

In the logical estimation of magnitude, the impossibility of ever attaining to absolute totality through the progression of the measurement of the things of the sensible world in time and space was recognized as objective, i.e., as an impossibility of **thinking** the infinite as even given, and not as merely subjective, i.e., as an incapacity^a for **grasping** it; for there nothing at all turns on the degree of comprehension in one intuition as a measure, but everything comes down to a numerical concept. But in an aesthetic estimation of magnitude the numerical concept must drop out or be altered, and the comprehension of the imagination in respect of the unity of measure (so that the concept of a law of the successive generation of concepts of magnitude is avoided) is alone purposive for it. – Now if a magnitude almost reaches the outermost limit of our faculty of comprehension in one intuition, and yet the imagination is by means of numerical concepts (our capacity^b for which we are aware is unlimited) summoned to aesthetic comprehension in a greater unity, then we feel ourselves in our mind as aesthetically confined within borders; but with respect to the necessary enlargement of the imagination to the point of adequacy to that which is unlimited in our faculty of reason, namely the idea of the absolute whole, the displeasure and thus the contrapurposiveness of the faculty of imagination is yet represented as purposive for the ideas of reason and their awakening. It is precisely in this way, however, that the aesthetic judgment itself becomes purposive for reason, as the source of ideas, i.e., for an intellectual comprehension for which all aesthetic comprehension is small; and the object is taken up as sublime with a pleasure that is possible only by means of a displeasure.

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B.

On the Dynamically Sublime in Nature

§ 28.

On nature as a power.

Power is a capacity^c that is superior to great obstacles. The same thing is called **dominion** if it is also superior to the resistance of something that itself possesses power. Nature considered in aesthetic judgment as a power that has no dominion over us is **dynamically sublime**.

If nature is to be judged^d by us dynamically as sublime, it must be represented as arousing fear (although, conversely, not every object

^a *Unvermögen*

^b *Vermögens*

^c *Vermögen*

^d *beurtheilt*

that arouses fear is found sublime in our aesthetic judgment). For in aesthetic judging^a (without a concept) the superiority over obstacles can only be judged^b in accordance with the magnitude of the resistance. However, that which we strive to resist is an evil, and, if we find our capacity^c to be no match for it, an object of fear. Thus, for the aesthetic power of judgment^d nature can count as a power,^e thus as dynamically sublime, only insofar as it is considered an object of fear.

We can, however, consider an object as **fearful** without being afraid of it, if, namely, we judge^f it in such a way that we merely **think** of the case in which we might wish to resist it and think that in that case all resistance would be completely futile. Thus the virtuous man fears God without being afraid of him, because he does not think of the case of wishing to resist God and his commands as anything that is worrisome for **him**. But since he does not think of such a case as impossible in itself, he recognizes God as fearful.

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Someone who is afraid can no more judge about the sublime in nature than someone who is in the grip of inclination and appetite can judge about the beautiful. The former flees from the sight of an object that instills alarm in him, and it is impossible to find satisfaction in a terror that is seriously intended. Hence the agreeableness in the cessation of something troublesome is **joyfulness**. But this joyfulness on account of liberation from a danger is accompanied with the proviso that one never again be exposed to that danger; indeed one may well be reluctant to think back on that sensation, let alone seek out the opportunity for it.

Bold, overhanging, as it were threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, etc., make our capacity^g to resist into an insignificant trifle in comparison with their power. But the sight of them only becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, as long as we find ourselves in safety, and we gladly call these objects sublime because they elevate the strength of our soul above its usual level, and allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity^h for

^a *Beurtheilung*

^b *beurtheilt*

^c *Vermögen*

^d *Urtheilskraft*

^e *Macht*

^f *beurtheilen*

^g *Vermögen*

^h *Vermögen*

resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature.

For just as we found our own limitation in the immeasurability of nature and the insufficiency of our capacity^a to adopt a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its **domain**, but nevertheless at the same time found in our own faculty of reason another, nonsensible standard, which has that very infinity under itself as a unit against which everything in nature is small, and thus found in our own mind a superiority over nature itself even in its immeasurability: likewise the irresistibility of its power certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical^b powerlessness, but at the same time it reveals a capacity^c for judging^d ourselves as independent of it and a superiority over nature on which is grounded a self-preservation of quite another kind than that which can be threatened and endangered by nature outside us, whereby the humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion. In this way, in our aesthetic judgment nature is judged^e as sublime not insofar as it arouses fear, but rather because it calls forth our power^f (which is not part of nature) to regard those things about which we are concerned (goods, health and life) as trivial, and hence to regard its power^g (to which we are, to be sure, subjected in regard to these things) as not the sort of dominion over ourselves and our authority to which we would have to bow if it came down to our highest principles and their affirmation or abandonment. Thus nature is here called sublime merely because it raises the imagination to the point of presenting those cases in which the mind can make palpable to itself the sublimity of its own vocation even over nature.

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This self-esteem is not diminished by the fact that we must see ourselves as safe in order to be sensible of this inspiring satisfaction, in which case (it might seem), because the danger is not serious, the sublimity of our spiritual capacity^b is also not to be taken seriously.¹⁶ For the satisfaction here concerns only the **vocation** of our capacityⁱ as it is revealed to us in such a case, just as the predisposition to it lies in our nature; while the development and exercise of it is left to us and

^a *Vermögens*

^b The word “physical” was added in the second edition.

^c *Vermögen*

^d *beurtheilen*

^e *beurtheilt*

^f *Kraft*

^g *Macht*

^h *Geistesvermögen*

ⁱ *Vermögens*

remains our responsibility.^a And there is truth here, however much the person, if he takes his reflection this far, may be conscious of his present actual powerlessness.

5: 263 To be sure, this principle seems far-fetched and subtle, hence excessive for an aesthetic judgment; but the observation of human beings shows the opposite, that it can be the principle for the most common judgments^b even though one is not always conscious of it. For what is it that is an object of the greatest admiration even to the savage? Someone who is not frightened, who has no fear, thus does not shrink before danger but energetically sets to work with full deliberation. And even in the most civilized^c circumstances this exceptionally high esteem for the warrior remains, only now it is also demanded that he at the same time display all the virtues of peace, gentleness, compassion and even proper care for his own person, precisely because in this way the incoercibility of his mind by danger can be recognized. Hence however much debate there may be about whether it is the statesman or the general who deserves the greater respect in comparison to the other, aesthetic judgment decides in favor of the latter. Even war, if it is conducted with order and reverence for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and at the same time makes the mentality of the people who conduct it in this way all the more sublime, the more dangers it has been exposed to and before which it has been able to assert its courage; whereas a long peace causes the spirit of mere commerce to predominate, along with base selfishness, cowardice and weakness, and usually debases the mentality of the populace.

This analysis of the concept of the sublime, to the extent that it is ascribed to power, seems to run counter to the fact that we usually represent God as exhibiting himself in anger but at the same time in his sublimity in thunder, storm, earthquake etc., where to imagine that our minds have any superiority over the effects and as it seems even over the intentions of such a power would seem to be at once both foolishness and outrage. Here it seems to be not a feeling of the sublimity of our own nature but rather submission, dejection, and a feeling of complete powerlessness that is the appropriate disposition of the mind to the appearance of such an object, and which is also usually associated with the idea of it in the case of natural occurrences of this sort. In religion in general submission, adoration with bowed head, and remorseful and anxious gestures and voice, seem to be the only appropriate conduct in the presence of the Deity, and so to have been

^a In the first edition, this period was a comma, and the sentence continued to the end of the paragraph.

^b *Beurtheilungen*

^c *allergesittesten*

adopted and still observed by most people. But this disposition of the mind is far from being intrinsically and necessarily connected with the idea of the **sublimity** of a religion and its object. Someone who is genuinely afraid because he finds cause for that within himself, because he is conscious of having offended with his contemptible disposition^a a power whose will is irresistible and at the same time just, certainly does not find himself in the right frame of mind to marvel at the greatness of God, for which a mood of calm contemplation and an entirely free^b judgment is requisite. Only when he is conscious of his upright, God-pleasing disposition do those effects of^c power serve to awaken in him the idea of the sublimity of this being, insofar as he recognizes in himself a sublimity of disposition suitable to God's will, and is thereby raised above the fear of such effects of nature, which he does not regard as outbursts of God's wrath. Even humility, as the pitiless judging^d of one's own failings, which otherwise, given consciousness of good dispositions, could easily be covered with the mantle of the fragility of human nature, is a sublime state of mind, that of voluntarily subjecting oneself to the pain of self-reproach in order gradually to eliminate the causes of it. In this way alone does religion internally distinguish itself from superstition, the latter not providing a basis in the mind for reverence^e for the sublime, but only for fear^f and anxiety before the being of superior power, to whose will the terrified person sees himself as subjected without holding him in great esteem; from which of course nothing can arise but the attempt to curry favor and ingratiate oneself, instead of a religion of the good conduct of life.¹⁷

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Thus sublimity is not contained in anything in nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us (insofar as it influences us). Everything that arouses this feeling in us, which includes the **power**^g of nature that calls forth our own powers,^h is thus (although improperly) called sublime; and only under the presupposition of this idea in us and in relation to it are we capable of arriving at the idea of the sublimity of that being who produces inner respect in us not merely through his power, which he displays in nature, but even more by the

^a *Gesinnung*

^b In the second edition, *freies*; in the first edition, *zwangfreies* (uncoerced or free from coercion).

^c *der*; in the first edition, *seiner*, that is, God's power.

^d *Beurtheilung*

^e *Ehrfurcht*

^f *Furcht*

^g *Macht*

^h *Kräfte*

capacity^a that is placed within us for judging^b nature without fear and thinking of our vocation as sublime in comparison with it.

§ 29.

On the modality of the judgment on the
sublime in nature.

There are innumerable things in beautiful nature concerning which we immediately require consensus with our own judgment from everyone else and can also, without being especially prone to error, expect it; but we cannot promise ourselves that our judgment concerning the sublime in nature will so readily find acceptance by others. For a far greater culture, not merely of the aesthetic power of judgment, but also of the cognitive faculties on which that is based, seems to be requisite in order to be able to make a judgment about this excellence of the objects of nature.

5: 265 The disposition of the mind to the feeling of the sublime requires its receptivity to ideas; for it is precisely in the inadequacy of nature to the latter, thus only under the presupposition of them, and of the effort of the imagination to treat nature as a schema for them, that what is repellent for the sensibility, but which is at the same time attractive for it, consists, because it is a dominion that reason exercises over sensibility only in order to enlarge it in a way suitable for its own proper domain (the practical) and to allow it to look out upon the infinite, which for sensibility is an abyss. In fact, without the development of moral ideas, that which we, prepared by culture, call sublime will appear merely repellent to the unrefined person. He will see in the proofs of the dominion of nature given by its destructiveness and in the enormous measure of its power, against which his own vanishes away to nothing, only the distress, danger, and need that would surround the person who was banished thereto. Thus the good and otherwise sensible Savoyard peasant (as Herr de Saussure relates) had no hesitation in calling all devotees of the icy mountains fools.¹⁸ And who knows whether that would have been entirely unjust if that observer had undertaken the dangers to which he there exposed himself, as most travelers usually do, merely as a hobby, or in order one day to be able to describe them with pathos? But his intention was the edification of mankind, and this excellent man experienced the elevating sentiment^c that he gave to the readers of his travels as part of the bargain.

But just because the judgment on the sublime in nature requires

^a *Vermögen*

^b *beurtheilen*

^c *seelenerhebende Empfindung*