

Immanuel Kant

Critique of Judgment

FIRST PART CRITIQUE OF AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT

SECTION I. ANALYTIC OF AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT.

BOOK II. Analytic of the Sublime.

§ 23. Transition from the faculty of estimating the beautiful to that of estimating the sublime.

The beautiful and the sublime agree on the point of pleasing on their own account. Further they agree in not presupposing either a judgement of sense or one logically determinant, but one of reflection. Hence it follows that the delight does not depend upon a sensation, as with the agreeable, nor upon a definite concept, as does the delight in the good, although it has, for all that, an indeterminate reference to concepts. Consequently the delight is connected with the mere presentation or faculty of presentation, and is thus taken to express the accord, in a given intuition, of the faculty of presentation, or the imagination, with the faculty of concepts that belongs to understanding or reason, in the sense of the former assisting the latter. Hence both kinds of judgements are singular, and yet such as profess to be universally valid in respect of every subject, despite the fact that their claims are directed merely to the feeling of pleasure and not to any knowledge of the object.

There are, however, also important and striking differences between the two. The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of limitlessness, yet with a superadded thought of its totality. Accordingly, the beautiful seems to be regarded as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of understanding, the sublime as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason. Hence the delight is in the former case coupled with the representation of quality, but in this case with that of quantity. Moreover, the former delight is very different from the latter in kind. For the beautiful is directly attended with a feeling of the furtherance of life, and is thus compatible with charms and a playful imagination. On the other hand, the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that only arises indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, and so it is an emotion that seems to be no sport, but dead earnest in the affairs of the imagination. Hence charms are repugnant to it; and, since the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternately repelled thereby, the delight in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respect, i.e., merits the name of a negative pleasure.

But the most important and vital distinction between the sublime and the beautiful is certainly this: that if, as is allowable, we here confine our attention in the first instance to

the sublime in objects of nature (that of art being always restricted by the conditions of an agreement with nature), we observe that whereas natural beauty (such as is self-subsisting) conveys a finality in its form making the object appear, as it were, preadapted to our power of judgement, so that it thus forms of itself an object of our delight, that which, without our indulging in any refinements of thought, but, simply in our apprehension of it, excites the feeling of the sublime, may appear, indeed, in point of form to contravene the ends of our power of judgement, to be ill-adapted to our faculty of presentation, and to be, as it were, an outrage on the imagination, and yet it is judged all the more sublime on that account. From this it may be seen at once that we express ourselves on the whole inaccurately if we term any object of nature sublime, although we may with perfect propriety call many such objects beautiful. For how can that which is apprehended as inherently contra-final be noted with an expression of approval? All that we can say is that the object lends itself to the presentation of a sublimity discoverable in the mind.

For the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy itself which does admit of sensuous presentation. Thus the broad ocean agitated by storms cannot be called sublime. Its aspect is horrible, and one must have stored one's mind in advance with a rich stock of ideas, if such an intuition is to raise it to the pitch of a feeling which is itself sublime—sublime because the mind has been incited to abandon sensibility and employ itself upon ideas involving higher finality.

Self-subsisting natural beauty reveals to us a technic of nature which shows it in the light of a system ordered in accordance with laws the principle of which is not to be found within the range of our entire faculty of understanding. This principle is that of a finality relative to the employment of judgement in respect of phenomena which have thus to be assigned, not merely to nature regarded as aimless mechanism, but also to nature regarded after the analogy of art. Hence it gives a veritable extension, not, of course, to our knowledge of objects of nature, but to our conception of nature itself—nature as mere mechanism being enlarged to the conception of nature as art—an extension inviting profound inquiries as to the possibility of such a form. But in what we are wont to call sublime in nature there is such an absence of anything leading to particular objective principles and corresponding forms of nature that it is rather in its chaos, or in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation, provided it gives signs of magnitude and power, that nature chiefly excites the ideas of the sublime. Hence we see that the concept of the sublime in nature is far less important and rich in consequences than that of its beauty. It gives on the whole no indication of anything final in nature itself, but only in the possible employment of our intuitions of it in inducing a feeling in our own selves of a finality quite independent of nature. For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground external to ourselves, but for the sublime one merely in ourselves and the attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature. This is a very needful preliminary remark. It entirely separates the ideas of the sublime from that of a finality of nature, and makes the theory of the sublime a mere appendage to the aesthetic estimate of the finality of nature, because it does not give a representation of any particular form in nature, but involves no more than the development of a final employment by the imagination of its own representation.

§ 26. *Of that estimation of the magnitude of natural things which is requisite for the Idea of the Sublime*

The estimation of magnitude by means of concepts of number (or their signs in Algebra) is mathematical; but that in mere intuition (by the measurement of the eye) is aesthetical. Now we can come by definite concepts of *how great* a thing is, [only] by numbers, of which the unit is the measure (at all events by series of numbers progressing to infinity); and so far all logical estimation of magnitude is mathematical. But since the magnitude of the measure must then be assumed known, and this again is only to be estimated mathematically by means of numbers,—the unit of which must be another [smaller] measure,—we can never have a first or fundamental measure, and therefore can never have a definite concept of a given magnitude. So the estimation of the magnitude of the fundamental measure must consist in this, that we can immediately apprehend it in intuition and use it by the Imagination for the presentation of concepts of number. That is, all estimation of the magnitude of the objects of nature is in the end aesthetical (*i.e.* subjectively and not objectively determined).

Now for the mathematical estimation of magnitude there is, indeed, no maximum (for the power of numbers extends to infinity); but for its aesthetical estimation there is always a maximum, and of this I say that if it is judged as the absolute measure than which no greater is possible subjectively (for the judging subject), it brings with it the Idea of the sublime and produces that emotion which no mathematical estimation of its magnitude by means of numbers can bring about (except so far as the aesthetical fundamental measure remains vividly in the Imagination). For the former only presents relative magnitude by means of comparison with others of the same kind; but the latter presents magnitude absolutely, so far as the mind can grasp it in an intuition.

In receiving a quantum into the Imagination by intuition, in order to be able to use it for a measure or as a unit for the estimation of magnitude by means of numbers, there are two operations of the Imagination involved: *apprehension* (*apprehensio*) and *comprehension* (*comprehensio aesthetica*). As to apprehension there is no difficulty, for it can go on *ad infinitum*; but comprehension becomes harder the further apprehension advances, and soon attains to its maximum, viz. the aesthetically greatest fundamental measure for the estimation of magnitude. For when apprehension has gone so far that the partial representations of sensuous intuition at first apprehended begin to vanish in the Imagination, whilst this ever proceeds to the apprehension of others, then it loses as much on the one side as it gains on the other; and in comprehension there is a maximum beyond which it cannot go.

Hence can be explained what *Savary* remarks in his account of Egypt, viz. that we must keep from going very near the Pyramids just as much as we keep from going too far from them, in order to get the full emotional effect from their size. For if we are too far away, the parts to be apprehended (the stones lying one over the other) are only obscurely represented, and the representation of them produces no effect upon the aesthetical judgement of the subject. But if we are very near, the eye requires some time to complete the apprehension of the tiers from the bottom up to the apex; and then the first tiers are always partly forgotten before the Imagination has taken in the last, and so the comprehension of them is never complete.— The same thing may sufficiently explain the

bewilderment or, as it were, perplexity which, it is said, seizes the spectator on his first entrance into St. Peter's at Rome. For there is here a feeling of the inadequacy of his Imagination for presenting the Ideas of a whole, wherein the Imagination reaches its maximum, and, in striving to surpass it, sinks back into itself, by which, however, a kind of emotional satisfaction is produced.

I do not wish to speak as yet of the ground of this satisfaction, which is bound up with a representation from which we should least of all expect it, viz. a representation which lets us remark its inadequacy and consequently its subjective want of purposiveness for the Judgement in the estimation of magnitude. I only remark that if the aesthetical judgement is pure (i.e. *mingled with no teleological judgement* or judgement of Reason) and is to be given as a completely suitable example of the Critique of the *aesthetical* Judgement, we must not exhibit the sublime in products of art (e.g. buildings, pillars, etc.) where human purpose determines the form as well as the size; nor yet in things of nature *the concepts of which bring with them a definite purpose* (e.g. animals with a known natural destination); but in rude nature (and in this only in so far as it does not bring with it any charm or emotion produced by actual danger) merely as containing magnitude. For in this kind of representation nature contains nothing monstrous (either magnificent or horrible); the magnitude that is apprehended may be increased as much as you wish provided it can be comprehended in a whole by the Imagination. An object is *monstrous* if by its size it destroys the purpose which constitutes the concept of it. But the mere presentation of a concept is called *colossal*, which is almost too great for any presentation (bordering on the relatively monstrous); because the purpose of the presentation of a concept is made harder [to realise] by the intuition of the object being almost too great for our faculty of apprehension.— A pure judgement upon the sublime must, however, have no purpose of the Object as its determining ground, if it is to be aesthetical and not mixed up with any judgement of Understanding or Reason.

Because everything which is to give disinterested pleasure to the merely reflective Judgement must bring with the representation of it, subjective and, as subjective, universally valid purposiveness—although no purposiveness of the *form* of the object lies (as in the case of the Beautiful) at the ground of the judgement—the question arises “what is this subjective purposiveness?” And how does it come to be prescribed as the norm by which a ground for universally valid satisfaction is supplied in the mere estimation of magnitude, even in that which is forced up to the point where our faculty of Imagination is inadequate for the presentation of the concept of magnitude?

In the process of combination requisite for the estimation of magnitude, the Imagination proceeds of itself to infinity without anything hindering it; but the Understanding guides it by means of concepts of number, for which the Imagination must furnish the schema. And in this procedure, as belonging to the logical estimation of magnitude, there is indeed something objectively purposive,—in accordance with the concept of a purpose (as all measurement is),—but nothing purposive and pleasing for the aesthetical Judgement. There is also in this designed purposiveness nothing which would force us to push the magnitude of the measure, and consequently the *comprehension* of the manifold in an intuition, to the bounds of the faculty of Imagination, or as far as ever this can reach in its presentations. For in the estimation of magnitude by the Understanding (Arithmetic) we only go to a certain point whether we push the comprehension of the units up to the

number 10 (as in the decimal scale) or only up to 4 (as in the quaternary scale); the further production of magnitude proceeds by combination or, if the quantum is given in intuition, by apprehension, but merely by way of progression (not of comprehension) in accordance with an assumed principle of progression. In this mathematical estimation of magnitude the Understanding is equally served and contented whether the Imagination chooses for unit a magnitude that we can take in in a glance, *e.g.* a foot or rod, or a German mile or even the earth's diameter,—of which the apprehension is indeed possible, but not the comprehension in an intuition of the Imagination (not possible by *comprehensio aesthetica*, although quite possible by *comprehensio logica* in a concept of number). In both cases the logical estimation of magnitude goes on without hindrance to infinity.

But now the mind listens to the voice of Reason which, for every given magnitude,—even for those that can never be entirely apprehended, although (in sensible representation) they are judged as entirely given,—requires totality. Reason consequently desires comprehension in *one* intuition, and so the *presentation* of all these members of a progressively increasing series. It does not even exempt the infinite (space and past time) from this requirement; it rather renders it unavoidable to think the infinite (in the judgement of common Reason) as *entirely given* (according to its totality).

But the infinite is absolutely (not merely comparatively) great. Compared with it everything else (of the same kind of magnitudes) is small. And what is most important is that to be able only to think it as *a whole* indicates a faculty of mind which surpasses every standard of Sense. For [to represent it sensibly] would require a comprehension having for unit a standard bearing a definite relation, expressible in numbers, to the infinite; which is impossible. Nevertheless, *the bare capability of thinking* this infinite without contradiction requires in the human mind a faculty itself supersensible. For it is only by means of this faculty and its Idea of a noumenon,—which admits of no intuition, but which yet serves as the substrate for the intuition of the world, as a mere phenomenon,—that the infinite of the world of sense, in the pure intellectual estimation of magnitude, can be *completely* comprehended *under* a concept, although in the mathematical estimation of magnitude by means of *concepts of number* it can never be completely thought. The faculty of being able to think the infinite of supersensible intuition as given (in its intelligible substrate), surpasses every standard of sensibility, and is great beyond all comparison even with the faculty of mathematical estimation; not of course in a theoretical point of view and on behalf of the cognitive faculty, but as an extension of the mind which feels itself able in another (practical) point of view to go beyond the limit of sensibility.

Nature is therefore sublime in those of its phenomena, whose intuition brings with it the Idea of their infinity. This last can only come by the inadequacy of the greatest effort of our Imagination to estimate the magnitude of an object. But now in mathematical estimation of magnitude the Imagination is equal to providing a sufficient measure for every object; because the numerical concepts of the Understanding, by means of progression, can make any measure adequate to any given magnitude. Therefore it must be the *aesthetical* estimation of magnitude in which it is felt that the effort towards comprehension surpasses the power of the Imagination to grasp in a whole of intuition the progressive apprehension; and at the same time is perceived the inadequacy of this

faculty, unbounded in its progress, for grasping and using, for the estimation of magnitude, a fundamental measure which could be made available by the Understanding with little trouble. Now the proper unchangeable fundamental measure of nature is its absolute whole; which, regarding nature as a phenomenon, would be infinity comprehended. But since this fundamental measure is a self-contradictory concept (on account of the impossibility of the absolute totality of an endless progress), that magnitude of a natural Object, on which the Imagination fruitlessly spends its whole faculty of comprehension, must carry our concept of nature to a supersensible substrate (which lies at its basis and also at the basis of our faculty of thought). As this, however, is great beyond all standards of sense, it makes us judge as *sublime*, not so much the object, as our own state of mind in the estimation of it.

Therefore, just as the aesthetical Judgement in judging the Beautiful refers the Imagination in its free play to the *Understanding*, in order to harmonise it with the *concepts* of the latter in general (without any determination of them); so does the same faculty when judging a thing as Sublime refer itself to the *Reason* in order that it may subjectively be in accordance with its *Ideas* (no matter what they are):—*i.e.* that it may produce a state of mind conformable to them and compatible with that brought about by the influence of definite (practical) Ideas upon feeling.

We hence see also that true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the [subject] judging, not in the natural Object, the judgement upon which occasions this state. Who would call sublime, *e.g.* shapeless mountain masses piled in wild disorder upon each other with their pyramids of ice, or the gloomy raging sea? But the mind feels itself elevated in its own judgement if, while contemplating them without any reference to their form, and abandoning itself to the Imagination and to the Reason—which although placed in combination with the Imagination without any definite purpose, merely extends it—it yet finds the whole power of the Imagination inadequate to its Ideas.

Examples of the mathematically Sublime of nature in mere intuition are all the cases in which we are given, not so much a larger numerical concept as a large unit for the measure of the Imagination (for shortening the numerical series). A tree, [the height of] which we estimate with reference to the height of a man, at all events gives a standard for a mountain; and if this were a mile high, it would serve as unit for the number expressive of the earth's diameter, so that the latter might be made intuitible. The earth's diameter [would supply a unit] for the known planetary system; this again for the Milky Way; and the immeasurable number of milky way systems called nebulae,—which presumably constitute a system of the same kind among themselves—lets us expect no bounds here. Now the Sublime in the aesthetical judging of an immeasurable whole like this lies not so much in the greatness of the number [of units], as in the fact that in our progress we ever arrive at yet greater units. To this the systematic division of the universe contributes, which represents every magnitude in nature as small in its turn; and represents our Imagination with its entire freedom from bounds, and with it Nature, as a mere nothing in comparison with the Ideas of Reason, if it is sought to furnish a presentation which shall be adequate to them.

B. THE DYNAMICALLY SUBLIME IN NATURE.

§ 28. *Nature as Might.*

Might is a power which is superior to great hindrances. It is termed dominion if it is also superior to the resistance of that which itself possesses might. Nature, considered in an aesthetic judgement as might that has no dominion over us, is dynamically sublime.

If we are to estimate nature as dynamically sublime, it must be represented as a source of fear (though the converse, that every object that is a source of fear, in our aesthetic judgement, sublime, does not hold). For in forming an aesthetic estimate (no concept being present) the superiority to hindrances can only be estimated according to the greatness of the resistance. Now that which we strive to resist is an evil, and, if we do not find our powers commensurate to the task, an object of fear. Hence the aesthetic judgement can only deem nature a might, and so dynamically sublime, in so far as it is looked upon as an object of fear.

But we may look upon an object as fearful, and yet not be afraid of it, if, that is, our estimate takes the form of our simply picturing to ourselves the case of our wishing to offer some resistance to it and recognizing that all such resistance would be quite futile. So the righteous man fears God without being afraid of Him, because he regards the case of his wishing to resist God and His commandments as one which need cause him no anxiety. But in every such case, regarded by him as not intrinsically impossible, he cognizes Him as One to be feared.

One who is in a state of fear can no more play the part of a judge of the sublime of nature than one captivated by inclination and appetite can of the beautiful. He flees from the sight of an object filling him with dread; and it is impossible to take delight in terror that is seriously entertained. Hence the agreeableness arising from the cessation of an uneasiness is a state of joy. But this, depending upon deliverance from a danger, is a rejoicing accompanied with a resolve never again to put oneself in the way of the danger: in fact we do not like bringing back to mind how we felt on that occasion not to speak of going in search of an opportunity for experiencing it again.

Bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piled up the vault of heaven, borne along with flashes and peals, volcanos in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track, the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. But, provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; and we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature.

In the immeasurableness of nature and the incompetence of our faculty for adopting a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its realm, we found our own limitation. But with this we also found in our rational faculty another non-sensuous standard, one which has that infinity itself under it as a unit, and in comparison with which everything in nature is small, and so found in our minds a pre-eminence over nature even in its immeasurability. Now in just the same way the irresistibility of the might of nature forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as beings of

nature, but at the same time reveals a faculty of estimating ourselves as independent of nature, and discovers a pre-eminence above nature that is the foundation of a self-preservation of quite another kind from that which may be assailed and brought into danger by external nature. This saves humanity in our own person from humiliation, even though as mortal men we have to submit to external violence. In this way, external nature is not estimated in our aesthetic judgement as sublime so far as exciting fear, but rather because it challenges our power (one not of nature) to regard as small those things of which we are wont to be solicitous (worldly goods, health, and life), and hence to regard its might (to which in these matters we are no doubt subject) as exercising over us and our personality no such rude dominion that we should bow down before it, once the question becomes one of our highest principles and of our asserting or forsaking them. Therefore nature is here called sublime merely because it raises the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make itself sensible of the appropriate sublimity of the sphere of its own being, even above nature.

This estimation of ourselves loses nothing by the fact that we must see ourselves safe in order to feel this soul-stirring delight—a fact from which it might be plausibly argued that, as there is no seriousness in the danger, so there is just as little seriousness in the sublimity of our faculty of soul. For here the delight only concerns the province of our faculty disclosed in such a case, so far as this faculty has its root in our nature; notwithstanding that its development and exercise is left to ourselves and remains an obligation. Here indeed there is truth—no matter how conscious a man, when he stretches his reflection so far abroad, may be of his actual present helplessness.

This principle has, doubtless, the appearance of being too far-fetched and subtle, and so of lying beyond the reach of an aesthetic judgement. But observation of men proves the reverse, and that it may be the foundation of the commonest judgements, although one is not always conscious of its presence. For what is it that, even to the savage, is the object of the greatest admiration? It is a man who is undaunted, who knows no fear, and who, therefore, does not give way to danger, but sets manfully to work with full deliberation. Even where civilization has reached a high pitch, there remains this special reverence for the soldier; only that there is then further required of him that he should also exhibit all the virtues of peace-gentleness, sympathy, and even becoming thought for his own person; and for the reason that in this we recognize that his mind is above the threats of danger. And so, comparing the statesman and the general, men may argue as they please as to the pre-eminent respect which is due to either above the other; but the verdict of the aesthetic judgement is for the latter. War itself, provided it is conducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and gives nations that carry it on in such a manner a stamp of mind only the more sublime the more numerous the dangers to which they are exposed, and which they are able to meet with fortitude. On the other hand, a prolonged peace favours the predominance of a mere commercial spirit, and with it a debasing self-interest, cowardice, and effeminacy, and tends to degrade the character of the nation.

So far as sublimity is predicated of might, this solution of the concept of it appears at variance with the fact that we are wont to represent God in the tempest, the storm, the earthquake, and the like, as presenting Himself in His wrath, but at the same time also in His sublimity, and yet here it would be alike folly and presumption to imagine a pre-

eminence of our minds over the operations and, as it appears, even over the direction of such might. Here, instead of a feeling of the sublimity of our own nature, submission, prostration, Aristotle's remarks on Courage, in the utter helplessness seem more to constitute the attitude of mind befitting the manifestation of such an object, and to be that also more customarily associated with the idea of it on the occasion of a natural phenomenon of this kind. In religion, as a rule, prostration, adoration with bowed head, coupled with contrite, timorous posture and voice, seems to be the only becoming demeanour in presence of the Godhead, and accordingly most nations have assumed and still observe it. Yet this cast of mind is far from being intrinsically and necessarily involved in the idea of the sublimity of a religion and of its object. The man that is actually in a state of fear, finding in himself good reason to be so, because he is conscious of offending with his evil disposition against a might directed by a will at once irresistible and just, is far from being in the frame of mind for admiring divine greatness, for which a temper of calm reflection and a quite free judgement are required. Only when he becomes conscious of having a disposition that is upright and acceptable to God, do those operations of might serve, to stir within him the idea of the sublimity of this Being, so far as he recognizes the existence in himself of a sublimity of disposition consonant with His will, and is thus raised above the dread of such operations of nature, in which he no longer sees God pouring forth the vials of the wrath. Even humility, taking the form of an uncompromising judgement upon his shortcomings, which, with consciousness of good intentions, might readily be glossed over on the ground of the frailty of human nature, is a sublime temper of the mind voluntarily to undergo the pain of remorse as a means of more and more effectually eradicating its cause. In this way religion is intrinsically distinguished from superstition, which latter rears in the mind, not reverence for the sublime, but dread and apprehension of the all-powerful Being to whose will terror-stricken man sees himself subjected, yet without according Him due honour. From this nothing can arise but grace-begging and vain adulation, instead of a religion consisting in a good life.

Sublimity, therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us (as exerting influence upon us). Everything that provokes this feeling in us, including the might of nature which challenges our strength, is then, though improperly, called sublime, and it is only under presupposition of this idea within us, and in relation to it, that we are capable of attaining to the idea of the sublimity of that Being which inspires deep respect in us, not by the mere display of its might in nature, but more by the faculty which is planted in us of estimating that might without fear, and of regarding our estate as exalted above it.

* * *