

CHAPTER 6

*Kant's distinction between true  
and false sublimity*

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By looking carefully at Kant's understanding of true and false sublimity, we can better understand Kant's conception of the relation between the sublime and the moral in the *Observations* and in marginal notes known as the *Remarks*, which Kant wrote in his personal copy of the former treatise. In neither text does he clearly distinguish the concept of the sublime from that of the moral. When he states in the *Observations* that his aim is "to judge of sentiments," he does not clearly demarcate moral sentiments from the aesthetic feelings of beauty and sublimity. In addition, Kant connects the aesthetic feelings to "the sexual drive" (*Beo* 2:235).<sup>1</sup>

The lack of clear-cut conceptual lines between morality and sublimity can be seen from two vantage points. Going in the one direction, Kant emphasizes the moral dimension of sublimity. He intends to examine the sublime insofar as it is moral, that is, the moral dimension of the sublime (*Beo* 2:220). One of the modes of the sublime is the noble, a feeling for virtuous principles. Moreover, in section 4 of the *Observations*, Kant considers the various peoples' dispositions for the sublime and the beautiful from the point of view of morality (*Beo* 2:245). Going in the other direction, the treatise draws attention to the sublime dimension of morality. It defines moral feeling in terms of dignity, which can be understood as implying the evocation of the feeling of sublimity (*Beo* 2:217). Furthermore, Kant claims that women make decisions about morality by applying a feeling for the beautiful, whereas men do so through a feeling for the sublime and by sensing the sublimity of obligation and sacrifice (*Beo* 2:231).

I wish to argue that Kant's distinction between the true and false sublime is another instance of this general overlapping of the aesthetic and the moral. Splendor, honor, enthusiasm, and grotesqueries are only seemingly sublime, Kant holds, whereas the genuine sublime is based on virtuous

<sup>1</sup> All translations of the *Remarks* are my own (revised from Clewis 2003). Those of the *Observations* are from Kant 2007; those of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* are from Kant 2000.

principles. The false sublime, e.g. honor, is not founded on moral principles. Enthusiasm (*Enthusiasmus*), despite some good effects, is still only apparently sublime, at least for the early Kant. In the critical period, Kant judges enthusiasm more positively; he writes as if enthusiasm (in at least one instance, as we shall see) is even capable of being a genuine experience of the sublime.

This true/false distinction was not first introduced by Kant. It is also found in the writings of Henry Home (Lord Kames), John Baillie, Thomas Paine, James Beattie, even Pseudo-Longinus. I shall argue that the distinction is not so much a crucial part of a viable or defensible theory of the sublime as a significant step in the development of Kant's ethics. It anticipates, for instance, the distinction between outward conformity to, and inner respect for, the moral law.

Joseph Schmucker proposed that the basic doctrines of the critical ethics (or, following Alfred Denker, the "later" or "mature" ethics) are formulated by the mid-1760s. Of course, in order to assess this claim, one would need to be precise about what counts as a basic doctrine and which basic doctrines are in question. Some "basic doctrines" had not yet been formulated. Kant had not yet clearly differentiated the moral feeling of respect from the aesthetic feeling of the sublime. In any case, my aim is not to assess Schmucker's claim. I merely submit that, if one were to assess it, a proper understanding of the meaning of Kant's distinction between true and false sublimity in these two texts would be useful.<sup>2</sup>

Whether the sublime and the moral should be subsumed under one, broader category has been disputed by philosophers, not only by the critical Kant but also by recent interpreters of Kant. In the third *Critique*, as mentioned, he carefully argues that the sublime is distinct from the moral feeling of respect.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Kant's commentators Budd, Crowther, Kirwan, Lyotard, and Pillow, although they come from different philosophical traditions, endorse in various ways the distinction between the sublime and the moral feeling.<sup>4</sup> By looking at Kant's early theory of the sublime, we are in a better position to appreciate the merits (or demerits) of the critical account, and we can better understand the development of Kant's aesthetics and ethics.

It is not a stretch to say that the *Observations* contains little aesthetic theory that is valuable to contemporary aesthetics and philosophy of art. Moreover, de Vleeschauwer and other commentators seem right to claim

<sup>2</sup> Schmucker 1961, 256, 261; Denker 2001, 129. <sup>3</sup> Clewis 2009, 126–35.

<sup>4</sup> Budd 2002, 84; Crowther 1989, 133; Kirwan 2005, 158; Lyotard 1994, 123; Pillow 2000, 5.

that as a whole the work appears to be more an essay in moral psychology than in aesthetics.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the work does have *some* aesthetic content.<sup>6</sup> It is not exactly a treatise on moral philosophy either.<sup>7</sup> It mainly contains what Kant would later call anthropology from a pragmatic standpoint,<sup>8</sup> even if at the time he did not yet clearly distinguish between aesthetics and pragmatic anthropology. As for the *Remarks*, a general neglect of its references pertinent to aesthetics might be due to a broader lack of familiarity with the text, especially among scholars writing in English, and even there the focus has usually been on Kant's moral philosophy. Accordingly, if we want to learn more about Kant's early view of the sublime/moral relation, or about the true/false-sublime distinction, or to deepen our knowledge of the origins of Kant's aesthetics and ethics and the link between his early and mature positions, the *Observations* and the notes are excellent places to turn.<sup>9</sup>

This essay is divided into four sections. The first section characterizes the historical background to the *Observations* and considers the sublime in the *Observations* and *Remarks*. It proposes that the early theory of the sublime has serious shortcomings as a descriptive and evaluative theory. Since the integration of the sublime and the moral requires examining the concept of moral feeling, the second section examines the accounts of moral feeling in the two texts. Section 3 describes Kant's true/false-sublime distinction. The fourth and final section concludes by noting some of the salient similarities between the two early accounts and Kant's aesthetics in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790).

#### I THE SUBLIME

The concept of sublimity springs largely from a first-century rhetorical treatise, *On the Sublime*, which was traditionally but mistakenly attributed to Cassius Longinus. The concept referred to that quality of genius in great literary works that irresistibly delights, inspires, or overwhelms. In addition to connecting the sublime to morality and human dignity, the *Observations*, through its literary style, hints at the sublime's rhetorical roots. "The night is *sublime*, the day is *beautiful* . . . The sublime *touches*, the beautiful

<sup>5</sup> de Vleeschauwer 1976, 47 (ch. 1, §4); Guyer 1993, 4; Makkreel 2001, 50; Rischmüller 1991, xv.

<sup>6</sup> Norris 2001, 86; Schmucker 1961, 104–5. <sup>7</sup> Denker 2001, 140; Makkreel 2001, 62.

<sup>8</sup> Guyer in Kant 2007, 19; see also Aguado 1992, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Rockmore 2001, 11. David-Ménard (2000, 92) seems to exaggerate a bit in claiming that the *Observations* "constitutes the material of Kant's conceptual thought," although it is true that some of its empirical claims were assimilated to anthropology.

charms . . . Understanding is sublime, wit is beautiful" (*Beo* 2:208–11). These succinct sentences characterize the sublime while evoking the sublime of the Longinian literary tradition. Indeed, in the fourth section of the *Observations*, Kant considers styles and genres such as epic poetry and tragedy with respect to what he calls national character (*Beo* 2:244).

It is likely that Kant was at least indirectly familiar with Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime and the beautiful. Kant may have become acquainted with Burke's account through a thirty-page review of the *Enquiry* published anonymously by Moses Mendelssohn in 1758 in Nicolai's *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freien Künste*.<sup>10</sup> Lessing made a personal translation of the *Enquiry* in 1758 and shared it with Mendelssohn.<sup>11</sup> Mendelssohn described the work of the author, who was then unknown to him, as a "beautiful treatise."<sup>12</sup> Hamann cites the *Enquiry* in his review of Kant's *Observations*, thinking, however, that the *Enquiry*'s author was Hume (until Herder clarified this for him in 1769). A translation of the *Enquiry* appeared in France in 1765, and in Germany in 1773 (though a translation had been announced in 1758).<sup>13</sup> Kant may have even learned about Burke's theory through his Scottish friend Green, who seems to have known Burke personally.<sup>14</sup> By October 1763, about six years after the first publication of Burke's *Enquiry*, Kant had composed the *Observations*.

Some commentators<sup>15</sup> stress the influence of Burke on Kant's *Observations*, while other interpreters insist on the differences between the two accounts. These two positions are of course compatible.<sup>16</sup> Let us first note the significant similarities between Burke and Kant. Both writers make psychological, anthropological, and empirical claims in elaborating their theories of the sublime. Burke interprets beauty and the sublime in terms of sexual inclination and self-preservation, respectively. Kant uses the aesthetic feelings to fix and describe gender differences. He claims that the ideal feelings arise from more basic sexual inclinations (*Beo* 2:235). Kant makes this point repeatedly in the *Remarks*, too. Moreover, Kant and Burke both look at the effects on the subject that certain objects or events bring about. The subjectivist turn in aesthetics, therefore, did not begin with Kant. We can look to the sense based, empirical aesthetics of Burke (as well as David Hume, Lord Kames, and Francis Hutcheson) for accounts that are subjective and empirical.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Crowther 1989, 11; Rischmüller in *Ri* 278; Goetschel 1994, 200.

<sup>11</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue 2006, 16; Crawford 1985, 168n19. <sup>12</sup> Rischmüller in *Ri* 278.

<sup>13</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue 2006, 16n29; Rischmüller in *Ri* 279. <sup>14</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue 2006, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Mothersill 1984, 234; Aguado 1992, 38. <sup>16</sup> Pagano 1975, 271; Aguado 1992, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Cassirer 1968, 297–312; Wicks 2007, 11–14.



Nonetheless, there are important differences in style, claims, and aim. Kant's style is more informal, literary, and descriptive, while Burke's is more systematic and explanatory. Burke claims that the sublime is essential passion of modified terror or pain and, thereby, pertains to the instinct of self-preservation.<sup>18</sup> Although Kant's terrifying sublime has affinities with Burkean sublime, unlike Burke, Kant is not a self-preservation theorist. Kant does not aim for a causal theory, let alone hold that the sublime's definitive feature is modified terror and pain or that it consists in a link to self-preservation. Burke construes the passion of the sublime as the efficient causal effect of rather specific qualities of objects. Kant rejects this aim in the very first sentence of the *Observations*. He claims that the various sentiments rest not so much on the nature of the external things that arouse subjective responses as on a person's capacity to be moved (*Beo* 2:207).

The stock of examples that Kant offers in the treatise suggests an individual familiarity with Joseph Addison. The fact that Kant's examples are similar to those found in Burke's text (e.g. storms, mountains, infinity, Milton's heroes) seems traceable to common source material, namely, Addison's *Spectator* essays on the pleasures of the imagination (1712), translated into German in 1745.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Kant mentions the *Spectator* in the third section of the *Observations* (*Beo* 2:233). In fact, this list of objects was quite common and not cliché. Lord Kames mentions St. Peter's Basilica and the Egyptian pyramids in *Elements of Criticism* (1762; German translation, 1763). Hogarth refers to St. Peter's in *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753; German translation, 1754).<sup>21</sup>

Hutcheson's *An Enquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) was translated into German in 1762 and probably influenced the author of the *Observations*.<sup>22</sup> Some commentators maintain that Kant's treatment of the sublime and the beautiful as feelings was influenced by Hutcheson's notion of an internal sense.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, Schilpp denies that Hutcheson affected Kant's account of moral sense. He claims that Kant acknowledges the importance for the moral life of feeling and the emotional elements in general, but little more than this. He holds that much can be traced back to Kant's Pietistic upbringing.<sup>24</sup> In light of the similarities between Kant's position to Hutcheson's, it is difficult to follow Schilpp

<sup>18</sup> Crowther 1989, 11, 14; see Burke 2008, 24 (pt. I, §VII).

<sup>19</sup> Crowther 1989, 12; Crawford 1985, 167.

<sup>20</sup> Kames 2005, 151. According to Morpurgo-Tagliabue (2006, 37), Kant was acquainted with Hutcheson's *Elements*.

<sup>21</sup> Crawford 1985, 167. <sup>22</sup> Crowther 1989, 14; Crawford 1985, 167.

<sup>23</sup> Crowther 1989, 14; Goetschel 1994, 60. <sup>24</sup> Schilpp [1938] 1960, 60–61.

minimizing the influence of Hutcheson's moral sense theory on Kant.<sup>25</sup> Kant conceives of the moral *Gefühl* as universal in scope and as disinterested. This seems similar to Hutcheson's claim that moral sense is a "Determination of our Minds to receive amiable or disagreeable Ideas of Actions, when they occur to our Observation, antecedent to any Opinions of Advantage or Loss to redound to our selves from them."<sup>26</sup> For Hutcheson, there are several varieties of internal senses or determinations to be pleased by an object or action. Moral sense, like Kantian *Gefühl*, is one such capacity.

Although he is influenced by Hutcheson, Kant does indeed go beyond the latter's moral sense theory. Kant links moral feeling to acting on principles and unites it with a notion of freedom from determination by one's own inclinations (which seems uniquely Kantian) and from dependence on others (which derives from Rousseau). Even if Kant adopts the formula of a moral *Gefühl* to express his idea of moral obligation, he still thinks that morality must be based on principles. Accordingly, Kant distinguishes principled moral feeling from inclinations like sympathy, friendliness, and the love of honor.

### 1.1 The Observations

The import of the *Observations* and the *Remarks* lies primarily in the development of Kant's ethics and in his early attempts to develop a "pragmatic" anthropology. In order to show that the true/false-sublime distinction is largely a moral, not an aesthetic, notion, we need to examine what the two texts say about the genuine sublime.

Kant's aesthetic theory tends to describe what elicits sublimity and beauty rather than to define what they are as such. The sublime, he claims, is paradigmatically evoked by principled, universally minded virtue that springs from the recognition of the dignity of human nature. By contrast, compassion, pleasantness (*Gefälligkeit*), and the adopted virtues, directed toward individual persons rather than humanity, are beautiful. The sublime in general is "great" and "simple" (*Beo* 2:210). Whereas the beautiful charms (*reitzt*) us, the sublime touches or stirs (*rührt*) (*Beo* 2:209).

The feelings of sublimity and beauty are two species of the genus that Kant calls finer feeling (*das feinere Gefühl*). The sublime and the beautiful are both agreeable yet remain distinct feelings (*Beo* 2:208). Although he is not always consistent here, Kant uses the term *Gefühl* primarily as the

<sup>25</sup> I thus agree with Ward 1972, 175. <sup>26</sup> Hutcheson 2004, 100; cf. 90.

subjective disposition or capacity that enables us to find things pleasurable or painful. (Note that the title uses the singular of the term, *Gefühl*.) It is one's "feeling" that makes a person "capable" of enjoying a great gratification after his or her own fashion (*Beo* 2:207–8). Feeling in this sense should not be confused with the particular sensations or sentiments (*Empfindungen*) that are instantiations of that capacity.<sup>27</sup> Kant considers sublimity and beauty as modes of this ability for refined sentiments. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that, contrary to anachronistic readings,<sup>28</sup> Kant does not refer to a "judgment of taste" or "aesthetic judgment" in the *Observations*.

The disposition for the sublime is brought out in three characteristic ways, which Kant classifies as the terrifying, the noble, and the magnificent. The sublime is of three "different sorts" (*Beo* 2:209). The feeling of the sublime "is sometimes accompanied with some dread or even melancholy, in some cases merely with quiet admiration and in yet others with a beauty spread over a sublime prospect [*Plan*]" (*Beo* 2:209). Kant calls these, respectively, the terrifying, the noble, and the magnificent, probably as a response to the *Edle* and the *Prächtige* proposed by Mendelssohn in his anonymous publication, *On the Sublime and Naive in the Fine Sciences* (1758).<sup>29</sup>

Kant gives plenty examples of the most Burkean form, the terrifying sublime. It can be elicited by such phenomena as great depths, mountain peaks, descriptions of raging storms (and presumably the storms themselves), Milton's portrayal of hell, lonely shadows, night and twilight, deep loneliness and descriptions thereof, deserts, an incalculable future duration, and Haller's description of eternity. Kant claims that the mathematical representation of the immeasurable magnitude of the universe, metaphysical considerations of eternity, of Providence, and of the immortality of the soul contain "a certain sublimity and dignity" (*Beo* 2:215). It is plausible that what these evoke is similar to the "noble dread" inspired by reading Carazan's dream (*Beo* 2:209f.): they evidently elicit the terrifying (or its mixture with the noble), for they pertain to the idea of the future, which typically evokes the terrifying when it elicits the sublime. (Since there is some debate about where there can be artistic sublimity according to Kant's critical account, it is also worth noting that the objects that are here said to evoke the sublime range from the natural to the artifactual, artistic, and poetic.)

<sup>27</sup> Crowther 1989, 9ff.; see also Dumouchel 1999, 69n1.    <sup>28</sup> Panknin-Schappert 2008, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Crawford 1985, 168n19.

The feeling of the magnificent combines the feeling of beauty with that of sublimity, and it seems closer to the former than the latter. The feeling is brought about by glorious yet beautiful buildings such as Saint Peter's in Rome.<sup>30</sup> Kant's examples of the magnificent are usually architectural or monumental, and they have to do with design and order and the appearance thereof. Kant claims that on account of the masterful blueprint or design (*Plan*) of nature, the portrait or prospect (*Gemälde*) strikes us as magnificent (*Beo* 2:227). This description of the whole of "moral nature" that displays "beauty and dignity" in a shining manner counts as a characterization of the magnificent sublime.

Finally, the noble seems to be – at least at first glance – evoked by great heights, the Egyptian pyramids, a simple arsenal, a building of remote antiquity, a long quantity of time past, and Haller's description of past time. However, these examples are not in fact what evokes the truly noble. The sentiment is paradigmatically elicited by principled virtue, which requires the subduing and transcendence of sensory impulses: overcoming difficulties through strenuous effort arouses admiration and belongs to the sublime (*Beo* 2:229). Virtue, unlike what elicits the terrifying sublime and the Burkean sublime, involves no obvious or direct threat to our self-preservation or physical welfare. Still, it involves a transcendence of sensibility. This moral turn in the theory of the sublime marks a crucial and decisive advance beyond Burke's theory.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the reference to human action and virtue is actually a retrieval of an ancient use of *kalon*, which was applied not so much to art or even nature, as is the sublime from Boileau to Burke, but to human beings and great acts.<sup>32</sup> Given its connection to virtue, freedom, and principles, the noble sublime is clearly the most important form of the sublime for Kant.

He makes the somewhat odd claim that each of the three forms is *mixed* with a feeling *simpliciter*, presumably some kind of fundamental feeling of the sublime. One weakness in Kant's position is that he never explains what is meant by this pure or unmixed feeling of the sublime, basic to the three modes. This lends itself to the interpretation that the three modes are distinguished only by characteristics of the *objects* that induce the sentiments.<sup>33</sup> This interpretation would be somewhat peculiar, however, given Kant's phenomenologically oriented definitions of the modes (*Beo* 2:209).

<sup>30</sup> The combination of the sublime and the beautiful in terms of the splendid or magnificent has a parallel to Addison's *Spectator* essay no. 412 of Monday, June 23, 1712 (in Morley 1891, cited in Crowther 1989, 109).

<sup>31</sup> Crowther 1989, 12. <sup>32</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue 2006, 10. <sup>33</sup> Guyer in Kant 2007, 19.

Accordingly, other interpreters have attempted to understand the common structure shared by the various feelings of the sublime. Crowther views the basic feeling as enjoyment, to which is added horror, wonder, or a sense of the splendid.<sup>34</sup> But the weakness of this interpretation arises from its understanding of the relation of the parts of the feeling to the whole. For instance, since the entire sentiment as a whole is called the sense of the splendid (the magnificent/splendid sublime), the splendid should not be seen as part of the sentiment, at least not on Kant's theory. Crowther's suggestion does not fit well with Kant's claim that the basic sensation of the sublime (whatever it is) is *mixed* with wonder, terror, or beauty. It is the resultant feeling of the sublime that is enjoyable, not necessarily this basic sensation.

It is of course possible, and perhaps even helpful, to distinguish the objects that elicit the sentiments from the sentiments themselves. It may also be a good idea to claim that each sentiment has a distinct phenomenology. Nevertheless, doing so would still leave undetermined what structural features the three modes have in common. We would still need to know what unites them so that we can call each of them a mode of the sublime.

Crowther proposes that what unites the phenomenologically disparate modes of sublimity is *reverence*. He claims that the three forms constitute a mode of reverence for an authority that has power over some aspect of our being. This is not reverence for just any authority, but reverence of the self, hence a kind of self-admiration. Reflection on one's capacity to overcome sensibility can bring about self-admiration.

Although this is an interesting proposal, one problem with Crowther's suggestion is that the notion of self-reverence is suited only for the noble sublime. It is hard to see how self-reverence fits in with the terrifying sublime and the magnificent, where the object seems to be a power or authority that is unaccompanied by any redeeming self-admiration.

### 1.2 *The Remarks*

In the notes, Kant makes use of the conceptual framework of the *Observations*, referring to the terrifying, noble, and magnificent. To understand Kant's claims better, an overview of the aesthetic concepts he employs in the notes may be helpful. Feeling (*Gefühl*) in general is "the capacity for pleasure and displeasure" (*Bem* 20:117, *Ri* 88). This capacity includes the ability to feel a mixture of pleasure and pain, a *dolce piccante*, an "agreeable bitterness" (*Bem* 20:4, *Ri* 8). Kant defines ideal feeling as the feeling for

<sup>34</sup> Crowther 1989, 14.

things that presupposes greater intellectual perfections (missing in *Ak*; *Ri* 88); he distinguishes it from the chimerical and claims that the ideal can contain the “noblest ground” of the agreeable (*Bem* 20:4, *Ri* 8). Taste is defined as “the capacity for pleasure and displeasure in things that do not belong to needs” (*Bem* 20:117, *Ri* 188). Kant distinguishes the objects we use to satisfy basic, biological needs from the superfluous, ideal objects of taste. Along similar lines, Kant differentiates between finer taste, which is called “true” taste and concerns what is remote from needs, and coarse (*derbe*) taste, which remains close to needs (*Bem* 20:117, *Ri* 88). The person of coarse taste enjoys ideal pleasures less than crude (*grob*) ones that satisfy basic needs (*Bem* 20:124, *Ri* 94). In the *Observations*, Kant had claimed that the masses, including the allegedly self-interested and phlegmatic Dutch, are coarse in this way and lack finer taste (*Beo* 2:243, 248).

Kant sometimes adopts a physiological viewpoint that is reminiscent of Burke. He claims that “the tenderness of the nerves” is one of the governing determinations of taste because it restricts or limits the degree of contrast or severity of sensations (*Bem* 20:125, *Ri* 94). He states that in the feeling of the sublime the powers of a human being seem to be drawn out or stretched. In the beautiful, by contrast, they seem to be concentrated or to contract (*Bem* 20:119, *Ri* 90).

The concept of the terrifying (*schreckhaft*) in the notes does not go beyond that of the *Observations*, but it is compatible with it. Kant never uses “terrifying” to describe the corresponding type of sublimity, though one passage appears to come close. “Terror [*Schrecken*] is great [*groß*]” with respect to sight, which has long, delicate, ideal pleasures (*Bem* 20:126, *Ri* 95). Furthermore, the notes link the terrifying to tragedy. Kant claims that youth like to view stirring tragedy (*das rührend Tragische*) and to feel strong sensations (*Bem* 20:185, missing in *Ri*; cf. *Bem* 20:123, *Ri* 93). In the *Observations*, Kant had claimed that tragedy stirs the feeling for the sublime (*Beo* 2:212).

Kant writes that vengeance and certain vices are sublime (*Bem* 20:5, *Ri* 8). Given Kant’s claims in the *Observations*, this can only be the terrifying. “In general, the hero of *Homer* is *terrifyingly sublime*, that of *Virgil*, by contrast, *noble*. Open, brazen revenge for a great offense has something grand in it, and however impermissible it might be, yet in the telling it nevertheless touches us with dread and satisfaction” (*Beo* 2:212). Although we can be moved and find satisfaction upon hearing or reading about such vice, Kant thinks that upon reflection we should not consider it to be sublime, but morally blameworthy (“impermissible”).

In the notes, the noble continues to refer above all to virtue, to acting on moral principles. The notes mention the noble sublime most frequently,



revealing Kant's preference for it. "Principles are of the greatest sublime; e.g., self-esteem requires sacrifice" (*Bem* 20:3, *Ri* 7). "Courageous. The big gulp that Alexander took from the cup was sublime but thoughtless" (*B* 20:4, *Ri* 8). Like many in these notes, this sentence requires some explanation. According to a story in Plutarch's *The Life of Alexander*, Alexander showed his physician Philip a letter that alleged that the doctor was going to poison him, and proceeded to drink the contents of the cup that the doctor had given him. In *Emile*, Rousseau describes Alexander's act as a profession of faith or trust in virtue, a profession both sublime and beautiful. According to Herder's notes on Kant's lectures on practical philosophy (1762–64), Kant claimed that Alexander's act was great because Alexander trusted the doctor (*PPH* 27:21–22). The noble sublime in this example consists in Alexander's demonstration of freedom and his expression of trust. (Rousseau had claimed that the act was sublime and beautiful because Alexander "staked his head, his own life on that belief.")<sup>36</sup> Alexander apparently demonstrated an ability to act from principles and to transcend his own sensible nature for the sake of virtue.

Kant continues to understand the magnificent (*prächtig*) as the combination of beauty with sublimity. Kant still associates magnificence with grandeur and beauty with sublime and beautiful monuments. "In Rome, when one has happily gotten away from all of the mendicants in the Papal States, one can rejoice to the point of drunkenness over the magnificence [*Pracht*] of the churches and the antiquities" (*Bem* 20:38, *Ri* 34). The term *drunken* already suggests something negative about the magnificent, and we will return to this point later. Kant claims magnificence is contrived or artificial (*gekünstelt*) and has to do with superfluous or dispensable comforts that go beyond needs. "Wherever dispensability [*Entbehrlichkeit*] with regard to needs, alongside the effort to bring about agreeable things, appears that is artificial. With regard to the beautiful: preened [*geputzt*], adorned [*geschmückt*]. With regard to the sublime: magnificent/splendid [*prächtig*],<sup>37</sup> bombastic [*hochtrabend*]. Taste surely does not aim at needs but it must not hinder them, as in the case of splendor [*Pracht*]" (*Bem* 20:149, *Ri* 111). To give an example for Kant: whereas a simple shelter would do, taste requires a beautiful, grand design that not only satisfies basic needs but aims to impress. In addition to these artifactual cases, Kant mentions nonartificial, nonarchitectural examples such as rainbows and sunsets. I

<sup>35</sup> Rischmüller in *Ri* 139; Rousseau 1979, 110–11, 241.   <sup>36</sup> Rousseau 1979, 111.

<sup>37</sup> This *prächtig* may already refer to the kind of splendor that is not sublime, as the subsequent mention of *Pracht* suggests. Cf. *Bem* 20:36, *Ri* 33 (*Das scheinbar Edle . . .*).



considers the magnificence of a “setting sun’s rainbow” (*Bem* 20:4, *Ri* 8). “The rising sun is just as magnificent as the setting one, but the sight of the former touches on the beautiful, the latter on the tragic and sublime” (*Bem* 20:11, *Ri* 13). Presumably the sunset touches on the tragic and terrifying because nightfall follows the sunset, and night is associated with the tragic and terrifying.

Finally, in light of what would become the mathematical sublime in the third *Critique*, a passage on physical greatness or magnitude (*Größe*) is particularly noteworthy. In the *Observations*, Kant had attributed “a certain sublimity and dignity” to the “mathematical representation of the immeasurable magnitude of the universe” (*Beo* 2:215). In the notes, he writes: “That all magnitude [*Größe*] is only relative and that there is no absolute magnitude can be seen from the following. I measure in the sky by means of the earth’s diameter, the earth’s diameter by means of miles, miles by means of feet, the latter by means of the relation to my body” (*Bem* 20:47, *Ri* 40). These passages anticipate Kant’s claim that there is an “aesthetically greatest basic measure for the estimation of magnitude” (*KU* 5:252) and that “in the end all estimation of the magnitude of objects of nature is aesthetic (i.e., subjectively and not objectively determined)” (*KU* 5:251). The note might be a reflection on Rousseau’s suggestion that instruments of measurement, for better or worse, free us from having to estimate or judge through the employment of our senses.<sup>38</sup>

How should we assess Kant’s theory of the sublime presented in these texts? Following Crowther, I will assume that an adequate definition of the sublime, if it is not to be unwarrantably stipulative, should at least account for the *descriptive* and the *evaluative* ways of using the term.<sup>39</sup> The descriptive sense is used to refer to objects or artifacts of great power or size, or that induce intense states of emotion in us as subjects of aesthetic experiences. The evaluative sense refers to artworks of extraordinarily high quality. The theory presented in the *Observations* and the notes (considering them together) seems largely to fail on both accounts, although it begins to account for the descriptive sense. It fails as an evaluative theory because it does not tell us which artworks are sublime or merit being called sublime. (Admittedly, this assessment may be unfair to Kant insofar as his theory was never intended mainly as an account of how we apply the category of sublimity to aesthetically successful works of art.)

The account also largely falls short as a descriptive theory. The theory does describe what kinds of objects generally, if not always, elicit the

<sup>38</sup> Rousseau 1979, 176.    <sup>39</sup> Crowther 1989, 2.

sublime, but Kant does not adequately explain why they do so. (Note that Burke denies that we can explain the first or “ultimate cause”<sup>40</sup> and that implies that those who search for it seek in vain; however, Burke does give a *physiological* account of the mechanism by which the sentiment is produced.) By referring to our various kinds of dispositions, Kant does at least give a partial explanation of the sublime: a variety of dispositions accounts for a diversity of sentiments.

But Kant does not adequately explain why an object with a certain set of properties rather than another object with a different set of properties should elicit a stirring response in persons who have a disposition for the sublime. In addition, it is hard to see how a theory could explain the experience of the sublime without referring to freedom in some manner, whether freedom is understood as Kantian transcendence of sensibility or in some other way such as a coming out of our ordinary way of experiencing objects in the world.

Kant’s early theory starts to move toward a nonempirical account based on freedom, which, for the critical Kant as well as for the precritical Kant (though he is less explicit about it), moral activity presupposes. The sublime is no longer characterized mainly by terror as it is on Burke’s theory: it is virtue that elicits the noble sublime. Kant construes the noble sublime as occasioned by powers that go beyond the ordinary self. Although the precritical Kant writes as if external objects can function as such powers, the sublime is paradigmatically an instance of self-transcendence, exhibited, for instance, by a self that acts on correct moral principles, controls and subdues personal inclination or exceeds a merely sensuous mode of being.<sup>41</sup>

## 2 MORAL FEELING IN THE OBSERVATIONS AND THE REMARKS

Kant wrote the *Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality* by the end of December 1762, but it was not published until April 1764.<sup>42</sup> He concluded the work with the confession that it has yet to be determined whether it is “merely” the faculty of cognition or *feeling* that decides the first principles of practical philosophy (*UD* 2:300). In the *Observations* (completed by October 1763 and published by January 31, 1764),<sup>43</sup> feeling, not understanding, emerges as Kant

<sup>40</sup> Burke 2008, 99 (pt. IV, §1).    <sup>41</sup> Crowther 1989, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Walford and Meerbote in Kant 1992a, lxv.

<sup>43</sup> Walford and Meerbote in Kant 1992a, lxv; Guyer in Kant 2007, 18.

answer. (Nevertheless, Kant still claims that understanding and feeling have a close interconnection [*Beo* 2:225].) Kant holds that moral principles, which have universal scope or application, are based on feeling rather than intellect. Kant's moral feeling in the *Observations*, like the British theorists' moral sense, has an empirical, not rational, origin. He thinks moral feeling, a sense of obligation, can act as an incentive to action and that it has motivational power (*Beo* 2:216), a view he would later reject for conflating the moral law with moral feeling.<sup>44</sup> The moral feeling of the *Observations*, even if a sentiment, is not an ordinary sensual capacity. It leads to respect for all members of humanity. Although moral feeling is supposed to produce respect for all human beings, this is not the critical notion of respect for the moral law, the moral feeling of respect, for Kant does not yet claim in the *Observations* that moral feeling arises from a recognition of the moral law.

Kant's *Announcement of the Organization of His Lectures in the Winter Semester 1765–66* (composed in 1765 and published in the autumn of that year)<sup>45</sup> reveals that even after the publication of the *Observations* Kant remained dissatisfied with the "incomplete," "defective," and imprecise moral sense theories of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume. Nevertheless, he thought they went the furthest in the search for the fundamental principles of morality (*N* 2:311; cf. *UD* 2:300). As the notes to the *Observations* show, at this time Kant struggled with the nature of feeling, particularly moral feeling.<sup>46</sup>

From the perspective of Kant's later ethics, the *Observations*' notion of moral feeling is problematic. First, the view that a kind of feeling (however unique it may be) functions as the motive to moral acts makes it difficult to account for the necessity and universality, and thus normativity, of duty, insofar as feeling is capricious and blind. Even the fact that the moral feeling lives in *every human breast* would be a contingent matter of fact, and would not account for the obligation to have the feeling in the first place.<sup>47</sup> Second, the notion of the universal remains quite undeveloped. Worse, it seems inconsistent to claim that moral feeling is universal yet depends on contingent features of the subject such as temperament, gender, and national character. It seems that Kant can claim only that the feeling is present in *almost every human breast*.<sup>48</sup> A third problem concerns Kant's conception of a principle. It remains unclear how a principle can be, if it is not a

<sup>44</sup> Guzzo 1924, 114; Ward 1972, 23–24.

<sup>45</sup> Walford and Meerbote in Kant 1992a, lxx; trans., 1992c. <sup>46</sup> Ward 1972, 33. <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Guyer in Kant 2007, 20.

speculative rule, a consciousness of a feeling (*Beo* 2:217), much less one of the beauty and dignity of human nature (*ibid.*). If it seems odd to characterize a principle as a consciousness of a feeling, it is likewise peculiar to claim that “general affection towards humankind” has become one’s principle (*Beo* 2:216).<sup>49</sup> The critical ethics will later clearly differentiate between principle and feeling, or between the moral law as the objective, rational principle that grounds morality and the moral feeling of respect.

In the *Remarks*, Kant is ultimately undecided about the relation between sublimity and moral feeling.<sup>50</sup> Kant does not clearly distinguish the sublime from respect. The respect we feel for a person is evoked *through* sublimity. “A human being can produce two kinds of favorable emotions in another: respect [*Achtung*] and love, the former by means of the sublime, the latter by means of the beautiful” (*Bem* 20:3, *Ri* 7). Presumably this feeling of respect-via-sublimity can be applied to oneself as much as to someone of another social rank: “Respect for oneself; equality” (missing in *Ak*; *Ri* 40). Kant connects respect to the noble sublime: “The beautiful is loved, the noble respected [*geachtet*]. The ugly with disgust, the ignoble [*Unedle*] disdained [*verachtet*]” (*Bem* 20:52, *Ri* 44). “One can hate a person who is right, but one is constrained to respect him” (*Bem* 20:91, *Ri* 69).

Although the notes contain references to *reverentia* (*Bem* 20:80, *Ri* 62; *Bem* 20:112, *Ri* 85), it would be a mistake to identify this with respect in the critical sense. This *reverentia* is a simple and underived feeling, whereas the moral feeling of respect is a response to the moral law.

In the notes, “moral feeling” is not a basic affection and esteem for humanity, but a feeling of the perfection of the will (*Bem* 20:137, *Ri* 102).<sup>51</sup> The marginalia reveal a continuous, even increased, skepticism toward what Kant had called the adopted virtues. He refers to the latter as the moral instincts (*Instinkte*): sympathy (*Sympathie*), pity (*Mitleid*), kindheartedness (*Gutherzigkeit*), benevolence (*Gütigkeit*), goodwill (*Wohlwollen*), pleasantness (*Gefälligkeit*), and the general love of man (*die allgemeine Menschenliebe*). Kant thinks that these are nonrational inclinations and tend to be chimerical (*Bem* 20:172–73, *Ri* 128). They are contingent, passive sentiments rather than active principles. Moreover, the concept of “moral feeling” has undergone a change, for Kant now specifies the moral feeling in terms of conscience. “The moral feeling, applied to one’s own actions, is conscience” (*Bem* 20:168, *Ri* 125; cf. *PPH* 27:42). Moral feeling refers to a rationally grounded feeling that is based on the principle of equality and freedom. Whereas in the *Observations* moral feeling is defined

<sup>49</sup> Ward 1972, 24.   <sup>50</sup> Shell 1996, 103.   <sup>51</sup> Velkley 1989, 78.

in aesthetic and ethical terms as a feeling of the beauty and dignity of human nature, in the *Remarks* Kant determines the moral feeling as a feeling of the perfection of the will according to the laws of freedom. "The will is perfect insofar as it is, in accordance with the laws of freedom, the greatest ground of the good in general; the moral feeling is the feeling of the perfection of the will" (*Bem* 20:136–37, *Ri* 102). Kant wonders how "freedom in the proper sense," or moral, not metaphysical, freedom, might be the highest principle of all virtue and happiness (*Bem* 20:31, *Ri* 29). In perfecting the will "in accordance with the laws of freedom," the moral agent is active, not passive. "The feeling of pleasure and displeasure concerns either that with respect to which we are passive, or it concerns us as an active *principium* of good and evil by means of freedom. The latter is moral feeling" (*Bem* 20:145, *Ri* 108).

The notes plainly reject any state of affairs in which ideal pleasure suppresses the satisfaction of genuine needs. Kant follows Rousseau closely here. Nevertheless, although moral taste (*moralisches Geschmack*) involves the play of appearance (*Schein*), moral taste can serve a moral function in a civilized society. In other words, moral taste can differentiate between good and evil in those instances where a natural moral feeling, being too simple and immediate, would be fooled, lost in the play of appearances.<sup>52</sup>

Here it is important not to confuse *Schein*, the play of appearances, with the more undesirable delusion called *Wahn*. The latter is a cognitive or moral, not merely perceptual, illusion in which we mistake an appearance for the real thing (*Bem* 20:55, *Ri* 45; *Bem* 20:136, *Ri* 102; *Bem* 20:172, *Ri* 128; *Bem* 20:181, *Ri* 135). In *Wahn*, we lose our sense of place in the world and what Providence intended; for instance, we conflate inner dignity with outer honor (*Bem* 20:130, *Ri* 97).

Moral taste is easily reconciled with *Schein*, since all taste is not only compatible with, but actually requires, the play of appearances. Kant claims that moral *principles*, however, are not so easily reconciled with *Schein*,<sup>53</sup> for moral principles are generally in tension with our imitating of others, appearing other than how one is, and pretence. A person can be very virtuous, Kant says, yet have little taste (*Bem* 20:51, *Ri* 43).

One final note: Kant sometimes refers to moral taste for the superfluous or dispensable as moral *sentiment*. "With regard to morality, feeling either remains merely with needs, i.e., obligation, or it goes further; in the latter case it is sentiment" (*Bem* 20:117, *Ri* 89). Moral sentiment in this sense differs from moral feeling. The latter involves satisfying genuine needs and

<sup>52</sup> Catena in Kant 2002, L.    <sup>53</sup> Geonget in Kant 1994, 55.

fulfilling obligations; moral sentiment, as a kind of moral taste, goes beyond sheer necessity.

### 3 THE TRUE/FALSE SUBLIME

#### 3.1 *The Observations*

In the *Observations*, Kant introduces, at least implicitly, a distinction between what is and what is not genuinely sublime. Accordingly, splendor, honor, enthusiasm, and grotesqueries are only apparently sublime.<sup>54</sup> Kant further develops this distinction in the *Remarks*. Although he divides the sublime into the noble, magnificent, and terrifying, Kant's stated typology is misleading, since the noble is first among equals, as we have seen.

At least one apparent form can be associated with each of the three genuine forms. Enthusiasm (being overheated or ignited by excessive devotion to a friend, country, or religion) seems to be noble, but is not. So does honor. Extravagance, or splendor, only appears to be magnificent sublime. Finally, grotesqueries (*Fratzen*) only seem to be terrifying sublime (see Table 6.1).

Let us begin with splendor. Although the magnificent (*das Prächtige*) is one of the three official modes of the sublime, Kant actually sometimes disparages part of what falls under this concept.<sup>55</sup> There are therefore grounds for distinguishing the magnificent, which is sublime, from splendor (*das Prächtige*), which is "really only the gloss [*Schimmer*] of sublimity" (*Beo* 2:222). Kant associates splendor with deception, for splendor hides the

Table 6.1 *Examples of objects with respect to true and false sublimity.*

	Noble	Magnificent	Terrifying
Objects that can elicit true sublimity	Genuine virtue	St. Peter's Basilica, residence castle	Milton's hell, night, solitude
Objects that can elicit false sublimity	Honor, reputation, excessive devotion to country, etc. ("enthusiasm")	Dissemblance, ostentation, extravagance ("splendor")	Holy bones, graves, castigation, <i>sati</i> , <sup>a</sup> omens, dreams ("the grotesque")

<sup>a</sup> Female self-immolation.

<sup>54</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue (2006, 22, 32, 41) also notices the false sublime in the early Kant.

<sup>55</sup> Goetschel 1994, 63; Makkreel 2001, 59.



inner content of the thing or person, who may actually be worse than appearances suggest (*Beo* 2:222–23). Splendor is not sublime, he says, even if not as undesirable as the false brilliance (*falschen Schimmer*) of the late Roman Empire (*Beo* 2:255). Kant also describes splendor (*Pracht*) with regard to costume or dress (*Beo* 2:213). The melancholic person, who has a feeling for the genuine sublime, is indifferent to changes in fashion and contemptuous of their luster (*Schimmer*) (*Beo* 2:221).

Kant claims that degeneration in one aspect (*Seite*) of finer feeling is linked to deterioration in other ones (*Beo* 2:256). It is thus unsurprising that Kant connects the shortcomings of splendor to moral deficiencies. Just as an edifice can make a “noble” impression by means of a stucco coating that deceives a person into thinking it is made of stones, so “alloyed virtues” and “painted merit” can glisten before the observer (*Beo* 2:223). A spirit of imitation, which needs examples and models, is associated with those who have a feeling for the glittering or splendid sublime (*Schimmernd-Erhabene*) (*Beo* 2:244). Kant proposes an analogy: exaggeration (*Übertriebene*) and splendor are to the magnificent sublime as the adventurous (*Abenteuerliche*) or irresponsible/cranky (*Grillenhafte*) are to the serious (i.e. terrifying) sublime (*Ernsthaft-Erhabenen*) (*Beo* 2:224).<sup>56</sup> In other words, they are instances of the false/true–sublime relation.

Let us turn to the false form of the noble. Honor is only the sheen or simulacrum (*Schimmer*) of virtue (*Beo* 2:218). Acting from a feeling for honor is not virtuous, yet it can often give the appearance of being virtuous. Action that is motivated by a feeling of honor, even if it can contribute to the common weal, contains the delusion (*Wahn*) that our worth (*Werth*) is determined by the opinions of others (*ibid.*). A concern for splendor and a sense of honor, it turns out, are closely linked.<sup>57</sup> A person who has a feeling for one is likely to have a feeling for the other. Kant’s examples of such a person (however odd these examples might seem today) are the choleric (*Beo* 2:223) and the German (*Beo* 2:248–49; cf. *PPH* 27:41).

According to the *Observations*, enthusiasm is “the state of the mind which is inflamed beyond the appropriate degree by some principle, whether it be by the maxim of patriotic virtue, or of friendship, or of religion, without involving the illusion of a supernatural community” (*Beo* 2:251n).<sup>58</sup> It is a

<sup>56</sup> Since Kant claims at *Beo* 2:213–14 that the terrifying degenerates into the adventurous, the reference at *Beo* 2:224 to the “serious” sublime is almost certainly an allusion to the terrifying. I thus disagree with Norris (2001, 97), that it may refer to the noble: Goldthwait’s translation is misleading.

<sup>57</sup> Makkreel 2001, 53.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Shaftesbury 1999, 9: “There is a melancholy which accompanies all enthusiasm. Be it love or religion (for there are enthusiasms in both) . . .”



passion (*Leidenschaft*) that takes a principle too far, even when the maxim or principle is good. Since it takes principles too far, it is active, not passive like an affect. But it is still a disturbing passion, literally. This demerit makes it difficult for enthusiasm to be sublime. Although Kant says in the *Essay on the Maladies of the Head* (published in February 1764) that nothing great has been achieved or accomplished without enthusiasm (*VK* 2:267)<sup>59</sup> and that enthusiasm is rooted in a love of freedom, it is important to recognize that it is a degeneration of a love of freedom. The melancholic – and perhaps Kant had himself in mind<sup>60</sup> – is most inclined toward the sublime, but when he “deteriorates,” seriousness inclines toward dejection or melancholy (*Schwermuth*), devotion toward fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*), and fervor for freedom to enthusiasm (*Beo* 2:221–22). Given the melancholic’s deterioration of his disposition and the failure of reason to put it in check, he takes up what Kant calls the adventurous (*Abenteuerliche*). If the understanding looses even more of its grip, the melancholic descends even further into a feeling for the grotesque, of which Kant gives a plethora of examples: duels, tombs, castigation, holy bones.

This leads us to the third and final false form. The grotesque is predicated of objects that are unnatural or undesirable from an instrumental or moral point of view, yet appear to be terrifying sublime. “The quality of the *terrifying sublime*, if it becomes entirely unnatural, is *adventurous*. Unnatural things, in so far as the sublime is thereby intended [*gemeint*], even if little or none of it is actually found, are *grotesqueries* [*Fratzen*]” (*Beo* 2:213–14). The grotesque object is a false form of the sublime, but it appears terrifying sublime because the grotesque, Kant implies, is wondrous (*wunderliche*) (*Beo* 2:252). While the object might be repugnant and repulsive in some respects, it still attracts, fascinates, and moves us (as do the objects that evoke the sublime). Unfortunately, the grotesque goes beyond nature, is unnatural, in the wrong way. Just as the feeling of the beautiful, if it entirely lacks the noble, degenerates into the ridiculous (*Beo* 2:214), which, Kant says, is as far below the sublime that feeling can sink (*Beo* 2:233), the feeling of the terrifying descends into grotesqueries. To the informed (*belehrt*) person (*Beo* 2:252n), the grotesque object evokes a feeling that has close affinities with disgust.<sup>61</sup> In the fourth section of the *Observations*, Kant

<sup>59</sup> Meo 1982, 13.

<sup>60</sup> On Kant as melancholic, see Vaihinger 1898, Schilpp [1938] 1960, 3–5, and Shell 1996, 288.

<sup>61</sup> In the *Observations*, disgust (*Ekel*) is a response to grotesque objects that are undesirable or reprehensible (*Beo* 2:229, 2:233, 2:234). In the *Remarks*, disgust remains unchanged (*Bem* 20:19, *Ri* 20; *Bem* 20:125, *Ri* 95; *Bem* 20:155, *Ri* 115; cf. *ApH* 7:157–58, 250, 276, 306). Disgust is distinct from sublimity: in the *Inquiry*, e.g. Kant lists the “feeling of the sublime, the beautiful, the disgusting

characterizes a widow's self-immolation (or *sati*) in India as grotesque and "a repulsive adventure" (*Beo* 2:252), presumably because he believes it involves the wrong kind of self-sacrifice, applying in the wrong way the ability to overcome sensibility. (Although there would seem to be a connection here between the grotesque and the noble sublime, since the latter is the response to, and feeling for, genuine virtue and transcendence of sensibility, Kant does not pursue any such connection.) Kant offers more examples: Indian idols of aberrant and monstrous shape (*ungebeurer Gestalt*), and Chinese paintings that represent wondrous and unnatural shapes, are grotesque (*fratzenhaft*). In short, the grotesque may be marvelous, but it goes against nature (*Beo* 2:252). Having a taste for grotesqueries thus has affinities with being a fantast (*Phantast*) (*Beo* 2:222) or fanatic. For fanaticism runs against the "usual and prescribed" order of nature and is occasioned by an excessive confidence that one can come closer to the heavenly natures (*Beo* 2:251).

In short, the distinction between the true and false sublime presupposes making a judgment about the real instrumental or moral value of the object, act, or event for which one has the inclination. The attribution of false sublimity to an object is more a deprecation of it than a false kind of response, feeling, or sentiment. In fact, false sublimity, if understood as a false *feeling*, may even border on incoherence: in a certain sense, if it feels sublime, it is sublime.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.2 The Remarks

Kant's notes develop the true/false-sublime distinction concerning splendor and honor, and they also briefly refer to enthusiasm and the grotesque.

The concept of *Schein* is again crucial. Ideal pleasures are promoted by the art of appearing, Kant claims, referring to what he thinks is woman's capacity to dissemble: "All things, if they are only recognized for what they are, have little that is agreeable in them. Only by appearing to be what they are not do they elevate [*erheben*] sensation" (*Bem* 20:140, *Ri* 104). Some semblance, some play of appearance, is required for the ideal sentiments of beauty and sublimity. An ideal object (or person) appears to be something that it is not, and this increases the agreeableness of the ideal pleasure. "Permitted [*erlaubte*] appearance is a type of untruth that is not then a lie; it is an occasion for ideal pleasures whose object is not in the things" (*Bem*

[*Ekelhaften*]" (*UD* 2:280). Finally, Kant opposes *Ekel* to beauty (*Beo* 2:233; *Bem* 20:19, *Ri* 20), especially the beauty he associates with femininity (*Beo* 2:229, 2:234; *Bem* 20:155, *Ri* 115; cf. *ApH* 7:306, 7:250, 7:276, and *Ref* 1067, 15:473).

<sup>62</sup> Kirwan 2005, 64.

20:134, *Ri* 101). Appearance is not intrinsically harmful, but causes harm when we cannot see reality for what it is. Needless to say, Kant's term "appearance" does not allude to the central critical doctrine that the objects of experience can only be appearances and not things in themselves. Moreover, *Schein* is to be confused neither with *Erscheinung*, "the undetermined object of an empirical intuition" (*KrV* A 20/B 34), nor with the transcendental illusion (*Schein*) that is discussed in the Transcendental Dialectic (*KrV* A 293/B 349). Rather, like Kant's critique of splendor, the concept is decidedly Rousseauian.

Splendor (*Pracht*) is a false form of the sublime because it hinders the satisfaction of needs (*Bem* 20:149, *Ri* 111). This splendor is not the magnificent sublime of the *Observations*. Magnificence has to do more with plans and structures than with a person's neglect of needs. In viewing this glamour and display, we are deceived by appearance without knowing that we are doing so; we mistake the apparent for the authentic, a facade for the real thing. Moreover, because we are enraptured, the satisfaction of basic needs is obstructed. "The apparent magnificent [is] sheen [*Das scheinbar Prächtige [ist] der Schimmer*]. The apparent beautiful [is] the adorned [*Geschminkte*]" (*Bem* 20:36, *Ri* 33).<sup>63</sup> Kant seems to contrast simplicity with splendor, even if, admittedly, the passage is only one line: "On the beautiful and noble in social intercourse and hospitality; simplicity; splendor [*das Prächtige*]" (*Bem* 20:60, *Ri* 48). Splendor is only shimmer and shine, glamour and gloss without substance, an untruth that spectators cannot see through.

In the notes, Kant connects splendor (*Pracht*) to the desire for honor (*Ehrbegierde*) (*Bem* 20:130–31, *Ri* 97–98). The two forms of the false sublime are here intimately related, as they were in the *Observations*. Committing an error of delusion, the pompous (*hoffärtig*) man mistakes the outward honor that people can give him for the honor of his dignity as a human being, an honor that is inner. He seeks to gain external honor through the image he projects.

For Kant, splendor is not always undesirable, a view that is unsurprising since he makes similar claims with respect to honor and enthusiasm. He states that if one manages to see through the appearances (*Schein*) or the makeup (*Schminke*), what occurs is no longer a deception (*Betrug*) (*Bem* 20:167–68, *Ri* 125). Such play of appearances can even be in some ways *better* than the truth and can lead to increased pleasures for an observer. Moreover,

<sup>63</sup> The verb *schimmern* is etymologically related to *scheinen*. *Schimmer* can translate the Latin *splendor*, and *schimmern* translates *radiare* and *scintillare*. Grimm and Grimm 1854–1971, vol. IX, 159–60.

it can incite meritorious actions by a person who is trying to impress his peers. Accordingly, splendor can contribute to the common good. In a similar way, Kant's thoughts about splendor are influenced by Rousseau's view that women can and should constrain men by charming them.<sup>64</sup> Kant's connecting splendor with the power to dissemble is reminiscent of Rousseau's notion of seemliness (*décence*) in social propriety.<sup>65</sup> Kant writes that woman's semblances, while not wholly desirable, can bring about certain social benefits and goods, ranging from marital harmony to ideal pleasures.

In the notes, Kant applies the true/false distinction to the noble. Propriety (*Anständigkeit*) is the "art of appearing virtuous" (*Bem* 20:177, *Ri* 131). Propriety and one's outward reputation (*Ansehen*) only seem to be noble. "The apparent noble is decency. Reputation [*Das scheinbar Edle ist der Anstand. Ansehen*]" (*Bem* 20:36, *Ri* 33). Propriety, a sense of decency, only imitates what is noble sublime. Reputation falls short of virtue and fails to evoke sublimity because it is not founded on the exercise of agency on the basis of principles. "Reputation, when it indicates [*ankündigt*] sublimity, is sheen [*Schimmer*]" (*Bem* 20:28, *Ri* 27). "That great people shine [*schimmern*] only in the distance, that a prince loses a great deal in the eyes of his valet: this happens because no human being is great" (*Bem* 20:30, *Ri* 28). Once the distance is removed, the valet sees that the "greatness" of the man of repute is not always genuine. Kant seems to argue that a person can be virtuous yet not be recognized for it, whereas, by contrast, honor is intrinsically linked to appearance. If a man does not *appear* to be honored in the eyes of others, it makes little sense to say that he is honored by them (though he could still be worthy of honor).

Kant makes a move familiar to us by now: he holds that a sense of honor can have both undesirable and desirable consequences. "Corruption in our time can be seen in this, that no one demands of himself to be content or even to be good, but to appear to be so" (*Bem* 20:84, *Ri* 65). Nevertheless, like splendor, a feeling for honor can contribute to the social good. The sheen radiating from honor is not merely negative.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, this phenomenon can encourage human beings to refine their ability to interact with each other and can thereby lead to the harmony of the social whole. The sublime with respect to social rank (*Standes*) may include much dignity (*Bem* 20:28, *Ri* 27), but, since it does not require virtue and is not necessarily connected with it, it is not truly sublime.

<sup>64</sup> Rousseau 1979, 358. For Kant's views of gender, see Jauch 1988, 64–67, and Hull 1996, 309ff.

<sup>65</sup> Bloom in Rousseau 1979, 491n73. <sup>66</sup> Catena in Kant 2002, xlv.

As we have seen, Kant suggests that the human being is the standard or measure of size or greatness (*Bem* 20:47, *Ri* 40). This alone, however, does not merit calling the human being noble. For that, physical size has to be connected with a human being's capacity for *morality*. Kant provides this connection by noting the isomorphism between the physical and moral greatness of the human being. Kant plays with the ambiguity of the grand or great (*Größe*), which can refer to physical size or to moral greatness. "Although a tall man is not for that reason great, physical greatness [*Größe*] nevertheless agrees with the judgment about the moral one" (*Bem* 20:10, *Ri* 13). In the *Observations*, Kant had claimed that height or a great stature elicits regard (*Ansehen*) and respect (*Achtung*), whereas a small one evokes more intimacy or familiarity (*Beo* 2:213). Drawing on his theory of appearance, Kant thinks that the connection between moral and physical greatness is tenuous. Whereas physical greatness is readily available for anyone to observe, moral greatness is largely hidden from the observer. According to Parow's notes on Kant's lectures on anthropology (1772/73), Kant later made a similar claim about outer talents and inner morality: "When one envisions someone as a great [*großen*] man, one exaggerates too much . . . Often talents appear [*scheinen*] to have a greatness, but this does not constitute the estimation of the human being" (*AP* 25:334).

Enthusiasm, again, is a false form of sublimity. Kant calls enthusiasm the "passion of the sublime" (*Bem* 20:43, *Ri* 37), a formulation probably derived from Shaftesbury's description of enthusiasm in *Characteristics* (1711) as the "sublime in human passions."<sup>67</sup> Kant had briefly mentioned Cato in the *Observations*. To those who lack finer feeling, Cato comes off as an obstinate fool (*Beo* 2:224). However, to those with formed culture, the senator's committing suicide after he learned that the Roman Republic was lost to Julius Caesar contains something noble about it. "Cato's death. Sacrifice. Wonderful and rare" (*Bem* 20:4, *Ri* 8). Cato's enthusiasm appears (but no more) to be sublime for several reasons. Cato demonstrates his freedom by acting on principles of patriotic virtue. He sacrifices the entirety of his sensible being for the idea of the Republic. Finally, Cato stimulates wonder and admiration, the sentiments of the noble sublime. However, in the end Cato's act is not truly sublime, because his passion goes too far: the very act of transcendence of his sensible nature extinguishes his life.

Finally, the notes refer to the grotesque and the ludicrous. Although Kant had mentioned grotesqueries (*Fratzen*) in the *Observations*, the ludicrous (*possierlich*) seems to be a new development. "The adventurous taste

<sup>67</sup> Shaftesbury 1999, 27.

parodies. *Hudibras* parodies grotesqueries. Ludicrous sublime" (*Bem* 20:37, *Ri* 32). In the tradition of works such as *Don Quixote*, *Hudibras* is, for Kant, a parody of grotesqueries. Here it is helpful to consider the pages of the *Observations* on which this note is written. Kant had claimed that unnatural things that seem to be sublime are grotesqueries, that whoever has an inclination toward them is a crank (*Grillenfänger*), and that whoever loves and believes in strange adventures is a fantast (*Beo* 2:214, ll. 3–6). The ludicrous is so called because the otherworldly and unnatural come across as absurd or ridiculous. Although the sublime is fancied to exist in the unnatural things that elicit the feeling, they actually contain little or no sublimity. In other words, grotesqueries go beyond nature in the wrong way, and the consequent silliness renders it an easy target for parody. In the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* (composed in 1764–65 and published by January 31, 1766<sup>68</sup>) Kant quotes a passage from *Hudibras* concerning the fevered brains of deluded fanatics. Depending on which way the wind blows, such fanatics either release intestinal gas or have a heavenly inspiration (*T* 2:348).

Grotesqueries can contribute to the moral or social good only in a very limited way, since it is hard for such unnatural events or objects to accomplish nature's purposes. Echoing Alexander Pope, Kant asserts that "whatever one does contrary to the favor of nature one always does very badly" (*Beo* 2:242). Thus, if one were to rank the false sublimities hierarchically, grotesqueries, and the taste for them, would be near the bottom.

#### 4 CONCLUSION: TOWARD THE AESTHETIC THEORY OF 1790

What do we make of Kant's distinction between true and false sublimity? Although the distinction seems to be an aesthetic concept – after all, it concerns the sublime – it is above all an important step in the development of Kant's ethics. The distinction when applied to honor anticipates, for instance, the distinction between outward conformity to the moral law and morally worthy, inward respect for the latter. Kant's critical ethics maintains that we cannot observe by introspection whether other people, or even we ourselves, are morally great. We cannot discern whether our actions are motivated by morally worthy reasons.

The true/false distinction was not first proposed by Kant, and we find a similar notion in many other theorists of the sublime in the rhetorical and

<sup>68</sup> Walford and Meerbote in Kant 1992a, lxvii.



critical tradition: Shaftesbury, Samuel Werenfels, Nathan Bailey, John Baillie, Thomas Paine, Thomas Stackhouse, Thomas Blackwell, James Beattie, Joshua Reynolds, Hugh Blair, and Pseudo-Longinus.<sup>69</sup> Most of these writers connect the false sublime (the bombastic, ridiculous, or even monstrous) to going beyond proper, natural limits. In a similar vein, Kant links a feeling for splendor and honor to a taste for bombast (*Bombast*) (*Beo* 2:249).

Lord Kames and Rousseau merit particular mention here. In *Elements of Criticism*, Kames characterizes the “false sublime” as having to do with a writer’s attempt to magnify an object “beyond natural bounds.”<sup>70</sup> Kames subdivides the false sublime into two categories: bombast, and impropriety with respect to fictions. In the first case, the writer of “mean genius” attempts, but fails, to raise a low or familiar subject above its rank. This produces the ridiculous. In the second case, the writer forces elevation by introducing imaginary beings, but without preserving any propriety or consistency in their actions. Kames holds that this fault is worse than bombast. Both of these cases of false sublimity involve overstepping proper bounds and being unnatural.

This brings us to Rousseau. After Rousseau’s writings, especially *Emile*, awakened Kant to the problem of luxury, Kant separated the feeling for magnificence from the feeling for deceptive splendor, which, he claimed, can hinder natural needs. Kant’s distinction does not therefore point out innovatory aspects of the sublime, nor does the distinction play a central role in the critical theory of the sublime. He does not elaborate a theory of the true/false sublime where one would expect it, namely, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.<sup>71</sup> I suspect that Kant’s critical ethics began to do the work that the distinction was previously doing.

There are some sentiments and mental states that Kant’s precritical theory does not characterize as false sublime, although one would expect just that: fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*), taste for the adventurous, and melancholy. (A taste for the adventurous, as a fascination with otherworldly things like apparitions and ghosts, has affinities with *Schwärmerei*.)

A comparison with the critical aesthetics is revealing, for there are passages that can be interpreted as critical repetitions, or revisions, of Kant’s earlier claims. Fanaticism, for instance, still fails to count as a sublime sentiment and is comparable to a delusion of mind or insanity (*Wahnwitz*) that is incompatible with the sublime (*KU* 5:275).

<sup>69</sup> Kirwan 2005, 47–50. <sup>70</sup> Kames 2005, 173–77. <sup>71</sup> Kirwan 2005, 62.



In the critical account, melancholy (*Schwermut*) remains about the same or is perhaps characterized as slightly more preferable. According to the early theory, melancholy is, alongside dread, a *component* of the experience of the terrifying sublime (*Beo* 2:209), and “melancholy withdrawal” based on a “legitimate weariness” is said to be noble, that is, it can *elicit* that form of sublimity in those who contemplate it (*Beo* 2:215). At the same time, Kant calls melancholy the negative side of earnestness (*Ernsthaftigkeit*) (*Beo* 2:221). According to the critical aesthetics, moral sadness (*Traurigkeit*) or sorrow (*Betrübniß*) can only elicit the sublime (*KU* 5:276). Sadness is not a component of an experience of the sublime and plays no role in its phenomenology.

The critical theory gives more prominence to apathy or affectlessness. In the *Observations*, apathy is associated with a phlegmatic lack of (refined and moral) feeling altogether. Apathy not only indicates a lack of a feeling for the sublime, but also an inability to evoke the sublime. By contrast, according to the critical account, apathy can incite the sublime in some contemplators (*KU* 5:272), that is, as long as the necessary conditions of aesthetic engagement and experience (e.g. disinterestedness) are met.

Admiration (*Bewunderung*) is part of the phenomenology of the noble sublime according to the early theory (*Beo* 2:209), and in the critical aesthetics it is still a component of some sublime experiences (*KU* 5:245, 262, 272).

Although Kant’s position is not entirely transparent, it seems to me that enthusiasm in the critical aesthetics can be part of an experience of the sublime. If this is correct, it would mark a renewed esteem for enthusiasm on Kant’s part, for, according to the precritical theory, enthusiasm is classified as a false sublimity.

The case of enthusiasm is especially noteworthy. In the third *Critique*, Kant says that enthusiasm, defined as the affective response to the idea of the good and characterized as an affect rather than a passion (*KU* 5:272; cf. *ApH* 7:254), appears (*scheint*) to be aesthetically sublime (*KU* 5:272). He then considers whether this is true, and, in my view, his answer is affirmative, although Kant could have been clearer on this point.

That enthusiasm can be sublime seems to be confirmed by Kant’s essay on moral progress in *The Conflict of the Faculties*. The universal, necessary, purposive yet purposeless, and disinterested exaltation collectively felt by spectators who are watching the establishment of the first French Republic counts as a sublime mental state (*S* 7:85). This instance of enthusiasm can be interpreted as a genuinely aesthetic experience of the sublime, not merely as excitement about the love of honor demonstrated by the French Republic

and its citizen army.<sup>72</sup> The spectators' enthusiasm is an instance of true, not false, sublimity. Kant holds that the enthusiasm is purposeless and disinterested in the following senses: the spectators do not participate in the Revolutionary events, do not promote their welfare (their well-being is actually threatened), and do not directly attempt to achieve some goal or end (other than looking on). Kant claims that the enthusiasm is universally shared, that is, would be felt by all impartial, suitably backgrounded, and cultured spectators contemplating the events. He maintains that the affective response is necessarily binding for them insofar as they are finite, free, rational creatures who possess an idea of the good.

Over the course of about twenty-five years, therefore, enthusiasm transforms from an apparent to a genuine form of the sublime. Aesthetic experience, especially sublime enthusiasm, ultimately plays an important role in the transition from nature to freedom, a problem that deeply concerned Kant and that motivated the composition of the third *Critique*. In his arguments about the transition to freedom, Kant did not neglect the importance of aesthetics – or taste broadly construed so as to include the sublime.

Some of the precritical theory's aesthetic concepts become important to the critical aesthetics. Unsurprisingly, they change in the process. The terrifying sublime becomes, with significant alterations, the dynamical sublime. The noble sublime transforms into (what we can call) the "moral sublime," a term found, albeit used in a unique sense, in Herder's lecture notes (*PPH* 27:31). The magnificent sublime turns into the combination of sublimity with beauty that can be elicited by aesthetic engagement with works of art.<sup>73</sup> Reminiscent of Kant's early view that the "adopted" virtues are beautiful, the third *Critique* distinguishes vigorous, strenuous, and noble affects that can evoke the sublime from tender, yielding ones that strike us as beautiful (*KU* 5:272; cf. *ApH* 7:256–58, *KpV* 5:151–61). Kant disapproves of weak, even if beautiful, affects because they do not arouse the consciousness of our powers to overcome resistance. He connects oversensitivity and sympathy to fantasy (*Phantasie*), to having a wild imagination (*KU* 5:273), which causes one to confuse the real and the imaginary, not unlike the precritical concept of *Wahn*. The fantast displays an unruly and dreamy imagination, yet he lacks sublime enthusiasm – where the imagination is said to be free, stretched and extended by rational ideas.

<sup>72</sup> Shell 2001, 81; cf. David-Ménard 2000, 92.

<sup>73</sup> On these transformations, see Clewis 2009, 54–55, and Myskja 2002, 126–28. On the possibility of artistic sublimity, see Abaci 2008, 2010, and Clewis 2010.

In conclusion, the importance of *Observations* and the notes lies not so much in the value of the aesthetic theory they defend as in the picture they give us of the development of Kant's pragmatic anthropology and ethical theory. Nevertheless, some strains of contemporary aesthetics have more affinity with the empirical methods of Burke and the early Kant than with the *Critique* of 1790. Since the *Observations* indeed offers a "physics and natural history of the sublime and the beautiful," as Schiller wrote in a February 19, 1795, letter to Goethe,<sup>74</sup> the treatise is closer to contemporary neuroaesthetics, empirical aesthetics, and psychological aesthetics than the critical account is. The *Observations'* empirical concern with pragmatic anthropology and ethical concepts, with gender and race, places it far from the aesthetics of 1790. Insofar as the *Observations* and the *Remarks* strike us as lacking concepts of primarily aesthetic value – as texts that make claims in anthropology, psychology, and sociology (as we might call them today) while developing and contributing to ethical theory – we demonstrate just how influential on the discipline of aesthetics the third *Critique* has been, given its stated turn away from empirical science, its declaration of the autonomy of the aesthetic, and its separation of the domains of the aesthetic and the moral.

<sup>74</sup> Cited from Goetschel 1994, 59, which cites *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*, ed. Franz Muncker (n.d.), vol. 1, 71.