

Imagination and the Sublime in Kant's Aesthetics

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Kantian Aesthetics and Imagination

Kant's *Critique of Judgment* owes its legacy in Baumgarten's aesthetics. Kant's third *Critique* not only delineates his own aesthetical theory, with all the maturity of his earlier contemplations, but provides the most detailed and intricately worked out theory of imagination, that was consistent with his overall transcendental philosophy. It established a theory that has far reaching influences upon modern western philosophical aesthetics. For Kant, the organisation of random stimuli into perceived objects is the work of *imagination* and the conceptual categorisations of those objects is the work of understanding, which to him, is the function of the faculty of reason.

The nature of Romantic imagination influenced Kant but also followed him by being extended from his theory to those of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. The theory of imagination, in this context, has a heritage and a legacy. During the nineteenth century, there seemed a clear emergence of two beliefs about imagination. The first was that imagination and truth are opposed, the former being personal, unreliable, and passing while truth is shared, and timeless. This has been the conventionally accepted, objective scientific view of truth. The other belief, however, is associated with the Romantic Movement. Here, imagination is understood and grasped intuitively, by each individual. It also finds expression, or is expressed, in works of art, poetry and any other creative mode. The idea of 'unform', other than being associated with the experience of that which is sublime, is also thus applicable to the arts as well. For instance in the case of music, we have an 'infinite extendedness which can be expressed either in spatial or temporal terms' and be a 'composition by indeterminacy'.¹ For Kant, imagination is distinct from the faculty of reason because it is what receives sensuous experience. Imagination is also not 'irrational' in the sense of being nonsensical but because it has in fact a freedom or liberty that

conventional definitions of 'rationality' do not seem to have, the latter being 'analytic' and 'scientific' and so limited. In Kant's aesthetics, thus, imagination defies reason, as it were, and brings together in his critical methodology, the world of senses as experienced to be harmonized with the faculty of reason in the very creation (and interpretation) of 'understanding' itself. Mary Warnock explains Kant's position thus:

"... (Kant) made our ordinary peasant like assumptions about the world out there, waiting to be perceived and known, seem better founded. The invisible 'I', the 'I' who perceives, is fitted out a priori with the imagination (as well as the necessary categories of the understanding) which follows me to interpret the world of nature. If there is no 'I' there is no inner world. But then there is no outer world either. The two must stand in contrast to each other; if one exists, so does the other. Though the world of nature, according to Kant, is still the world 'as it appears', we can claim to know it, and to understand it according to laws applicable to it by every rational creature. The mystery of how on earth we manage to communicate with each other has been solved. For the world as it appears is genuinely common to us all, though grasped and understood by each."²

However, it is the connection between imagination as a facilitator, and our experiencing selves as well as the moral selves that ultimately must need be objective and universal (in Kantian philosophy) that has been criticized by some critics. For instance, Terry Eagleton says that Kantian aesthetics along with its central theme of imagination ultimately becomes ineffective as it finally bows down to the authority of Reason. But in defense of this problem of the imagination being restricted by reason, Kant shows that the "free-play" between imagination and reason is really the interplay of imagination and the faculty of judgment. He explains that the faculty of judgment:

"generates the feeling of beauty out of the harmony it finds in relating the imagination, in its free play, to the understanding, in its general character; it generates the feeling of the sublime out of the conflict it creates by relating the imagination, even in its fullest exertion, to Reason and its transcendent Ideas"³

We could ask, if the organization of random stimuli into perceived objects is the work of the *imagination* and the production of conceptual categorizations of those objects is the work of the *understanding*, how free is the former really in its 'intention' to 'create reality'? For Kant,

both scientific judgments and ethical judgments are objective, in the sense that some of them are correct and the rest are likely to be incorrect. Judgements of taste (pertaining to aesthetics) seem to be on the middle ground between the two extremes. It was Kant who first emphasised that there is a special kind of pleasure which human beings experience when they *disinterestedly* contemplate the formal structure of sensuous aspects of phenomena. In his First Moment of the Critique of Judgement about the Beautiful he points out that disinterested does not mean any lack of interest in the object of aesthetic regard, but not having any personal gratification or interest, other than the sheer delight through contemplation. During the process of disinterested contemplation, the faculties of understanding (reason) and imagination may harmonize. However, when these "reflective" (contemplative) judgements are being made, the imagination is not under strict subordination of understanding. It thus engages in a "free" generation of sensuous content. This "free play" between understanding and imagination is one of the essential cornerstones of Kant's aesthetic theory.

In common discursive communication (within oneself and outside) the synthesizing imagination is bound by the concept. But, for Kant, in aesthetic experience or aesthetic judgement, imagination and understanding enter into a "free play". It is also from the free play that aesthetic delight arises. Even though Kant says that the origin of aesthetic delight is free play between imagination *and* understanding, this may not always mean the random free-play of the mind in daydreaming where the stream of consciousness has no limits. The play, then, to which Kant refers, regarding aesthetic intention, aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgement is something that occurs because in imagination we *push* the limits of those constraints. For, the words of poem and the sounds of music also have the power to *constrain* and shape our imaginations. So, poetry says Kant:

'...expands the mind by giving freedom to the imagination and by offering, from among the boundless multiplicity of possible forms accordant with a given concept, to whose bounds it is restricted, that one which couples verbal expression is completely adequate, and by thus rising aesthetically to ideas.'

The Beautiful and the Sublime:

Kant's treatment of the sublime is throughout related to his account of the beautiful. The two are, in his view, similar. That is, judgments of

the beautiful and the sublime are, according to Kant, both reflective aesthetic judgments. That is, they record the feeling of pleasure excited by an object, instead of describing any characteristics of the latter. In this, they are essentially subjective judgments of the Imagination.

To Kant, both, the beautiful and the sublime, please 'on their account'. That is, the delight in either case does not accrue because of any realization that the object gratifies the senses, or realizes or conforms to some norm or end. This particular point, is related to the key features of the aesthetic attitude which is distinguished from, and in fact rejects, the utilitarian, intellectual and the critical attitudes. And it is precisely this that distinguishes the judgements of beauty and sublimity from those of the agreeable and the good. To Kant, the delight that we take in the beautiful or the sublime arises because, in a given intuition with either understanding or reason which are faculties of concepts, there is accord of imagination with understanding in the case of beauty, and accord of imagination with reason in the case of the sublime. So, the idea of imagination is crucial for Kant in his aesthetic theory as it has a distinct role for the understanding of both, the beautiful as well as the sublime.

In so far as the delight given by the beautiful and the sublime is 'connected with the mere presentation', judgment is in both cases singular. In the delight of both the beautiful and the sublime we remain confined to the individual. This, incidentally, gives us yet another key feature of the aesthetic attitude. The object is here a 'this', not a mere 'such'. Yet, in so far as the delight is not ultimately grounded in any merely individual sensations, judgments of both profess to be valid in respect of every subject. This claim, however, is made not through the use of any concepts, nor even by an reference to the qualities of the object, but solely with reference to the felt quality of the pleasure in question. The delight in beauty or sublimity, though it is in principle shareable, is an instance of subjective, not objective finality. In other words, the experience is here internally harmonious and not adapted to anything external. For, 'The beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, apart from any interest: the sublime to esteem something highly even in opposition to our (sensible) interest.'⁵ However, the distinctions within similarities are significant. For, 'the beautiful is directly attended with a feeling of the furtherance of life'. That is, we directly feel simulated, not at all depressed, by an object of beauty. The sublime, on the other hand, does not please us directly. Rather, its immediate impact

comes as 'the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces'. Delight here arises only when the initial shock has brought out, from within the depths of our being, the unseen reserves of moral strength. To make this seem intelligible, a reference may here be made to Winckelmann's remark that in looking upon the sea the mind is at first depressed and then recovers itself more strongly. The beautiful, again is quite compatible with unremitting sensuous charm; but the Sublime is not. In the former, the activity of the imagination is playful and tranquil; in the latter, very serious and stirring. The beautiful does not really tax the mind and there is no painful effort required to realize anything. The intensity in an experience of beauty does not overwhelm us to the extent where it may actually become difficult for us to grasp the full impact and depth of the experience. It is well within the range of our sensible apprehension; and, like fancy, the ideas here gently and happily tread over the experience in a feeling of free delight. In the sublime, on the other hand, there is present a painful effort to realize that greatness which is conceivable but which is as yet unattained. Further, in our experience of the beautiful, the object appears pre-adapted to our power of judgment. It is characterized by 'finality', the feeling of harmonious adaptation. Here the object merely pleases; the delight is positive and unmixed. But in our experience of the sublime, the object may seem: 'in point of form to contravene the ends of our power of judgment, to be ill adapted to our faculty of presentation, and to be, as it were, an outrage on the imagination'. In this sense, it is apprehended as 'contra-final'. It first tends to repel, and only ultimately appears or satisfies. The delight is not so much pleasure as admiration or respect. It is, we may say, a negative pleasure: "The beautiful is what pleases in the mere estimate formed of it ... it must please apart from all interest. The sublime is what pleases ... by reason of its opposition to the interest of sense."⁶

Objections (implicitly by Bosanquet and explicitly by Israel Knox) have been raised to the excessively sharp way in which Kant seems to distinguish the sublime from the beautiful:

"...Kant demolishes the continuity of the beautiful in nature from the simplest and the loveliest to the most inspiring and the grandest. In all aesthetic experience there is an imaginative sympathetic identification with, a going out to, the object of contemplation, there is an undulation, there is an ebb and flow, and there is at least peace and calm and serenity. The experience of the sublime is the highest and most intense form of aesthetic experience; it is intricate

and passionate, and at once elemental and spiritual. The beautiful to the sublime which are not, as Burke and Kant thought, two species of aesthetic Judgment but, as Longinus held, modes and manifestations of the same species of experience..."

It could well be asked: is the beautiful in fact continuous with the sublime, and, 'continuous' in which sense of the word 'continuity'? Kant's discussion lends itself to the latter meaning, and in this sense of 'continuity' the transition from the beautiful to the sublime may be said to be discontinuous even in the extract from Wordsworth. Otherwise what does the word 'disturbs' here mean? It cannot mean something adverse or unpleasant for the disturbance is here from 'the joys of elevated thoughts.' The meaning simply is that the experience of sublimity—though continuous, in time, with the preceding experience of mere beauty—is yet qualitatively distinct. The idea of temporal continuity with qualitative discontinuity is by no means fantastic. It is true of artistic creation. For, the total meaning of the completed work of art just 'happens'. In other words, though it is continuous with, and dependent on the period of the process of creation, it cannot be reduced to the latter.

Imagination and the Sublime:

Kant was influenced by the writings of Edmund Burke and Felix Mendelssohn. Kant's own most challenging and interesting interpretation of imagination is worked out in the *Analytic of the Sublime*. This brings out more clearly the imagination's free-play, on the one hand and its being restricted on the other, by understanding, transcending to a crescendo, as it were, to a plane of moral value experienced as well as understood as something aesthetic. As mentioned, the sublime was a much-loved theme in the eighteenth century aesthetics, espoused specially by the Romantic Movement. Basically, to Kant, the sublime is not merely an experience of pleasure, but a complex experience of pleasure and the overwhelming that takes place while encountering the grandeur or boundlessness of nature. First, there is disharmony between imagination and understanding and then there is harmony as the categorical framework marks out the 'rational' conception of imagination. The faculty and function of imagination is here cardinal in both experience and in the understanding of the sublime. For Kant, the sublime takes two forms, the 'mathematical' and the 'dynamic'. The 'mathematically sublime' is the manner in which reason's capacity to conceive the infinite reveals itself to the vastness or expansion of natural

experience. The 'dynamically sublime' is the content of our moral power to preserve our character with the experience of the emotionally overwhelming quality of moral value or excellence. The mathematical sublime and its relation to imagination can be understood, as discussed above, by attending to Kant's notion of the experience of objects while they manifest the discrepancy and disparity, and the constant striving of the sense of the vast or the great to satisfy that idea. The feeling of pain arising from the perception of this want of accordance is counter balanced or overcome by the feeling of pleasure: "Arising from the correspondence with rational Ideas of this very judgment of the inadequacy of our greatest faculty of sense; in so far as it is law for us to strive after these Ideas". Kant in fact insists that the absolute greatness of the sublime cannot be said to be subject to any kind of objective determination. Objective determination would here mean the mathematical measurement of magnitude in terms of the units of measurement present in phenomena. This implies further that the idea of an all-inclusive totality does not truly give us the idea of infinity implicit in the sublime: for, as a positive idea, an all-inclusive totality is a complete, and so a limited totality. Therefore, so far as the sublime is that in comparison to which all else is small, it only means that the sublime is that greatness which is devoid of form, since it is unrestricted. It is that which involves the consciousness of subjective finality, extension here affecting the imagination toward progress ad infinitum, that is, an immeasurable or incomprehensible progression, whereas, on the other hand, our reason demands an absolute totality, as a real idea.

Thus, when the sheer magnitude of a vast mountain range evokes in us the feeling of the sublime, we are not concerned with the actual measurable dimensions of its vastness or the exactitude of its form. For, to measure it would only make it an object of objective determination and as such logically or mathematically exact and not aesthetical. The magnitude of the sublime, therefore, strikes us essentially as a judgment of the subjective imagination; being that vastness which is greater than the observing subject. When we estimate magnitude through numbers (or conceptually) the imagination selects a unit, which it can then repeat indefinitely. But, there is a second way of estimating magnitude. This Kant calls 'aesthetic estimation'. Here, the imagination tries to comprehend or encompass the whole representation in one single intuition. Now, if an object has such a big size, apparent or conceived, that it defies the imagination's attempt to take all at once, we

(subjectively) experience 'absolute magnitude', though such magnitude is obviously not seen. In the aesthetic estimation of magnitude we get at once a feeling of the effort towards a comprehension that exceeds the faculty of imagination. In this lies the interplay of imagination and reason. Thus, Kant says:

"The joy and elevation felt in the presence of the sublime is the natural human pleasure of being reminded that we have...faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense... The feeling of the sublime contains a pain, the awareness of the disparity between imagination and reason, but it is transformed into pleasure by its reflection of reason's greatness. Thus, we are moved by the Sublime, not set to 'restful contemplation, as by beauty; and our feeling has some similarity to our respect for the moral law.'"⁸

Reason, according to Kant, exercises a regulative function over the operations of understanding upon sense. This it does, not of course by itself actually giving us supersensible knowledge, but by demanding such a completeness in the system of our knowledge as could be attained only by going beyond appearance to things in themselves. The experience of the sublime thus necessarily involves a representation of limitlessness. Yet when the sublime has been elicited from within the subject by an excitation of the idea of reason—which stands for the idea of totality in general—the suggestion of totality is 'superadded'. That is, the experience of the sublime is one of 'totality', not however as a unity with clear limits, but in the sense of an infinite inclusiveness. It is here that Kant's sublime enters the sphere of infinity; and comes close to the nominal self. The sublime in this sense, as identified with noumena, has to be realized as a subjective judgment of imagination, through the Idea of Reason: for Reason alone can conceive the noumena. It is in this sense that the sublime is unqualified; for, to qualify it with a form, would bar it from being infinite. Following Bosanquet's account of the matter, we may say that whereas the object of beauty is, in Kant's view, necessarily a form, the sublime is quite compatible with 'unform' which includes not only formlessness, but also deformity. What is more, the sublime includes a thought of the fearfulness of the object, but the beautiful does not. The sublime is felt to be greater and more powerful than the subject. The beautiful, on the other hand, is that which is quite manageable and is not too big for us. Beauty, Kant insists, is certainly not an intrinsic property of things. But in so far as the object here seems directly adapted to our cognitive powers, it is not a serious error to speak of beautiful

objects. But to speak of the sublime objects of nature is, according to Kant, a much greater error. For, initially, the object here seems quite out of tune with our apprehending powers. It only comes to appear sublime – and, therefore, on the whole deeply satisfying after we get enabled to meet it by drawing upon the hidden dimension of our being. As Bosanquet rightly points out, the sublime is, in Kant's view, one degree more subjective than the beautiful. So here imagination plays an even stronger role. Thus,

"How can that which is apprehended as inherently contra-final be noted with an expression of approval? All that we can say is that the object lends itself to the presentation of the sublime discoverable in the mind. For the Sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns Ideas of Reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy itself which does admit of sensuous presentation. Thus the broad ocean agitated by storms cannot be called Sublime. Its aspect is horrible and one must have stored one's mind in advance with a rich stock of ideas, if such an institution is to raise it to the pitch of a feeling which is itself sublime—sublime because the mind has been incited to abandon sensibility, and employ itself upon ideas involving higher finality."⁹

The passage just cited gives some key ideas about Kant's conception of the sublime as such. It is important because it contains not only a theoretical account of how the sublime arises, according to Kant, but illustrates it. For, how, if at all, does that object which is ill-adapted to our sensibility, being contra-final, ultimately come to be approved of as that which is sublime? To Kant, the object of sublimity, as in the case of a mountain that is uncomfortably big for the eyes, is intrinsically unmanageable to our sensibility. So, it cannot itself be said to be 'sublime' which stands for an experience that is on the whole deeply satisfying. The object merely 'lends itself' to, or passively allows itself to be transmitted into, an experience of sublimity. According to this, sublimity is 'discoverable in the mind'. The word 'discoverable' here means that, first, the experience of sublimity is a discovery rather than a creation, or that it is not foreign to the mind—or, is 'in the mind'; and secondly, that, though it belongs to the region of the mind, it is not there always manifest, but can be discovered, provided certain prior conditions are met. Kant also emphasizes here that 'the sublime, in the strict sense of the word cannot be contained in any sensuous form.' With regard to

this, Kant himself appears guilty of speaking of sublime objects since the precise meaning of the word is not, and cannot always be specified. Thus, we could also wonder if Kant's viewpoint that the sublime cannot really 'be contained in any sensuous form' actively contributes to Hegel's view that the sublime cannot be contained in those arts—such as painting and sculpture—the form of which is dominantly sensuous. Furthermore, sublimity, we are told, 'concerns' Ideas of Reason. The meaning is not that an Idea of Reason is itself sublime, but that it is somehow related to the sublime. Thus to Kant, the feeling of sublimity appears when the Ideas of Reason are excited but that no actual presentation of these Ideas is possible. Yet, he adds, they can well be 'excited'. What brings about this excitation, according to him, is our inability to find in actuality the perfect totality on which the Ideas exist, - an inability or 'inadequacy' which, in the sense that we directly experience it—'does admit of sensuous presentation.' For example, the ocean's own look (or 'aspect') is horrible. It can appear sublime only when it is attended to by a mind richly stocked with imagination and with 'higher ideas'. In other words, the experience of sublimity is not a direct response immediately compelled by the object. It is rather the occasional and heightened experience of a rich mind. Thus, the experience of sublimity arises when the mind, after realizing the inability of imagination to deal with the surpassing bigness of the object, turns towards—and gets adapted—to another superior faculty, that is, Reason. This is the higher finality—the accord of Judgment with Reason—of which Kant here speaks. So there is this essential interplay between imagination and reason for the experience of the Sublime. According to Kant, this inability on the part of our faculty of judgment to estimate the surpassing magnitude of the object as a complete idea, awakens within us a feeling of a supersensible faculty.

Imagination, the Sublime and the Moral Law

To understand the Kantian relation between the 'moral' and the 'aesthetic' we need to attend to his discussion about the 'categories' in the *Critique of Judgment*. The beautiful and the sublime are alike 'final in reference to the moral feeling'. When we regard an object beautiful, our delight is not primarily determined by its appeal to the senses. On the other hand, when an object appears sublime to us, we respect it even though it is positively offensive to the senses. In brief, the beautiful and the sublime are, in Kant's own words, similar as follows:

"The delight in the Sublime, just like that in the beautiful, must in its quantity be shown to be universally valid, in its quality independent of interest, in its Relation subjective finality, and the latter, in its Modality, necessary."¹⁰

Here, Kant speaks of the judgments of the beautiful and the sublime from the viewpoint of the various categories. The categories of Quantity are: unity, plurality and totality. Of these, it is *totality* that relates to the beautiful and the sublime, since the latter are both judgments that have universal validity. Quality has three categories: reality, limitation and negation. Here, it is the idea of *negation* that is relevant to the beautiful and the sublime, because they are both not dependent on interest. They are essentially disinterested ideas and therefore negate any kind of personal interest or 'motive', such as mentioned earlier, for instance, utilitarian, moral or intellectual interest. As for the categories of relation, the beautiful and the sublime are related to inherent *causality*. This means that the continuance of the delight of beauty or sublimity depends not on any external factor, but on the inner nature of the experience itself. Moreover, subjective finality is in its modality 'necessary', the other categories of modality being possibility and existence.

For Kant, the meaning here clearly seems to be that when we say: 'This is beautiful' we mean that the harmonious and delightful experience that has been ours, ought to and can be had, not that it is bound to be had, by everyone. This brings out the 'shareableness' or 'shareability' of beauty and the sublime. 'Necessity' here is not 'necessitation'. The compulsion here is no imposition from the outside. It is an inner demand of the experience itself. When we turn to Kant's account of the differences between the judgments of the beautiful and the sublime we find 'The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object.' Form, for Kant, stands for what is limited. To him, "In painting, sculpture, and in fact in all formative arts ... the design is the essential thing. Here it is not what gratifies sensation, but merely what pleases by means of its form that is fundamental for taste." On the other hand, the sublime, according to Kant, can even, be found in an object that is devoid of form. Here the work 'even' is significant. It means that an object that seems sublime need not necessarily be formless as well.

Thus, according to Kant, to understand the relation of the 'aesthetic' to the 'moral' we not only need to attend to the categories, as delineated above, but to *the relationship between the dynamically sublime and*

imagination. This, according to Kant, manifests itself when events or objects reveal our impotence in the presence of the power of Nature, and its origin is in a feeling of anxiety and fear which is transformed into a sense of deep and stirring satisfaction in the perception of the superiority of our moral freedom to the blind forces of nature:

"The boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. But, provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness, and we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature."¹¹

Human beings do not remain passive in the presence of the awe-inspiring objects and spectacles of nature. They transcend the province of the Imagination and appreciate the grandeur of nature that is really a grandeur in the human mind—the grandeur born of Reason and the consciousness of moral worth. It is here that Kant glorifies most completely in his aesthetics the 'supersensible destination of men', as the possessors of reason and the practitioners of the Moral Law, as beings whose spiritual home is noumena, the true spiritual reinvigoration, which is (for Kant) the essence of sublimity, arising primarily from the cast of our own mind, that is, our subjective judgment of imagination. The very sense of our helplessness, as physical creature, brings home to us the awareness of our infinite superiority as moral beings, which: "Saves humanity in our own person from humiliation, even though as moral men we have to submit to external violence". Again: "It is the sublimity of our destination that we actually admire".

For Kant, we must remember, the sublime is not sensational or casual as in the conception of Burke, but it is grounded in the awareness in us of our 'noumenal self'. Burke ascribed the beautiful to instinctive, especially the sexual, and the Sublime with the instinct of self-preservation. He holds that the beautiful—whose qualities are smallness, smoothness and delicacy—arouses in us a feeling of tenderness, and that the sublime—whose qualities are vastness, obscurity, awe—stimulate in us a feeling of terror. Kant on the other hand, says that the objects of sublimity must be fearful, but not evoke actual fear; that there must be no consciousness of imminent personal danger, since the awareness of

such danger would incite the instinct of self preservation and would thwart the feeling of the supersensible. Here again the importance of imagination is spelt out as it is not actual fear but *imagined greatness or imagined experience of overwhelming power* that we are talking about. This obviously refers to such objects of Nature as frighten us— and tend to threaten our very existence when we are in fact secure by a display of intense activity and destructive power. Thus,

"Raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height, and discover in us a faculty of resistance of quite different kind, which given is courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of Nature."¹²

It would be a misunderstanding to claim that Kant's sublime consists only in might or magnitude. The concept of sublime to him is on the one hand, an endeavor on the part of imagination and on the other hand a demand of the idea of reason, for which utter might and magnitude only act as essential sources. Therefore, although he explicitly denies the distinction between the mathematical and dynamical sublime, Bradley seems to admit of such a distinction implicitly, by virtue of the very quality of the object he admits as sublime. Surely he would not call the weak trickle of a rivulet or a small and static pool 'sublime'. He chooses to ascribe the term rather to the majestically rushing Clyde fall.

To Burke there must be actual fear but no actual pain. To Kant, the presence of actual fear would render impossible a pure judgment of the sublime, precisely as subservience to appetite would preclude a pure judgment of the beautiful. The feeling of the sublime must flow from the perception of our sensuous insufficiency in the presence of the magnitude and might of nature. The fearfulness of the objects and events and the feeling of pain are indispensable only because they augment the energies of the soul and purify the moral ideas of the mind, and disclose by contrast another kind of self-preservation anchored in the glory of the Reason and the grandeur of the will.

Knox advances another objection to Kant's concept of the sublime. Bearing in mind his approval of A.C. Bradley's notion of sublimity, let us formulate and meet his objections that Bradley rightly discards Kant's distinction between a mathematical and a dynamical sublime, and its corollary that the sublime consists merely in might or magnitude.

Now, regarding the first part of this contention, we may accept that

Bradley does discard Kant's distinction, in so far as he (Bradley) does not use the words 'mathematical', and 'dynamical'. But with regard to the word 'rightly' in the above passage, we cannot categorically accept this charge against Kant. For, if we were to distinguish the sense in which Bradley himself describes the Falls of Clyde as 'sublime' from any other example of our own, also taken from nature – say a vast snow clad mountain range would we not say that the former arouses sublimity by virtue of its might and dynamic nature, whereas the latter does so by virtue of its sheer magnitude? After all, there are clear objective differences between the might waterfall and the vast mountain range. As sources of sublimity, Kant cites instances from nature and Bradley's illustration indeed does little to cancel Kant's distinction, for the falls of Clyde are not only majestic but dynamic in their torrential flow – like the storm – tossed vast ocean which Kant cites as an instance of dynamical sublimity, in opposition to the static mounted range which is merely vast.

Further, viewing the above passage of Knox, we are left unsure as to whether we really understand the sense in which Kant regards the mathematical and dynamical in nature as sources of sublimity. To the best of our knowledge, Kant never says that "the Sublime consists merely in might or magnitude. He takes great pains to show us how the sublime is a subjective concept, which means that sublimity as such can never reside in the magnitude or the might of Nature as such.

To Kant, the mathematical and the dynamical in nature overwhelm us, enlarge our own being and create by overpowering the imagination a sense of infinity which our Idea of Reason alone may attempt to grasp. So, it is a serious misunderstanding to claim that Kant's sublime consists only in might or magnitude. The concept of sublime to him is on the one hand, an endeavour on the part of imagination and on the other hand a demand of the idea of reason, for which outer might and magnitude only act as essential sources. Therefore, although he explicitly denies the distinction between the mathematical and dynamical sublime, Bradley seems to admit of such a distinction implicitly, by virtue of the very quality of the object he admits as sublime. Surely he would not call the weak trickle of a rivulet or a small and static pool 'sublime'. He chooses to ascribe the term rather to the majestically rushing Clyde fall.

Turning to Bradley himself, we find that he seems to equate the idea of greatness with that of the sublime; and to include in the meaning of

greatness the greatness of spirit, along with immensity of the objects of Nature. As far as the greatness of spirit is concerned, it suggests the subjective realization of the infinite, an idea quite compatible with the idea of Kant's. Bradley, however, does not elaborate the quality of such greatness; he just proceeds to speak of the 'quantity of the quality' as the main source of sublimity. To illustrate this 'quantity' of greatness he cites a passage from a prose poem of Tourganieff wherein a sparrow, to save its tiny fledgling, is driven by a passionate love to sacrifice its own life, to the dog belonging to the author, which was about to devour the child-bird. Here, the greatness of spirit lies in the love of the parent bird and such an act of sacrifice is sublime. What, however, seems suspect here is Bradley's own interpretation of the passage in question. True, the sparrow's act is one of 'great' self-sacrifice, but this greatness really means its rare or exceptional and admirable quality, not really any quantity of the quality. Qualities can never really be measured in terms of extent or volume. Another objection by Knox runs thus:

"The crucial question is: Does the experience of the sublime really involve two antithetical stages? How does the first stage pass into the second? Is there not an element of the melodramatic in this conception of the metamorphosis of a strongly negative feeling, tinged with mortification, into a delightfully affirmative feeling, overflowing with ecstasy?"¹³

In the above passage, the word 'really' signifies a question of fact. Does the experience of the sublime actually involve two 'antithetical' stages? Now, Kant is as much concerned with the fact of sublime experience as Knox himself. But he nowhere speaks of the elements here involved as being 'antithetical'. 'Antithetical' means mutually and directly opposed, and exclusive of each other. According to Kant, the positive element of deep and stirring satisfaction which is the end of a sublime experience includes—not excludes—the primary negative element. So the protest of Knox proves nothing against Kant.

In fact, the Wordsworthian passage, which Knox himself quotes with obvious approval, if attended to more fully, brings out well an experiential dimension of the temporality of Kant's notion of the sublime:

For I have learnt

To look on nature, not as in the hour

Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes

*The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue, and I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused...*

Knox, in his critique of Kant, does not cite this passage in this full way, but only as much of it as suits his purpose. But, if we note carefully the full extract given above, it becomes clear that Wordsworth, too, here admits of a temporal order in the elements of sublimity. The negative element comes first. 'To chasten' means 'to purify or to free from faults by punishing'. 'To subdue' is obviously to restrain or moderate. It is only when this negative element has occurred—as suggested by the word 'and'—that the positive awareness of the sublime element asserts itself. What other better way could there have been in exemplifying that imagination is cardinal to the understanding of moral worth? Kant's own words make his negative emphasis clear:

"If then we call the sight of the starry heaven sublime, we must not place at the basis of our judgments concepts of worlds inhabited by rational beings, and regard the bright points, with which we see the space above us filled, as their suns moving in circles purposively fixed with reference to them; but we must regard it, just as we see it, as a distinct, all-embracing vault. ... And in the same way, if we are to call the sight of the ocean sublime, we must not think of it as we (ordinarily) do, endowed as we are with all kind of knowledge (not contained, however, in the immediate intuition). For example, we sometimes think of the ocean as a vast kingdom of aquatic creatures; or as the great source of those vapours that fill the air with clouds for the benefit of the land; or again as an element which, though dividing continents from each other, yet promotes the greatest communication between them: but these furnish merely teleological judgments. To call the ocean sublime we must regard it as poets do, merely by what strikes the eye; if it is at rest, as a clear mirror of water only bounded by the heaven; if it is restless, as an abyss threatening to overwhelm everything?"¹⁴

Here, while disagreeing with Kant that to call a thing sublime we have to follow the poet in attending only to the visual look of the object,

without reading in it any deeper purpose on unity we might remember his emphasis on the inner experience of contemplation. For, likewise the poet's way may at all be just to admire the 'look' of things. Turning again to the Wordsworthian passage cited earlier, does not the poet's experience of sublimity here come as the result of turning away from the merely sensuous appearance of the scene, and as the sensing of 'something—far more deeply interfused'?

Noteworthy also is Beardsley's objection to the extreme subjectively of Kant's account of the sublime:

"But there is a problem here that Kant leaves in a not wholly satisfactory state. He insists in several places that, properly speaking, sublimity is not predicated of objects of nature, but only of subjective states, in the judgment, "This is sublime", then, what does "this" refer to? If it refers to the speaker's own feelings, the judgment has no general claim to validity at all. If it refers to the Ideas of Reason, so that the judgment means either "Infinity is sublime" or "Man's moral nature is sublime" (or perhaps "Reason is sublime), then it can claim universal validity, but all judgments of sublimity mean the same. The man who says the waterfall is sublime, and the man who says the raging sea is sublime, are both talking about the same thing, namely man's moral nature or Reason. If judgments about the sublime are to be interesting as well as universally valid, they must make some external reference."¹⁵

To the question: what does the 'this' in 'this is sublime' refer to? Kant's answer could well be: the object. Obviously, it is some object that is (commonly) said to be sublime. But, Kant would hasten to add that in the judgment: 'This is sublime' the key word is 'is' and that when we attend to it, we find that 'is' means 'appears' or 'comes to appear'. The moment we see this, the question arises: How does the thing come to appear sublime? – a question that Kant does take pain to answer in his account of the mathematically sublime and the dynamically sublime, in the experience and understanding of both.

Moreover, it is not fair to suggest that Kant makes no reference to external objects in his account of sublimity. For according to him, the subjective movement which gives rise to sublime feeling is *initiated* by a vast ocean or mountain. Also, his account of the two kinds of sublimity is based on objective differences. Kant would add, however, that strictly speaking, objects only provide suitable occasions for the original happening itself. A difficulty, however, remains. Can we at all speak of

a sublime feeling—or in fact of any feeling—without referring to some object? Perhaps we can, if we speak only of the *quality* of feeling. The content of feeling is not independent of 'object'; but the quality of feeling may well be considered without referring to its object. For instance, is not the feeling of deep satisfaction after helping someone, or the delight felt in a reunion thinkable as being of a distinctive quality, quite independent of the particularity of the person who is helped or met? Furthermore, if the idea of 'value' itself as a category is informed by the faculty of 'imagination', then it seems reasonable to argue that both aesthetic value and moral worth are also informed by imagination. In Kant this idea is heightened by the concept of the sublime.

Kant viewed the sublime as a subjective judgment of the mind resulting from an encounter with the grand in Nature. After Kant, Hegel once again affirms the view that the sublime is to be found in the literary arts, especially the key idea of the sublime, that is, utter humility of the self as felt in extolling God as the Absolute. The Absolute as such cannot be embodied in form: but the Psalms, through a stark comparison, suggest its great power and infinity. And, finally, there is A.C. Bradley who regards the sublime comprehensively; and applies it not only to objects of nature and poetry, but to happenings which are characterized by a remarkable expression of moral value. However, with regard to the nature of the sublime, it is indeed a comprehensive concept applicable to objects of Nature, the good life, and the literary arts, and also to painting, sculpture, music and other arts. In extending the sublime to painting, however, we must consider and meet a protest of Hegel; His view may be summed up as follows: Of all the arts, poetry alone can be sublime; and that poetry presents sublimity at its best which emphasizes the Absolute authority of God, on the one hand; and the utter nothingness of the entire created world— including Man on the other. Although Hegel does not ignore the subjective aspects of the sublime—their expression of Man's spiritual exultation being, in his view, one main mark of the genuine sublimity of the Psalms—he disagrees with Kant's thesis that the source of sublimity is wholly subjective—that nature which is peculiar to ourselves as men'. In Hegel's view, the fundamental source of the concept in question is 'the absolute substance'.

But then if the concept of the sublime is applied so extensively, that is, to nature, arts and the good life—will that not become too indeterminate? Yes, it would. But then do we not today use quite a few

other concepts, quite legitimately which are equally if not more indeterminate? Consider 'good', for instance. We can distinguish at least three broad senses in which it has been interpreted: the Good as metaphysical, the Good as ethical, and finally, the Good as the useful. Now, if such an indeterminate concept is still freely discussed, how are we justified in ignoring the sublime altogether? Also, objects of aesthetic regard as well as the experience of the aesthetic, in their distinction from utility and other material phenomena, are exemplary as analogies as well as in their actual manner of expressing and communicating moral worth. Moreover, since moral and aesthetic judgments as well as experiences, are both based on 'value' they can best be understood through imagination and the *processes of imaginings* that underpin all that is 'normative'.¹⁶

Notes and References

¹Chatterjee Margaret.: *Towards a Phenomenology of Time Consciousness in Music*, Diogene. 74, p. 55.

²Warnock, Mary: *Imagination and Time*, Blackwell, Oxford, U.K., 1994, p.14.

³Eagleton, Terry: *The Ideology of the Aesthetics*. Oxford. Basil Blackwell. 1990

⁴Immanuel Kant: *Critique of Judgement*. (trans. Pluhar, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1987.) See Stephen F. Barker, 'Beauty and Induction in Kant's Third Critique' (ed.) Meerbote, p.191

⁵Kant: *Critique of Judgement*. (trans. Meredith, Oxford, Clarendon, 1952,) p.191

⁶Kant: *Critique of Judgement*, (trans: .Meredith, Oxford, Clarendon, 1952)

⁷I. Knox: *The Aesthetic theories of Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer*, Thames and Hudson, 1958, p. 66

⁸Kant: *Critique of Judgement* (trans, Meredith, Oxford, Clarendon, (1952), p. 92

⁹See Beardsley, *Aesthetics-from Classical Greece to the Present*, Macmillan Co, New York, 1966, 77

¹⁰Kant: *Critique of Judgement* (trans, Meredith, Oxford, Clarendon, (1952), p 92

¹¹*ibid*, 110-1

¹²*ibid.*

¹³Knox: above, op.cit. pp. 67-68

¹⁴See Kant, op.cit. pp.121-22

¹⁵See Beardsley: *Aesthetics from Classical to the Present*, op.cit. pp. 220-21.

¹⁶See *Kant's Aesthetics*, (ed) Meerbote, Aascadero, California, 1991