

**Immanuel  
Kant**

**Critique  
of  
Judgment**

translated by  
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# BOOK II

## ANALYTIC OF THE SUBLIME

### § 23

#### Transition from the Power of Judging<sup>1</sup> the Beautiful to That of Judging the Sublime<sup>2</sup>

The beautiful and the sublime are similar in some respects. We like both for their own sake, and both presuppose that we make a judgment of reflection rather than either a judgment of sense or a logically determinative one. Hence in neither of them does our liking depend on a sensation, such as that of the agreeable, nor on a determinate concept, as does our liking for the good; yet we do refer the liking to concepts, though it is indeterminate which concepts these are. Hence the liking is connected with the mere exhibition or power of exhibition, i.e., the imagination, with the result that we regard this power, when an intuition is given us, as harmonizing with the *power of concepts*, i.e., the understanding or reason, this harmony furthering [the aims of] these. That is also why both kinds of judgment are *singular* ones that nonetheless proclaim themselves universally valid for all subjects, though what they lay claim to

<sup>1</sup>[For my use of 'power,' rather than 'faculty,' see above, Ak. 167 br. n. 3.]

<sup>2</sup>[Cf. the *Anthropology*, § § 67-68, Ak. VII, 239-43.]

is merely the feeling of pleasure, and not any cognition of the object.

But some significant differences between the beautiful and the sublime are also readily apparent. The beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in [the object's] being bounded. But the sublime can also be found in a formless object, insofar as we present *unboundedness*, either [as] in the object or because the object prompts us to present it, while yet we add to this unboundedness the thought of its totality. So it seems that we regard the beautiful as the exhibition of an indeterminate concept of the understanding, and the sublime as the exhibition of an indeterminate concept of reason. Hence in the case of the beautiful our liking is connected with the presentation of *quality*, but in the case of the sublime with the presentation of *quantity*. The two likings are also very different in kind. For the one liking ([that for] the beautiful) carries with it directly a feeling of life's being furthered, and hence is compatible with charms and with an imagination at play. But the other liking (the feeling of the sublime) is a pleasure that arises only indirectly: it is produced by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger. Hence<sup>3</sup> it is an emotion,<sup>4</sup> and so it seems to be seriousness, rather than play, in the imagination's activity. Hence, too, this liking is incompatible with charms, and, since the mind is not just attracted by the object but is alternately always repelled as well, the liking for the sublime contains not so much a positive pleasure as rather admiration and respect, and so should be called a negative pleasure.<sup>5</sup>

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But the intrinsic and most important distinction between the sublime and the beautiful is presumably the following. If, as is permissible, we start here by considering only the sublime in natural objects (since the sublime in art is always confined to the conditions that [art] must meet to be in harmony with nature), then the distinction in question comes to this: (Independent) natural beauty carries with it a purposiveness in its form, by which the object seems as it were pre-

<sup>3</sup>[Cf. Ak. 226.]

<sup>4</sup>[Cf. the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Ak. II, 209: "The sublime MOVES us, the beautiful CHARMS us."]

<sup>5</sup>[On admiration, respect, and positive and negative pleasure, cf. the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. V, 71-89.]

determined for our power of judgment, so that this beauty constitutes in itself an object of our liking. On the other hand, if something arouses in us, merely in apprehension and without any reasoning on our part, a feeling of the sublime, then it may indeed appear, in its form, contrapurposive for our power of judgment, incommensurate with our power of exhibition, and as it were violent to our imagination, and yet we judge it all the more sublime for that.

We see from this at once that we express ourselves entirely incorrectly when we call this or that *object of nature* sublime, even though we may quite correctly call a great many natural objects beautiful; for how can we call something by a term of approval if we apprehend it as in itself contrapurposive? Instead, all we are entitled to say is that the object is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind. For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility. Thus the vast ocean heaved up by storms cannot be called sublime. The sight of it is horrible; and one must already have filled one's mind with all sorts of ideas if such an intuition is to attune it to a feeling that is itself sublime, inasmuch as the mind is induced to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness.

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Independent natural beauty reveals to us a technic<sup>6</sup> of nature that allows us to present nature as a system in terms of laws whose principle we do not find anywhere in our understanding: the principle of a purposiveness directed to our use of judgment as regards appearances. Under this principle, appearances must be judged as belonging not merely to nature as governed by its purposeless mechanism, but also to [nature considered by] analogy with art. Hence even though this beauty does not actually expand our cognition of natural objects, it does expand our concept of nature, namely, from nature as mere mechanism to the concept of that same nature as art, and that invites us to profound investigations about [how] such a form is possible. However, in what we usually call sublime in nature there is such an utter lack of anything leading to particular objective principles and to forms of nature conforming to them, that it is rather in its chaos that nature most arouses our ideas of the sublime, or in its

<sup>6</sup>[See Ak. 193 br. n. 35.]

wildest and most ruleless disarray and devastation, provided it displays magnitude and might. This shows that the concept of the sublime in nature is not nearly as important and rich in implications as that of the beautiful in nature, and that this concept indicates nothing purposive whatever in nature itself but only in what *use* we can make of our intuitions of nature so that we can feel a purposiveness within ourselves entirely independent of nature. For the beautiful in nature we must seek a basis outside ourselves, but for the sublime a basis merely within ourselves and in the way of thinking that introduces sublimity into our presentation of nature. This is a crucial preliminary remark, which separates our ideas of the sublime completely from the idea of a purposiveness of *nature*, and turns the theory of the sublime into a mere appendix to our aesthetic judging of the purposiveness of nature. For through these ideas we do not present a particular form in nature, but only develop [the] purposive use that the imagination makes of the presentation of nature.

## § 24

## On Dividing an Investigation of the Feeling of the Sublime

In dividing the moments that are involved when we judge objects aesthetically in relation to the feeling of the sublime, the analytic can go on under the same principle that it followed in analyzing judgments of taste. For, since judgments about the sublime are made by the aesthetic reflective power of judgment, [the analytic] must allow us to present the liking for the sublime, just as that for the beautiful, as follows: in terms of *quantity*, as universally valid; in terms of *quality*, as devoid of interest; in terms of *relation*, [as a] subjective purposiveness; and in terms of *modality*, as a necessary subjective purposiveness. So our method here will not deviate from the one used in the preceding [book], except for a [detail that is] of no account: since aesthetic judgments about the beautiful concerned the form of the object, we there started by investigating their quality, whereas

here, since what we call sublime may be formless, we shall begin with the quantity as the first moment of an aesthetic judgment about the sublime. The reason for this is evident from the preceding section.

But we do have to make one division in analyzing the sublime that the analysis of the beautiful did not require: we must divide the sublime into the *mathematically* and the *dynamically* sublime.

For while taste for the beautiful presupposes and sustains the mind in *restful* contemplation, the feeling of the sublime carries with it, as its character, a mental *agitation* connected with our judging of the object. But (since we like the sublime) this agitation is to be judged subjectively purposive, and so the imagination will refer this agitation either to the *cognitive power* or to the *power of desire*, but in both cases the purposiveness of the given presentation will be judged only with regard to these *powers* (without any purpose or interest). The first kind of agitation is a *mathematical*, the second a *dynamical*, attunement of the mind. And so we attribute both these kinds of agitation to the object, and hence present the object as sublime in these two ways.



# ON THE MATHEMATICALLY SUBLIME

## § 25

### Explication of the Term Sublime

We call *sublime* what is *absolutely* [*schlechthin*] *large*. To be large [*groß*] and to be a magnitude [*Größe*] are quite different concepts (*magnitudo* and *quantitas*). Also, *saying simply* [*schlechtweg*] (*simpliciter*) that something is large is quite different from saying that it is *absolutely large* (*absolute, non comparative magnum*<sup>7</sup>). The latter is *what is large beyond all comparison*. But what does it mean to say that something is large, or small, or medium-sized? Such a term does not stand for a pure concept of the understanding, let alone an intuition of sense. Nor does it stand for a rational concept, for it involves no cognitive principle whatsoever. Hence it must stand for a concept that belongs to the power of judgment or is derived from such a concept, and it must presuppose a subjective purposiveness of the presentation in relation to the power of judgment. That something is a magnitude (*quantum*) can be cognized from the thing itself without any comparison of it with others, namely, if a multiplicity of the homogeneous together constitutes a unity. On the other hand, [to

<sup>7</sup>[Large absolutely rather than by comparison.]



judge] *how large* something is we always need something else, which is also a magnitude, as its measure. But since what matters in judging magnitude is not just multiplicity (number) but also the magnitude of the unity<sup>8</sup> [used as the unit] (the measure), and since [to judge] the magnitude of this unity we always need something else in turn as a measure with which we can compare it, it is plain that no determination of the magnitude of appearances can possibly yield an absolute concept of a magnitude, but at most can yield only a comparative one.

Now if I say simply that something is large, it seems that I have no comparison in mind at all, at least no comparison with an objective measure, because in saying this I do not determine at all how large [*groß*] the object is. But though my standard of comparison is merely subjective, my judgment still lays claim to universal assent. Such judgments as, This man is beautiful, and, He is large, do not confine themselves to the judging subject, but demand everyone's assent, just as theoretical judgments do.

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But in a judgment by which we describe something as absolutely large, we do not just mean that the object has some magnitude, but we also imply that this magnitude is superior to that of many other objects of the same kind, yet without indicating this superiority determinately. Hence we do base our judgment on a standard, which we assume we can presuppose to be the same for everyone; but it is a standard that will serve not for a logical (mathematically determinate) judging of magnitude, but only for an aesthetic one, because it is only a subjective standard underlying our reflective judgment about magnitude [*Größe*]. Furthermore, the standard may be either empirical or one that is given a priori. An empirical one might be the average size [*Größe*] of the people we know, of animals of a certain kind, of trees, houses, mountains, and so on. One that is given a priori would be confined, because of the deficiencies of the judging subject, to subjective conditions of an exhibition *in concreto*; an example from the practical sphere is the magnitude [or degree] of a certain virtue, or of the civil liberty and justice in a country; from the theoretical sphere,

<sup>8</sup>['*Einheit*' can mean 'unity' or 'unit' Here it means both, but the concern is with the imagination's effort to perform its usual function of providing an intuition (including that of a unit, even a *basic* unit) with *unity*, by comprehending it in accordance with a concept. See § 26 (Ak. 251-57) as well as Ak. 259. Cf. also the *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 98-100.]

the magnitude [or degree] of the correctness or incorrectness of some observation or measurement that has been made, and so on.

It is noteworthy here that even if we have no interest whatsoever in the object, i.e., we are indifferent to its existence, still its mere magnitude, even if the object is regarded as formless, can yet carry with it a liking that is universally communicable and hence involves consciousness of a subjective purposiveness in the use of our cognitive powers. But—and in this it differs from [the liking for] the beautiful, where reflective judgment finds itself purposively attuned in relation to cognition in general—this liking is by no means a liking for the object (since that may be formless), but rather a liking for the expansion of the imagination itself.

If (under the above restriction<sup>9</sup>) we say simply of an object that it is large, then our judgment is not mathematically determinative; it is a mere judgment of reflection about our presentation of the object, a presentation that is subjectively purposive for a certain use we can make of our cognitive powers in estimating magnitude; and we then always connect with the presentation a kind of respect, as we connect a [kind of] contempt with what we simply call small. Furthermore, our judging of things as large or small [*groß oder klein*] applies to anything, even to any characteristics of things. That is why we call even beauty great or little [*groß oder klein*], because no matter what we exhibit in intuition (and hence present aesthetically) in accordance with the precept of judgment, it is always appearance, and hence also a quantum.<sup>10</sup>

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But suppose we call something not only large, but large absolutely [*schlechthin, absolut*], in every respect (beyond all comparison), i.e., sublime. Clearly, in that case, we do not permit a standard adequate to it to be sought outside it, but only within it. It is a magnitude that is equal only to itself. It follows that the sublime must not be sought in things of nature, but must be sought solely in our ideas; but in which of these it resides [is a question that] must wait for the deduction.<sup>11</sup>

The above explication can also be put as follows: *That is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small.* We can easily see

<sup>9</sup>[On the kind of standard we are presupposing.]

<sup>10</sup>[Cf. the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Axioms of Intuition, A 162-66 = B 202-07.]

<sup>11</sup>[See below, § 30, Ak. 279-80.]

here that nothing in nature can be given, however large we may judge it, that could not, when considered in a different relation, be degraded all the way to the infinitely small, nor conversely anything so small that it could not, when compared with still smaller standards, be expanded for our imagination all the way to the magnitude of a world; telescopes have provided us with a wealth of material in support of the first point,<sup>12</sup> microscopes in support of the second. Hence, considered on this basis, nothing that can be an object of the senses is to be called sublime. [What happens is that] our imagination strives to progress toward infinity, while our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea, and so [the imagination,] our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense, is inadequate to that idea. Yet this inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power; and what is absolutely large is not an object of sense, but is the use that judgment makes naturally of certain objects so as to [arouse] this (feeling), and in contrast with that use any other use is small. Hence what is to be called sublime is not the object, but the attunement that the intellect [gets] through a certain presentation that occupies reflective judgment.

Hence we may supplement the formulas already given to explicate the sublime by another one: *Sublime is what even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense.*

<sup>12</sup>[Cf. the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), Ak. I, 215-368.]

## On Estimating the Magnitude of Natural Things, as We Must for the Idea of the Sublime

Estimation of magnitude by means of numerical concepts (or their signs in algebra) is mathematical; estimation of magnitudes in mere intuition (by the eye) is aesthetic. It is true that to get determinate concepts of *how large* something is we must use numbers (or, at any rate, approximations [expressed] by numerical series progressing to infinity), whose unity is [the unit we use as<sup>13</sup>] the measure; and to that extent all logical estimation of magnitude is mathematical. Yet the magnitude of the measure must be assumed to be known. Therefore, if we had to estimate this magnitude also mathematically, i.e., only by numbers, whose unity would have to be a different measure, then we could never have a first or basic measure, and hence also could have no determinate concept of a given magnitude. Hence our estimation of the magnitude of the basic measure must consist merely in our being able to take it in [*fassen*] directly in one intuition and to use it, by means of the imagination, for exhibiting numerical concepts. In other words, all estimation of the magnitude of objects of nature is ultimately aesthetic (i.e., determined subjectively rather than objectively).

Now even though there is no maximum [*Größtes*] for the mathematical estimation of magnitude (inasmuch as the power of numbers progresses to infinity), yet for the aesthetic estimation of magnitude there is indeed a maximum. And regarding this latter maximum I say that when it is judged as [the] absolute measure beyond which no larger is subjectively possible (i.e., possible for the judging subject), then it carries with it the idea of the sublime and gives rise to that emotion which no mathematical estimation of magnitude by means of numbers can produce (except to the extent that the basic aesthetic

<sup>13</sup>[Cf. Ak. 248 incl. br. n. 8.]

measure is at the same time kept alive in the imagination). For a mathematical estimation of magnitude never exhibits more than relative magnitude, by a comparison with others of the same kind, whereas an aesthetic one exhibits absolute magnitude to the extent that the mind can take it in in one intuition.

252 In order for the imagination to take in a quantum intuitively, so that we can then use it as a measure or unity in estimating magnitude by numbers, the imagination must perform two acts: *apprehension* (*apprehensio*), and *comprehension*<sup>14</sup> (*comprehensio aethetica*). Apprehension involves no problem, for it may progress to infinity. But comprehension becomes more and more difficult the farther apprehension progresses, and it soon reaches its maximum, namely, the aesthetically largest basic measure for an estimation of magnitude. For when apprehension has reached the point where the partial presentations of sensible intuition that were first apprehended are already beginning to be extinguished in the imagination, as it proceeds to apprehend further ones, the imagination then loses as much on the one side as it gains on the other; and so there is a maximum in comprehension that it cannot exceed.

This serves to explain a comment made by *Savary* in his report on Egypt:<sup>15</sup> that in order to get the full emotional effect from the magnitude of the pyramids one must neither get too close to them nor stay too far away. For if one stays too far away, then the apprehended parts (the stones on top of one another) are presented only obscurely, and hence their presentation has no effect on the subject's aesthetic judgment; and if one gets too close, then the eye needs some time to complete the apprehension from the base to the peak, but during that time some of the earlier parts are invariably extinguished in the imagination before it has apprehended the later ones, and hence the comprehension is never complete. Perhaps the same observation can explain the bewilderment or kind of perplexity that is said to seize the spectator who for the first time enters St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

<sup>14</sup>[*Zusammenfassung*. 'Comprehension' and 'comprehend' are used in this translation only in this sense of 'collecting together and holding together' (cf. 'comprehensive'), never in the sense of 'understanding.']

<sup>15</sup>[*Lettres sur l'Égypte (Letters on Egypt)*, 1787, by Anne Jean Marie René Savary, Duke of Rovigo, (1774-1833), French general, diplomat, and later minister of police (notorious for his severity) under Napoleon Bonaparte, but active even after the latter's banishment to St. Helena in 1815. Savary took part in Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt.]

For he has the feeling that his imagination is inadequate for exhibiting the idea of a whole, [a feeling] in which imagination reaches its maximum, and as it strives to expand that maximum, it sinks back into itself, but consequently comes to feel a liking [that amounts to an<sup>16</sup>] emotion [*rührendes Wohlgefallen*].

I shall say nothing for now regarding the basis of this liking, a liking connected with a presentation from which one would least expect it, namely, a presentation that makes us aware of its own inadequacy and hence also of its subjective unpurposiveness for the power of judgment in its estimation of magnitude. Here I shall only point out that if the aesthetic judgment in question is to be *pure* (*unmixed with any teleological* and hence rational judgment), and if we are to give an example of it that is fully appropriate for the critique of *aesthetic* judgment, then we must point to the sublime not in products of art (e.g., buildings, columns, etc.), where both the form and the magnitude are determined by a human purpose, nor in natural things *whose very concept carries with it a determinate purpose* (e.g., animals with a known determination in nature), but rather in crude nature (and even in it only insofar as it carries with it no charm, nor any emotion aroused by actual danger), that is, merely insofar as crude nature contains magnitude. For in such a presentation nature contains nothing monstrous (nor anything magnificent or horrid); it does not matter how far the apprehended magnitude has increased, just as long as our imagination can comprehend it within one whole. An object is *monstrous* if by its magnitude it nullifies the purpose that constitutes its concept. And *colossal* is what we call the mere exhibition of a concept if that concept is almost too large for any exhibition (i.e., if it borders on the relatively monstrous); for the purpose of exhibiting a concept is hampered if the intuition of the object is almost too large for our power of apprehension. A pure judgment about the sublime, on the other hand, must have no purpose whatsoever of the object as the basis determining it, if it is to be aesthetic and not mingled with some judgment of understanding or of reason.

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Since the presentation of anything that our merely reflective power of judgment is to like without an interest must carry with it a

<sup>16</sup>[Cf. Ak. 245 and 226.]

purposiveness that is subjective and yet universally valid, but since in the sublime (unlike the beautiful) our judging is not based on a purposiveness of the *form* of the object, the following questions arise: What is this subjective purposiveness, and how does it come to be prescribed as a standard, thereby providing a basis for a universally valid liking accompanying the mere estimation of magnitude—an estimation that has been pushed to the point where the ability of our imagination is inadequate to exhibit the concept of magnitude?

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When the imagination performs the combination [*Zusammensetzung*] that is required to present a magnitude, it encounters no obstacles and on its own progresses to infinity, while the understanding guides it by means of numerical concepts, for which the imagination must provide the schema;<sup>17</sup> and in this procedure, which is involved in the logical estimation of magnitude, there is indeed something objectively purposive under the concept of a purpose (since any measuring is a purpose). And yet there is nothing in it that is purposive for, and liked by, the aesthetic power of judgment. Nor is there anything in this intentional purposiveness that necessitates our pushing the magnitude of the measure, and hence of the *comprehension* of the many [elements] in one intuition, to the limit of the imagination's ability, and as far as it may extend in exhibiting. For in estimating magnitudes by the understanding (arithmetic) we get equally far whether we pursue the comprehension of the unities to the number 10 (as in the decadic system) or only to 4 (as in the tetradic system): the further generation of magnitudes—in the [process of] combination or, if the quantum is given in intuition, in apprehension—is done merely progressively (rather than comprehensively), under an assumed principle of progression. This mathematical estimation of magnitude serves and satisfies the understanding equally well, whether the imagination selects as the unity a magnitude that we can take in in one glance, such as a foot or a rod, or whether it selects a German

<sup>17</sup>[A schema is what mediates, and so makes possible, the subsumption of intuitions under concepts of the understanding (and so the application of these concepts to intuitions). It does so by sharing features of both a concept and an intuition. See the *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 137–47 = B 176–87, and cf. Ak. 351–52 and the Translator's Introduction, xxxvi.]

mile,<sup>18</sup> or even an earth diameter, which the imagination can apprehend but cannot comprehend in one intuition (by a *comprehensio aesthetica*, though it can comprehend it in a numerical concept by a *comprehensio logica*). In either case the logical estimation of magnitude progresses without hindrance to infinity.<sup>19</sup>

But the mind listens to the voice of reason within itself, which demands totality for all given magnitudes, even for those that we can never apprehend in their entirety but do (in presentation of sense) judge as given in their entirety. Hence reason demands comprehension in *one* intuition, and *exhibition* of all the members of a progressively increasing numerical series, and it exempts from this demand not even the infinite (space and past time). Rather, reason makes us unavoidably think of the infinite (in common reason's judgment) as *given in its entirety* (in its totality).

The infinite, however, is absolutely large (not merely large by comparison). Compared with it everything else (of the same kind of magnitudes<sup>20</sup>) is small. But—and this is most important—to be able even to think the infinite as *a whole* indicates a mental power that surpasses any standard of sense. For [thinking the infinite as a whole while using a standard of sense] would require a comprehension yielding as a unity a standard that would have a determinate relation to the infinite, one that could be stated in numbers; and this is impossible. If the human mind is nonetheless to *be able even to think* the given infinite without contradiction, it must have within itself a power that is supersensible, whose idea of a noumenon cannot be intuited but can yet be regarded as the substrate underlying what is mere appearance, namely, our intuition of the world. For only by means of this power and its idea do we, in a pure intellectual estima-

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<sup>18</sup>[The Prussian rod equaled 3.7662 m (meters), the Saxon 4.2951 m, whereas the English rod equals 5.5 yds. or 5.029 m. The German mile was quite long: 7500 m; the English statute mile equals only 1609.35 m. There was also a "geographic" or "Bavarian" as well as a "*Badische*" mile.]

<sup>19</sup>['*Das Unendliche*.' What this expression says *literally* is 'the infinite.' Yet here (and similarly in mathematics, where the same expression is used), the expression does not mean *something infinite* (to which the estimation of magnitude progresses), even though it does mean this in other contexts (e.g., in the next paragraph). '*Unendlichkeit*,' on the other hand, usually means 'infinity' only in the most abstract sense: 'infiniteness,' 'being infinite.')

<sup>20</sup>[In this case, magnitudes that are *given* (in intuition).]



tion of magnitude, comprehend the infinite in the world of sense *entirely under* a concept, even though in a mathematical estimation of magnitude *by means of numerical concepts* we can never think it in its entirety. Even a power that enables us to think the infinite of supersensible intuition as given (in our intelligible substrate) surpasses any standard of sensibility. It is large beyond any comparison even with the power of mathematical estimation—not, it is true, for [the pursuit of] a theoretical aim on behalf of our cognitive power, but still as an expansion of the mind that feels able to cross the barriers of sensibility with a different (a practical) aim.

Hence nature is sublime in those of its appearances whose intuition carries with it the idea of their infinity. But the only way for this to occur is through the inadequacy of even the greatest effort of our imagination to estimate an object's magnitude. In the mathematical estimation of magnitude, however, the imagination is equal to the task of providing, for any object, a measure that will suffice for this estimation, because the understanding's numerical concepts can be used in a progression and so can make any measure adequate to any given magnitude. Hence it must be the *aesthetic* estimation of magnitude where we feel that effort, our imagination's effort to perform a comprehension that surpasses its ability to encompass [*begreifen*] the progressive apprehension in a whole of intuition, and where at the same time we perceive the inadequacy of the imagination—unbounded though it is as far as progressing is concerned—for taking in and using, for the estimation of magnitude, a basic measure that is suitable for this with minimal expenditure on the part of the understanding. Now the proper unchangeable basic measure of nature is the absolute whole of nature, which, in the case of nature as appearance, is infinity comprehended. This basic measure, however, is a self-contradictory concept (because an absolute totality of an endless progression is impossible). Hence that magnitude of a natural object to which the imagination fruitlessly applies its entire ability to comprehend must lead the concept of nature to a supersensible substrate (which underlies both nature and our ability to think), a substrate that is large beyond any standard of sense and hence makes us judge as *sublime* not so much the object as the mental attunement in which we find ourselves when we estimate the object.

Therefore, just as the aesthetic power of judgment in judging the beautiful refers the imagination in its free play to the *understanding*

so that it will harmonize with the understanding's *concepts* in general (which concepts they are is left indeterminate), so in judging a thing sublime it refers the imagination to *reason* so that it will harmonize subjectively with reason's *ideas* (which ideas they are is indeterminate), i.e., so that it will produce a mental attunement that conforms to and is compatible with the one that an influence by determinate (practical) ideas would produce on feeling.

This also shows that true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging person, not in the natural object the judging of which prompts this mental attunement. Indeed, who would want to call sublime such things as shapeless mountain masses piled on one another in wild disarray, with their pyramids of ice, or the gloomy raging sea? But the mind feels elevated in its own judgment of itself when it contemplates these without concern for their form and abandons itself to the imagination and to a reason that has come to be connected with it—though quite without a determinate purpose, and merely expanding it—and finds all the might of the imagination still inadequate to reason's ideas.

Nature offers examples of the mathematically sublime, in mere intuition, whenever our imagination is given, not so much a larger numerical concept, as a large unity for a measure (to shorten the numerical series). A tree that we estimate by a man's height will do as a standard for [estimating the height of] a mountain. If the mountain were to be about a mile high, it can serve as the unity for the number that expresses the earth's diameter, and so make that diameter intuitable. The earth's diameter can serve similarly for estimating the planetary system familiar to us, and that [in turn] for estimating the Milky Way system. And the immense multitude of such Milky Way systems, called nebulous stars, which presumably form another such system among themselves, do not lead us to expect any boundaries here.<sup>21</sup> Now when we judge such an immense whole aesthetically, the sublime lies not so much in the magnitude of the number as in the fact that, the farther we progress, the larger are the unities we reach. This is partly due to the systematic division in the structure of the world edifice; for this division always presents to us whatever is large in nature as being small in turn, though what it actually presents to us is

<sup>21</sup>[Cf. the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), Ak. I, 247-58, but esp. Ak. I, 306-22.]

our imagination, in all its boundlessness, and along with its nature, as vanishing[ly small] in contrast to the ideas of reason, if the imagination is to provide an exhibition adequate to them.

## § 27

### On the Quality of the Liking in Our Judging of the Sublime

The feeling that it is beyond our ability to attain to an idea *that is a law for us* is RESPECT. Now the idea of comprehending every appearance that may be given us in the intuition of a whole is an idea enjoined on us by a law of reason, which knows no other determinate measure that is valid for everyone and unchanging than the absolute whole. But our imagination, even in its greatest effort to do what is demanded of it and comprehend a given object in a whole of intuition (and hence to exhibit the idea of reason), proves its own limits and inadequacy, and yet at the same time proves its vocation to [obey] a law, namely, to make itself adequate to that idea. Hence the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation. But by a certain subreption<sup>22</sup> (in which respect for the object is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within our[selves, as] subject[s]) this respect is accorded an object of nature that, as it were, makes intuitable for us the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive powers over the greatest power of sensibility.<sup>23</sup>

Hence the feeling of the sublime is a feeling of displeasure that arises from the imagination's inadequacy, in an aesthetic estimation

<sup>22</sup>[Cf. the Inaugural Dissertation (1770), *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principii* (On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World), § 24, Ak. II, 412: "... praestigia intellectus, per subornationem conceptus sensitivi, tamquam notae intellectualis, dici potest (secundum analogiam significatus recepti) vitium subreptionis." i.e., "We may call fallacy of subreption (by analogy with the accepted meaning) the intellect's trick of slipping in a concept of sense as if it were the concept of an intellectual characteristic."]

<sup>23</sup>[I.e., the imagination "in its greatest expansion": cf. Ak. 269.]

of magnitude, for an estimation by reason, but is at the same time also a pleasure, aroused by the fact that this very judgment, namely, that even the greatest power of sensibility is inadequate, is [itself] in harmony with rational ideas, insofar as striving toward them is still a law for us. For it is a law (of reason) for us, and part of our vocation, to estimate any sense object in nature that is large for us as being small when compared with ideas of reason; and whatever arouses in us the feeling of this supersensible vocation is in harmony with that law. Now the greatest effort of the imagination in exhibiting the unity [it needs] to estimate magnitude is [itself] a reference to something *large absolutely*, and hence also a reference to reason's law to adopt only this something as the supreme measure of magnitude. Hence our inner perception that every standard of sensibility is inadequate for an estimation of magnitude by reason is [itself] a harmony with laws of reason, as well as a displeasure that arouses in us the feeling of our supersensible vocation, according to which finding that every standard of sensibility is inadequate to the ideas of reason is purposive and hence pleasurable.

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In presenting the sublime in nature the mind feels *agitated*,<sup>24</sup> while in an aesthetic judgment about the beautiful in nature it is in *restful* contemplation. This agitation (above all at its inception) can be compared with a vibration, i.e., with a rapid alternation of repulsion from, and attraction to, one and the same object. If a [thing] is excessive for the imagination (and the imagination is driven to [such excess] as it apprehends [the thing] in intuition), then [the thing] is, as it were, an abyss in which the imagination is afraid to lose itself. Yet, at the same time, for reason's idea of the supersensible [this same thing] is not excessive but conforms to reason's law to give rise to such striving by the imagination. Hence [the thing] is now attractive to the same degree to which [formerly] it was repulsive to mere sensibility. The judgment itself, however, always remains only aesthetic here. For it is not based on a determinate concept of the object, and presents merely the subjective play of the mental powers themselves (imagination and reason) as harmonious by virtue of their contrast. For just as, when we judge the beautiful, imagination and *understanding* give rise to a subjective purposiveness of the mental powers by their *accordance*, so do imagination and *reason* here give rise to such a purposiveness

<sup>24</sup>[Cf. Ak. 245 and 226.]

by their *conflict*, namely, to a feeling that we have a pure and independent reason, or a power for estimating magnitude, whose superiority cannot be made intuitable by anything other than the inadequacy of that power which in exhibiting magnitudes (of sensible objects) is itself unbounded.

259 Measuring (as [a way of] apprehending) a space is at the same time describing it, and hence it is an objective movement in the imagination and a progression. On the other hand, comprehending a multiplicity in a unity (of intuition rather than of thought),<sup>25</sup> and hence comprehending in one instant what is apprehended successively, is a regression that in turn cancels the condition of time in the imagination's progression and makes *simultaneity* intuitable.<sup>26</sup> Hence, (since temporal succession is a condition of the inner sense and of an intuition) it is a subjective movement of the imagination by which it does violence to the inner sense, and this violence must be the more significant the larger the quantum is that the imagination comprehends in one intuition. Hence the effort to take up into a single intuition a measure for magnitude requiring a significant time for apprehension is a way of presenting which subjectively considered is contrapurposive, but which objectively is needed to estimate magnitude and hence is purposive. And yet this same violence that the imagination inflicts on the subject is still judged purposive *for the whole vocation* of the mind.

The *quality* of the feeling of the sublime consists in its being a feeling, accompanying an object, of displeasure about our aesthetic power of judging, yet of a displeasure that we present at the same time as purposive. What makes this possible is that the subject's own inability uncovers in him the consciousness of an unlimited ability which is also his, and that the mind can judge this ability aesthetically only by that inability.

In the logical estimation of magnitude, the impossibility of ever arriving at absolute totality by measuring the things in the world of sense progressively, in time and space, was cognized as objective, as an impossibility of *thinking* the infinite as given, and not as merely subjective, as an inability to *take it in*. For there we are not at all

<sup>25</sup>[Parentheses added.]

<sup>26</sup>[Cf., for this portion of the paragraph, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 411-13 = B 438-40.]

concerned with the degree of the comprehension in one intuition, [to be used] as a measure, but everything hinges on a numerical concept. In an aesthetic estimation of magnitude, on the other hand, the numerical concept must drop out or be changed, and nothing is purposive for this estimation except the imagination's comprehension to [form] a unity [to be used as] a measure (so that the concepts of a law of the successive generation of concepts of magnitude are avoided). Now if a magnitude almost reaches the limit of our ability to comprehend [it] in one intuition, but the imagination is still called upon to perform, by means of numerical magnitudes (regarding which we are conscious of having an unbounded ability), an aesthetic comprehension in a larger unity; then we feel in our mind that we are aesthetically confined within bounds. Yet, in view of the necessary expansion of the imagination toward adequacy regarding what is unbounded in our power of reason, namely, the idea of the absolute whole, the displeasure is still presented as purposive for the rational ideas and their arousal, and hence so is the unpurposiveness of our imagination's ability. This is precisely what makes the aesthetic judgment itself subjectively purposive for reason, as the source of ideas, i.e., as the source of an intellectual comprehension [compared] to which all aesthetic comprehension is small, and the object is apprehended as sublime with a pleasure that is possible only by means of a displeasure.



# B

## ON THE DYNAMICALLY SUBLIME IN NATURE

### § 28

#### On Nature as a Might

*Might* is an ability that is superior to great obstacles. It is called *dominance* [*Gewalt*] if it is superior even to the resistance of something that itself possesses might. When in an aesthetic judgment we consider nature as a might that has no dominance over us, then it is *dynamically*<sup>27</sup> *sublime*.

If we are to judge nature as sublime dynamically, we must present it as arousing fear. (But the reverse does not hold: not every object that arouses fear is found sublime when we judge it aesthetically.) For when we judge [something] aesthetically (without a concept), the only way we can judge a superiority over obstacles is by the magnitude of the resistance. But whatever we strive to resist is an evil, and it is an object of fear if we find that our ability [to resist it] is no match for it. Hence nature can count as a might, and so as dynamically sublime, for aesthetic judgment only insofar as we consider it as an object of fear.

We can, however, consider an object *fearful* without being afraid of it, namely, if we judge it in such a way that we merely *think* of the

<sup>27</sup>[From Greek *δύναμις* (*dýnamis*), i.e. 'might,' 'power,' etc.]



case where we might possibly want to put up resistance against it, and that any resistance would in that case be utterly futile. Thus a virtuous person fears God without being afraid of him. For he does not think of wanting to resist God and his commandments as a possibility that should worry *him*. But for every such case, which he thinks of as not impossible intrinsically, he recognizes God as fearful.

Just as we cannot pass judgment on the beautiful if we are seized by inclination and appetite, so we cannot pass judgment at all on the sublime in nature if we are afraid. For we flee from the sight of an object that scares us, and it is impossible to like terror that we take seriously. That is why the agreeableness that arises from the cessation of a hardship is *gladness*. But since this gladness involves our liberation from a danger, it is accompanied by our resolve never to expose ourselves to that danger again. Indeed, we do not even like to think back on that sensation, let alone actively seek out an opportunity for it.

On the other hand, consider bold, overhanging and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piling up in the sky and moving about accompanied by lightning and thunderclaps, volcanoes with all their destructive power, hurricanes with all the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean heaved up, the high waterfall of a mighty river, and so on. Compared to the might of any of these, our ability to resist becomes an insignificant trifle. Yet the sight of them becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, provided we are in a safe place. And we like to call these objects sublime because they raise the soul's fortitude above its usual middle range and allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a quite different kind, and which gives us the courage [to believe] that we could be a match for nature's seeming omnipotence.

For although we found our own limitation when we considered the immensity of nature and the inadequacy of our ability to adopt a standard proportionate to estimating aesthetically the magnitude of nature's *domain*, yet we also found, in our power of reason, a different and nonsensible standard that has this infinity itself under it as a unit; and since in contrast to this standard everything in nature is small, we found in our mind a superiority over nature itself in its immensity. In the same way, though the irresistibility of nature's might makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical impotence, it reveals in us at the same time an ability to judge

ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us a superiority over nature that is the basis of a self-preservation quite different in kind from the one that can be assailed and endangered by nature outside us. This keeps the humanity in our person from being degraded, even though a human being would have to succumb to that dominance [of nature]. Hence if in judging nature aesthetically we call it sublime, we do so not because nature arouses fear, but because it calls forth our strength (which does not belong to nature [within us]), to regard as small the [objects] of our [natural] concerns: property, health, and life, and because of this we regard nature's might (to which we are indeed subjected in these [natural] concerns) as yet not having such dominance over us, as persons, that we should have to bow to it if our highest principles were at stake and we had to choose between upholding or abandoning them. Hence nature is here called sublime [*erhaben*] merely because it elevates [*erhebt*] our imagination, [making] it exhibit those cases where the mind can come to feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature.

This self-estimation loses nothing from the fact that we must find ourselves safe in order to feel this exciting liking, so that (as it might seem), since the danger is not genuine, the sublimity of our intellectual ability might also not be genuine. For here the liking concerns only our ability's *vocation*, revealed in such cases, insofar as the predisposition to this ability is part of our nature, whereas it remains up to us, as our obligation, to develop and exercise this ability. And there is truth in this, no matter how conscious of his actual present impotence man may be when he extends his reflection thus far.

I admit that this principle seems farfetched and the result of some subtle reasoning, and hence high-flown [*überschwenglich*] for an aesthetic judgment. And yet our observation of man proves the opposite, and proves that even the commonest judging can be based on this principle, even though we are not always conscious of it. For what is it that is an object of the highest admiration even to the savage? It is a person who is not terrified, not afraid, and hence does not yield to danger but promptly sets to work with vigor and full deliberation. Even in a fully civilized society there remains this superior esteem for the warrior, except that we demand more of him: that he also demonstrate all the virtues of peace—gentleness, sympathy, and even appropriate care for his own person—precisely because they reveal to us that his mind cannot be subdued by danger. Hence,

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no matter how much people may dispute, when they compare the statesman with the general, as to which one deserves the superior respect, an aesthetic judgment decides in favor of the general. Even war has something sublime about it if it is carried on in an orderly way and with respect for the sanctity of the citizens' rights. At the same time it makes the way of thinking of a people that carries it on in this way all the more sublime in proportion to the number of dangers in the face of which it courageously stood its ground. A prolonged peace, on the other hand, tends to make prevalent a mere[ly] commercial spirit,<sup>28</sup> and along with it base selfishness, cowardice, and softness, and to debase the way of thinking of that people.<sup>29</sup>

This analysis of the concept of the sublime, insofar as [sublimity is] attributed to might, may seem to conflict with the fact that in certain situations—in tempests, storms, earthquakes, and so on—we usually present God as showing himself in his wrath but also in his sublimity, while yet it would be both foolish and sacrilegious to imagine that our mind is superior to the effects produced by such a might, and is superior apparently even to its intentions. It seems that here the mental attunement that befits the manifestation of such an object is not a feeling of the sublimity of our own nature, but rather submission, prostration, and a feeling of our utter impotence; and this mental attunement is in fact usually connected with the idea of this object when natural events of this sort occur. It seems that in religion in general the only fitting behavior in the presence of the deity is prostration, worship with bowed head and accompanied by contrite and timorous gestures and voice; and that is why most peoples have in fact adopted this behavior and still engage in it. But, by the same token, this mental attunement is far from being intrinsically and necessarily connected with the idea of the *sublimity* of a religion and its object. A person who is actually afraid and finds cause for this in himself because he is conscious that with his reprehensible attitude he offends against a might whose will is at once irresistible and just is not at all in the frame of mind [needed] to admire divine greatness, which requires that we be attuned to quiet contemplation and that our judgment be completely free. Only if he is conscious that his attitude is sincere and pleasing to God, will these effects of might

<sup>28</sup>[Cf. *Perpetual Peace*, Ak. VIII, 368.]

<sup>29</sup>[Cf. § 83, Ak. 429–34.]

serve to arouse in him the idea of God's sublimity, insofar as he recognizes in his own attitude a sublimity that conforms to God's will, and is thereby elevated above any fear of such natural effects, which he does not regard as outbursts of God's wrath.] Even humility, as a strict judging of our own defects which, when we are conscious that our own attitudes are good, could otherwise easily be cloaked with the frailty of human nature [as an excuse], is a sublime mental attunement, namely, voluntary subjection of ourselves to the pain of self-reprimand so as gradually to eradicate the cause of these defects. This alone is what intrinsically distinguishes religion from superstition. The latter establishes in the mind not a reverence for the sublime, but fear and dread of that being of superior might to whose will the terrified person finds himself subjected but without holding him in esteem; and this can obviously give rise to nothing but ingratiating and fawning, never to a religion based on good conduct.<sup>30</sup>

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Hence sublimity is contained not in any thing of nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of our superiority to nature within us, and thereby also to nature outside us (as far as it influences us). Whatever arouses this feeling in us, and this includes the *might* of nature that challenges our forces, is then (although improperly) called sublime. And it is only by presupposing this idea within us, and by referring to it, that we can arrive at the idea of the sublimity of that being who arouses deep respect in us, not just by his might as demonstrated in nature, but even more by the ability, with which we have been endowed, to judge nature without fear and to think of our vocation as being sublimely above nature.

<sup>30</sup>[Cf. *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, Ak. VI, 51: "... [A]ll religions can be divided into two kinds: religion of *ingratiating* (mere worship), and *moral* religion, i.e., religion based on *good conduct*."]