hart writes that "the performance has a vital eschatological dimension and energy. In our Christian 'will to meaning,' we do not just look backwards, but perform hopefully towards a promised and imagined end."[27] That some sort of transformation occurs in or because of our creative activities may seem obvious to us. What may not be obvious is that artists are often caught within a tension between what the world is and what the world can become. The goal of human creativity is not simply the transformation of the world to suit our own preferences. Rather, our creative practices should also include a dimension of respect for our materials, traditions, and communities. The theological model for creativity in the arts proposed in *Creativity as Sacrifice* is not merely one of transformation, but one of *respectful transformation*.

A Brief Summary

Creativity as Sacrifice is divided into three parts. The first part lays out the methodology for this project. The first chapter defines what a theological model is, and responds to some preliminary objections

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25. Ellen Dissanayake argues that art, play, and ritual share the common activity of "making special." This activity is a bracketing off of a second order of reality to make sense of human experience. See *Homo Aestheticus* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 50.
26. Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, 198–247.
27. Trevor Hart, "The Sense of an Ending: Finitude and the Authentic Performance of Life," in *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. Trevor Hart and Steven Guthrie (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 185.

that readers may have to this project as a whole. I define a theological model as a systematic metaphor that organizes relevant data from scripture and tradition, opens new and interesting avenues for thought, aims toward the apprehension of reality, and enables one to change one's way of thinking about and experiencing the world. I suggest that a theological model is like a two-way street because it speaks about *both* God and the world. Because of the bi-directional nature of theological models, it is further suggested that all theological models must be assessed according to their *theological* and *anthropological* content.

The second chapter presents a historical survey of the use of theological models to frame and understand human creativity in the twentieth century. I consider more fully the ability of theological models to enable one to change one's way of thinking about and experiencing the world. In contrast to those who view them as peripheral or illustrative, I argue that theological models for human creativity play a significant role in many twentieth-century theologies of art by shaping the way theologians conceptualize human creativity.

Part 2 presents three different types of theological models: the modern concept of genius, the icon of God, and the sacrificial offering. They differ according to their theological foci (*creatio ex nihilo*, revelation, and redemption) and they differ according to the way they relate human creativity to the world. I argue that the sacrificial offering model is the most promising.

Part 3 evaluates the responsible use of a theological model for human creativity rooted in redemption. The responsible use of a theological model is contingent upon an assessment of the theological and anthropological commitments involved in using that model.

In chapter 6, I assess the anthropological commitments of the sacrificial offering model. This chapter is broken into two parts. First,

I explore some philosophical and psychological arguments in support of this theological model. By doing so, I achieve two things: (1) I situate this theological model in a wider context of theories about creativity outside of the discipline of theology, and (2) present an argument for viewing artistic creativity as *inherently* risky. Second, I explore the relationship between freedom and constraint in the creative practice of Andy Goldsworthy. Goldsworthy's writing and work is a unique dialogue partner for their theological models because he reflects on his own creative process, much of his creative process is documented, and there is a large secondary literature on Goldsworthy's work.

In chapter 7, I assess the theological commitments of the sacrificial offering model. This chapter explores how this model can answer the question: Does the Creator need the cosmos? One difficulty with this question is the way that it appears to demand either a positive or a negative response. In other words, it hides the rather complex nature of the concept "need." To approach a more subtle answer to the question, I use the observations made about freedom and constraint in the previous chapter as a guide. I propose four different approaches—unconstrained constraint, imposed constraint, chosen constraint, and invented constraint—to relating freedom and constraint in divine creativity. I argue that God's creativity is best modeled as interacting with the world as an "invented constraint."

In conclusion, I widen the scope by suggesting that the Christian life is essentially creative, and that working toward the kingdom of God inevitably involves human creativity.