

TRANSLATION

Of the Sublime

Towards the Further Realization Of Some Kantian Ideas

(1793)

Friedrich Schiller

THIS ESSAY APPEARED in the third volume of Schiller's periodical "Neue Thalia" in 1793. It was Schiller's first treatment of the concept of the sublime. In it, Schiller developed his own idea of the sublime through a critical treatment of the concept as expressed by Immanuel Kant in his "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment." Schiller wrote a second essay, entitled "On the Sublime," that was first published in 1801; a translation of that essay appears in the Institute's "Friedrich Schiller, Poet of Freedom," Vol. III.

We call an object *sublime*, with whose conception our nature feels its limits, but our cognitive nature its superiority, its freedom from limits; in the face of which we are therefore *physically* reduced, but over which we *morally* elevate ourselves, that is, through ideas.

Only as sensuous beings are we dependent; as cognitive beings we are free.

The sublime object *first* allows us to feel our dependency as natural beings, while it *secondly* makes us conscious of our independence, which we as cognitive beings maintain over nature, not only in us, but also *outside* us.

We are dependent, insofar as something outside us contains the grounds for something in us becoming possible.

As long as the nature outside of us is in conformity with the conditions under which something becomes possible in us, to that extent we cannot feel our dependency. Should we become conscious of our dependency, then nature must be conceived as at variance with that, which is a need for us and yet is only possible through nature's cooperation, or, which is to say just as much, nature must find itself in opposition to our drives.

Now, let all the drives which are effective in us as sensuous beings, be led back to two fundamental drives. First, we possess a drive, to alter our condition, to express our existence, to be effective, which all amounts to

obtaining conceptions for ourselves; thus, it can be called the conceptual drive, the cognitive drive. Secondly, we possess a drive, to preserve our condition, to continue our existence, which is called the drive of self-preservation.

The conceptual drive relates to cognition, the self-preservation drive to feelings, thus to the inner perceptions of existence.

We stand, therefore, in a two-fold *dependency* upon nature through these two drives. The first becomes perceptible to us, when nature is lacking the conditions under which we attain cognitions; the second becomes perceptible to us, when nature contradicts the conditions under which it is possible for us to continue our existence. In the same way, we assert a twofold independence from nature through our reason: first, in that we (in the theoretical) go beyond the conditions of nature and we are able to think more than we realize; second, in that we (in the practical) disregard the conditions of nature and can contradict our desires through our will. An object, with whose perception we experience the first, is theoretically great, a sublime of cognition. An object, which allows us to feel the independence of our will, is practically great, a sublime of disposition.

With the theoretical-sublime nature stands as an *object of cognition* in opposition to the conceptual drive. With the practical-sublime, it stands as an *object of feeling* in

opposition to the preservation drive. There it was considered merely as an object, which should extend our cognition; here it is conceived as a power, which can determine our own condition. For this reason Kant called the practical-sublime, the sublime of power or the dynamic-sublime, contrary to the mathematical-sublime. But, because nothing can become clear from the concepts dynamic and mathematical, whether or not the sphere of the sublime is exhausted by this division, I have therefore preferred the division into the *theoretical-* and *practical-sublime*.

In what way we are dependent in cognitions on the conditions of nature and we become aware of this dependency, will be sufficiently elaborated with the development of the theoretical-sublime. That our existence as sensuous beings is made dependent on conditions of nature outside of us, will indeed scarcely require its own proof. As soon as nature outside of us changes the determinate relationship to us, upon which our physical well-being is grounded, then also our existence in the sensuous world, which rests on this physical well-being, is immediately challenged and placed in danger. Nature therefore has the conditions in its power, under which we exist; and thereby we should take care of this natural relation so indispensable to our existence, our physical life has been given a vigilant guardian by way of the self-preservation drive, but this drive has been given a warner by way of pain. As soon therefore as our physical condition suffers an alteration, which threatens to determine our condition to the contrary, then pain draws attention to the danger, and the drive of self-preservation is called upon by pain to resistance.

If the danger is of the kind that our resistance would be in vain, then fear must arise. An object, therefore, whose existence conflicts with the conditions of our existence, is, if we do not feel ourselves equal to it in power, an object of fear: fearful.

But, it is fearful for us only as sensuous beings, for only as such are we dependent upon nature. That inside us, which is not nature, which is not subject to the law of nature, has nothing to fear from the nature outside us, considered as power. Nature, conceived as a power, which can indeed determine our physical condition, but has no power over our will, is dynamically or practically sublime.

The practical-sublime distinguishes itself therefore from the theoretical-sublime in that, it clashes with the



Friedrich Schiller

conditions of our existence, the latter only with the conditions of our cognition. An object is theoretically sublime, insofar as it bears within itself the conception of infinity, to which representation the imaginative power does not feel itself equal. An object is practically sublime, insofar as it bears within itself the conception of a danger, which our physical power does not feel itself capable of conquering. We are overcome by the attempt to make for ourselves a conception of the first. We are overcome by the attempt to oppose the violence of the second. An example of the first is the ocean at peace; the ocean in a storm is an example of the second.

An immensely high tower or mountain can provide a sublime of cognition. If it bends down to us, then it is transformed into a sublime of feeling. However, both again have in common with one another, that through their contradiction with the conditions of our existence and activity they reveal that power in us, which feels itself bound to none of these conditions—a power therefore, which, on the one hand, can conceive more than the senses grasp, and, on the other hand, fears nothing in regard to its independence and suffers no violence in its manifestations, even if its sensuous companion should succumb to the fearful power of nature.

But, even if both kinds of the sublime have an identical relation to our cognitive power, they nonetheless stand in a completely different relation to our sensuousness, which establishes an important difference between them, both of strength and of interest.

The theoretical-sublime contradicts the conceptual drive, the practical-sublime contradicts the preservation drive. With the first, only a single expression of the sensuous conceptual power is challenged, but with the second, the ultimate basis of all possible expressions of the same, namely its existence, is called into question.

Now, indeed, every unsuccessful striving for cognition is connected to aversion, because an active drive is contradicted thereby. But this aversion cannot rise to the level of pain, as long as we know our existence independently of the success or lack of success of such a cognition, and our self-respect does not suffer thereby.

An object, however, which clashes with the conditions of our existence, which would arouse pain in the immediate feeling, arouses terror in the conception; for nature had to make completely other arrangements for the preservation of the power itself, than she found necessary

for the maintenance of the activity. Our sensuousness is therefore interested in the fearful object completely otherwise than with the infinite; for the drive of self-preservation raises a much louder voice than the conceptual drive. It is entirely something different, if we have to fear for the possession of a single conception, or if we have to fear for the basis of all possible conceptions, our existence in the sensuous world; if we have to fear for existence itself, or for a single expression of the same.

But just for this reason, because the fearful object assails our sensuous nature more powerfully than the infinite, the gap between the sensuous and the supersensuous capability is also felt all the more vividly, the superiority of reason and the inner freedom of the state of mind is felt all the more prominently. Now, since the whole essence of the sublime rests on the consciousness of this our cognitive freedom, and all pleasure in the sublime is based only in this consciousness, it follows automatically (which experience also teaches), that the fearful must make an impression on the aesthetical conception more vividly and more pleasantly than the infinite, and that therefore the practical-sublime, according to the strength of the feeling, has a very great advantage over the theoretical.

The theoretical actually only expands our sphere; the practical-greatness, the dynamic-sublime expands our power.—We actually only experience our true and perfect independence from nature through the latter; for it is something entirely different, to feel oneself independent of natural conditions in the mere act of conception and in one's whole inner existence, than to feel that one has overriden fate, all contingencies, the entire necessity of nature, and to feel sublime. Nothing lies closer to man as a sensuous being than the concern for his existence, and no dependency is more pressing to him than this, to consider nature as that power, which has to rule over his existence. And one feels oneself free from this dependency with contemplation of the practical-sublime. “The irresistible power of nature,” Kant says, “allows us, considered as sensuous beings, to recognize our powerlessness indeed, but at the same time reveals in us a capability, to judge ourselves as independent of nature, and a superiority over nature, upon which a self-preservation of a completely different kind is grounded, than is that, which can be challenged by the nature outside us and can be brought into danger—thereby mankind remains undegraded in our person, although man must succumb to that power. In such a manner,” he continues, “the fearful power of nature is judged aesthetically by us as sublime, because it calls up in us our power, which is not nature, in order to look at all that, for which we as sensuous beings are concerned—goods, health, and life—as small, and for that reason also to consider that power of nature—to which in considering these goods we

are certainly subjugated—nevertheless as no power for us and our personality, under which we would have to bow, if it were a matter of our highest principles and their affirmation or abandonment. Therefore,” he concludes, “nature is here named sublime, because it elevates the imaginative power to the representation of those cases, in which the state of mind itself can make the characteristic sublimity of its determination perceptible.”

This sublimity of our cognitive determination—this our practical independence from nature, must indeed be distinguished from that superiority, which we know how to assert over nature as a power in individual cases either through our corporeal powers or through our rationality, and which indeed also has something great, but nothing at all sublime in itself. A man, for example, who fights with a wild animal and overcomes it through the strength of his arms, or also through cunning; a torrent like the Nile, whose power is broken by means of dams, and which the human understanding transforms from a destructive object even into a useful one, in that it collects its overflow into canals and irrigates arid fields with it; a ship on the ocean, which through man-made equipment is able to defy all the turbulence of the wild elements; briefly, all those cases, where man through his inventive understanding has compelled nature to obey him and to serve his purposes, even where nature is superior to him as power and is armed for his destruction—all these cases, I say, awaken no feeling of the sublime, although they have something analogous to it, and for this reason also are pleasing in the aesthetical judgment. But why are they not sublime, since they nevertheless make known the superiority of man over nature?

Here we have to go back to the idea of the sublime, wherein the cause will be easily revealed. In consequence of this idea, only that object is sublime, in the face of which we as natural beings are overpowered, but from which we as cognitive beings, as beings not belonging to nature, feel absolutely independent. Therefore, all natural means, which man applies, in order to resist the power of nature, are excluded through this idea of the sublime; for this idea demands absolutely, that we should not be equal to the object as natural beings, but that we should feel ourselves as independent from it through that, which is not nature in us (and this is nothing other than pure reason). Now, however, all those cited means, through which man becomes superior to nature (skill, cunning, and physical strength), are taken from nature, befit him therefore as a natural being; he resists therefore these objects not as an intelligent being, but rather as a sensuous being, not morally through his inner freedom, but rather physically through the application of natural powers. He is also for this reason not overcome by these

objects, but rather he is already superior to them as a sensuous being. However, where he suffices with his physical powers, there is nothing there, which could compel him to resort to his intelligent self, to the inner self-reliance of his cognitive power.

For the feeling of the sublime it is therefore absolutely required, that we see ourselves completely deserted by every physical means of resistance, and seek help on the contrary in our not-physical Self. Fearful must such an object therefore be for our sensuousness, and it is no longer fearful, as soon as we feel ourselves equal to it through natural powers.

This is also confirmed by experience. The most powerful natural power is to just that degree less sublime, as it appears subdued by man, and it rapidly becomes sublime again, as soon as it brings disgrace upon the art of man. A horse, which yet runs around in the woods free and unsubdued, is fearful to us as a natural power superior to us, and can serve as an object for a sublime description. Just this horse, tamed, harnessed to the yoke or to the wagon, loses its fearfulness, and with it also everything sublime. But, if this subdued horse breaks from its bridle, if it rears full of indignity under its rider, if it gains its freedom once again by force, then its fearfulness is there once again and it becomes sublime afresh.

The physical superiority of man over the powers of nature is therefore so little the basis of the sublime, that almost everywhere it is encountered, it weakens or completely destroys the sublimity of the object. Indeed, we can dwell with evident pleasure on the contemplation of human skill, which has been known to overcome the wildest powers of nature, but the source of this pleasure is logical and not aesthetical; it is an effect of reflection and is not imparted through the immediate conception.

Nature is therefore nowhere practically sublime, except where it is fearful. But now the question arises: Is the opposite also the case? Is nature everywhere where it is fearful, also practically sublime?

Here we have to go back once again to the idea of the sublime. Thus it is an essential requirement thereto, that we feel ourselves as sensuous beings dependent upon the object; thus, on the other side, it essentially requires that we feel ourselves as cognitive beings independent of the same. Where the first does not exist, where the object has nothing at all fearful for our sensuousness, there no sublimity is possible. Where the second is missing, where the object is merely fearful, where we do not feel ourselves superior to it as cognitive beings, there sublimity is just as little possible.

Inner mental freedom is absolutely required in order to find the fearful sublime and to have pleasure in it; for it can indeed only be sublime, in that it allows us to feel

our independence, our mental freedom. But now the real and earnest fear removes all mental freedom.

The sublime object must therefore be indeed fearful, but it may not arouse actual fear. Fear is a condition of suffering and of violence; the sublime can alone please in the free contemplation and through the feeling of inner activity. Either, therefore, the fearful object may not direct its power at us at all, or if this occurs, then our mind must remain free, while our sensuousness is overwhelmed. This latter case is, however, most rare, and requires an elevation of human nature, which can hardly be thought possible in a subject. For where we find ourselves actually in danger, where we ourselves are the object of a hostile natural power, there the aesthetical judgment is done for. As sublime as an ocean storm, seen from the shore, may be, so little may those who find themselves on the ship which is smashed to pieces by the same, be disposed to pass this aesthetical judgment over it.

We are therefore only dealing with the first case, where the fearful object lets us indeed see its power, but does not direct it at us, where we know we are secure before the same. We place ourselves then merely in the imagination, in the case where this power could strike us and all resistance would be in vain. The terrible is therefore merely in the conception; but also already the mere conception of danger, if it is to some extent lively, brings the preservation drive into motion, and something takes place analogous to what the actual feeling would produce. A shudder seizes us, a feeling of anxiety moves us, our sensuousness is aroused. And without this commencement of actual suffering, without this serious attack on our existence, we would merely play with the object; and it must be serious, at least in the feeling, if reason should have recourse to the idea of its freedom. Also, the consciousness of our inner freedom can only have value and count for something, insofar as it is serious about it; it can not, however, be serious about it, if we merely play with the conception of the danger.

I have said, that we must consider ourselves secure, if the fearful is to please us. But, now, there are mishaps and perils, in the face of which man can never know himself to be secure and which can nevertheless be sublime in the conception, and also really are sublime. The idea of security can therefore not be limited to the fact that one knows that he has physically escaped danger, as, for example, when one looks down from a high and well-secured railing into a great abyss, or from a high ground onto the storming sea. Here, of course, the fearlessness bases itself upon the conviction of the impossibility, that one can be struck. However, upon what would one want to base his security before fate, before the omnipresent power of the Divinity, before painful illnesses, before

heavy losses, before death? Here no physical basis for calm exists at all; even if at the same time we say to ourselves, that we are anything but removed from the same.

There is therefore a twofold basis of security. Before such evils, from which to escape stands in our physical capacity, we can have external physical security; before such evils, however, which in a natural way we are able neither to resist nor elude, we can merely have inner or moral security. This difference is important, especially in relationship to the sublime.

Physical security is an immediate cause of calm for our sensuousness, without any relationship to our inner or moral condition. Thence, also, nothing at all is required, to contemplate an object without fear, before which one finds oneself in this physical security. Thence one also observes among men a far greater unanimity of judgment about the sublime of such objects, whose view is connected to this physical security, than of those, before which one has only moral security. The cause is apparent. Physical security is to the benefit of every one in the same way; moral security on the contrary assumes a mental state, which is not found in all subjects. But because this physical security is valid merely for sensuousness, it has nothing in itself, which could please reason, and its influence is merely negative, in that it merely prevents the self-preservation drive from being startled and one's mental freedom from being cancelled.

It is entirely different with the inner or *moral security*. This is indeed also a cause of calm for sensuousness (otherwise it were itself sublime), but it is so only indirectly through ideas of reason. We look at the fearful without fear, because we feel ourselves removed from the power of the same over us, as natural beings, either through the consciousness of our innocence, or through ideas of the indestructibility of our being. This moral security postulates therefore, as we see, religious ideas; for only religion, but not morality, puts forward the grounds of calm for our sensuousness. Morality follows the direction of reason inexorably and without any regard for the interest of our sensuousness; it is religion, however, which seeks to establish a reconciliation, an agreement between the demands of reason and the desires of sensuousness. Therefore, it does not at all suffice for moral security, that we possess a moral disposition, but rather it is still required, that we think of nature in agreement with the moral law, or what

is here the same, that we think of nature under the influence of a pure cognitive Being. Death, for example, is such an object, before which we have only moral security. The vivid conception of all the horrors of death, combined with the certainty of not being able to escape it, would make it completely impossible for most men, because most are surely far more sensuous beings than cognitive beings, to combine as much calm with this conception, as is required for an aesthetical judgment—if the cognitive belief in immortality, even for sensuousness itself, did not provide a tolerable departure.

But one must not understand this as though the conception of death, if it is combined with sublimity, obtained this sublimity through the idea of immortality.—Nothing is less true!—The idea of immortality, as I understand it here, is a cause of calm for our drive towards continuance, hence for our sensuousness, and I must observe once and for all, that with respect to everything which should make a sublime impression, sensuousness with its requirements has been absolutely set aside, and every cause of calm has to be sought only in reason. That idea of immortality therefore, in connection with which sensuousness is still to a certain extent taken into account (as it is laid down in all positive religions), can contribute nothing at all to making the conception of death into a sublime object. On the contrary, this idea must as it were only stand in the background, in order merely to come to the aid of sensuousness, if this felt itself exposed hopelessly and defenselessly to all the horrors of destruction and was in danger of succumbing to this violent attack. But if this idea of immortality becomes pre-



Leonardo da Vinci, "An old man seated in profile; four studies of swirling waters."

dominant in the mind, then death loses its fearfulness, and the sublime vanishes.

Divinity, conceived in its omniscience, which shines through all the twists of the human heart, in its holiness, which suffers no impure emotion, and in its power, which has our physical fate in its control, is a fearful conception, and for this reason can turn into a sublime conception. Before the effects of this power we can have no physical security, because it is equally impossible to avoid the same and offer resistance. Therefore, only moral security is left to us, which we base upon the justice of this Being and upon our innocence. We view the frightened appearances, through which its power is revealed, without fear, because the consciousness of our innocence places us securely before it. This moral security makes it possible for us, not to entirely lose our mental freedom with the conception of this boundless, irresistible and omnipresent power; for, where this is gone, the mind is disposed to no aesthetical judgment. But it cannot be the cause of the sublime, because this feeling of security, although it rests on moral grounds, nevertheless ultimately only supplies a cause of calm for sensuousness and satisfies the drive of self-preservation, but the sublime is never grounded on the satisfaction of our drives. If the conception of Divinity should become practically (dynamically) sublime, then we may refer the feeling of our security not to our existence, but rather to our principles. It must be a matter of indifference to us, how we as natural beings fare with it, if we, only as intellects, feel ourselves independent of the effects of its power. But we feel ourselves independent even of the Omnipotent as cognitive beings, insofar as even the Omnipotent does not cancel our autonomy, cannot determine our wills contrary to our principles. Therefore, only insofar as we deprive the Divinity of all natural influence upon the determinations of our wills, is the conception of its power dynamically sublime.

To feel independent of the Divinity in His determinations of the will, is nothing other than to be conscious that the Divinity can never act as a power on our wills. But because the pure will must always coincide with the Will of the Divinity, the case can never arise, that we determine ourselves from pure reason against the Will of the Divinity. We therefore deprive it of influence on our wills, merely insofar as we are conscious that it could flow into the determinations of our wills through nothing other than through its unanimity with the pure laws of reason in us; therefore, not through authority, not through reward or punishment, not through regard to its power. Our reason reveres nothing in the Divinity except its holiness, and also fears nothing from it except its disapproval—and even this only insofar as it recognizes its

own law in the Divine Reason. But, it is not up to the Divine Caprice to disapprove or to approve of our disposition; but rather, that is determined through our conduct. In the single case, therefore, where the Divinity could become fearful for us, namely in its disapproval, we are not dependent upon the Divinity. The Divinity, therefore, conceived as a power, which can indeed cancel our existence, but as long as we still have this existence, can have no influence on the actions of our reason, is dynamically sublime—and also, only that religion, which gives us this conception of the Divinity, bears the seal of sublimity in itself.

The object of the practical-sublime must be fearful for sensuousness; an evil must threaten our physical condition, and the conception of danger must set the self-preservation drive into motion.

Our *intelligible self*, that in us which is not nature, must distinguish itself with each impulse of the preservation drive from the sensuous part of our being, and must become conscious of its self-reliance, its independence from everything which can befall our physical nature; briefly stated, it must become conscious of its freedom.

This freedom is, however, absolutely only moral, not physical. We may feel ourselves superior to the fearful object not through our natural powers, not through our understanding, not as sensuous beings; for then our security would always be determined alone through physical causes, therefore empirically, and therefore would always still remain a dependency upon nature. Rather, it must be completely indifferent to us, how we fare with it as sensuous beings, and our freedom must consist merely in the fact that we in no way consider our physical condition, which can be determined through nature, as our self, but rather look upon it as something foreign and strange, which has no influence upon our moral person.

Great is he who overcomes the fearful. Sublime is he who does not fear it, even when he himself is overcome.

Hannibal was theoretically great, since he created a passage for himself to Italy over the impassable Alps; he was only practically great, or sublime, in misfortune.

Hercules was great, since he undertook and completed his Twelve Labors.

Prometheus was sublime, since, put in chains in the Caucasus, he did not regret his deed and did not confess that he was wrong.

One can show oneself to be great in good fortune, sublime only in misfortune.

Therefore, every object is practically sublime, which indeed allows us to observe our impotence as natural beings, but at the same time reveals a capacity for resistance

in us of a completely different kind, which does not indeed remove the danger from our physical existence, but (which is infinitely more) separates our physical existence itself from our personality. It is therefore not a security which is material and merely pertaining to a single case, but rather a security which is ideal and extending to all possible cases, of which we become conscious with the conception of the sublime. This grounds itself therefore in no way upon the overcoming or the removal of danger threatening us, but rather upon the clearing away of the final condition under which there can alone be danger for us, while it teaches us to regard the sensuous part of our being, which alone submits to the danger, as a foreign thing of nature, which does not concern our true person, our moral self at all.

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After establishing the idea of the practical-sublime, we are able to classify it according to the diversity of objects through which it is produced, and according to the diversity of relations in which we stand to these objects.

In the conception of the sublime, we make three distinctions. First: an object of nature as power. Second: a relation of this power to our physical capacity for resistance. Third: a relation of the same to our moral person. The sublime is therefore the action of three successive conceptions: (1) of an objective physical power, (2) of our subjective physical impotence, (3) of our subjective moral superior strength. But even though with every conception of the sublime these three components must essentially and necessarily be combined, it is nevertheless contingent, how we attain the conception of the same, and upon this is now founded a twofold principal difference of the sublime of power.

1.

Either an object as power, the objective cause of suffering, but not the suffering itself, is merely given in contemplation, and it is the judging subject, which produces the conception of the suffering in itself and transforms the given object into an object of fear through connection to the preservation drive and into a sublime object through connection to a moral person.

2.

Or, aside from the object as power, its fearfulness for man, the suffering itself is at the same time objectively conceived, and nothing remains to the judging subject, except to make the application of it to his moral condition and produce the sublime from the fearful.

An object of the first class is contemplatively sublime, an object of the second, practically sublime.

I.

The Contemplative-Sublime of Power

Objects are merely contemplatively sublime, which show us nothing further than a power of nature, which is far superior to ours, but otherwise leave it to us ourselves, whether we want to make an application of it to our physical condition, or to our moral person. I name it thus, because it does not seize the mind so powerfully, that it could not persist in a condition of calm contemplation. With the contemplative-sublime most arrive at the self-activity of the mind, because a condition is given only from the outside, but the two others must be fulfilled by the subject itself. On this basis the contemplative-sublime is neither of so intensively strong nor of so extensive an action as the pathetic-sublime. Not of so extensive an action: because all men do not have enough imaginative power, in order to produce a vivid conception of the danger in themselves; not all have enough self-reliant moral power, in order not to prefer to avoid such a conception. Not of so strong an action: because the conception of danger, even if it is still so vividly awakened, in this case is nevertheless always voluntary, and the mind easily remains master of a conception which it generated spontaneously. The contemplative-sublime therefore provides a smaller, but also less mixed pleasure.

Nature gives up nothing to the contemplative-sublime except an object as power, out of which to make something fearful for mankind is left to the imaginative power. Accordingly as the part is large or small, which fantasy has in the production of this fearful object, accordingly as it conducts its business openly or covertly, the sublime must also turn out differently.

An abyss, which opens up to our feet, a thunderstorm, a burning volcano, a mass of rocks, which is suspended over us, as if it were about to tumble down just this moment, a storm on the ocean, a bitter winter in the Arctic circle, a summer in the torrid zone, rapacious or poisonous animals, a flood and the like, are such powers of nature, against which our capacity for resisting is to be considered nil, and which contradict our physical existence. Even certain ideal objects, such as, for example, time, regarded as a power, which acts silently, but inexorably; necessity, whose stringent laws no natural being can evade; even the moral idea of duty, which not seldomly acts against our physical existence as a hostile power, are fearful objects, as soon as the imaginative power refers them to the preservation drive; and they become sublime, as soon as reason applies them to its highest laws. But because in all these cases fantasy first adds the fearful, and it is completely up to us, to suppress an idea, which is our own work, these objects belong in

the class of the contemplative-sublime.

But, the conception of danger nevertheless has a real basis here, and it merely requires the simple operation, to combine the existence of these things with our physical existence in a conception, and thus is the fearful present. Fantasy needs to insert nothing from its own means, but rather it holds itself only to that, which is given it.

But not rarely are objects of nature, indifferent in themselves, transformed subjectively through the intervention of fantasy into fearful powers, and it is fantasy itself which reveals the fearful not merely through comparison, but rather creates it on its own authority without having an adequate objective ground for it. This is the case with the extraordinary, and with the indeterminate.

To man in the condition of childhood, where the imaginative power works most freely, everything is frightful, which is unusual. In every unexpected phenomenon of nature, he believes he sees an enemy which is armed against his existence, and the preservation drive is immediately busy countering the attack. The preservation drive is in this period his unconditional master, and because this drive is anxious and cowardly, the rule of the same is a realm of terror and of fear. The superstition which arises in this epoch is therefore black and frightful, and even the morals bear this hostilely dark character. One finds man sooner armed than clothed, and his first grasp is for the sword, if he encounters a stranger. The custom of the ancient inhabitants of Tauris, to sacrifice to Diana every recent arrival whom misfortune led to their coast, had scarcely another source than fear, for only the

badly educated, not the uneducated man, is so wild that he would rage against that which cannot harm him.

This fear before everything that is extraordinary is indeed now lost in the state of culture; but not so completely that a trace of it should not remain in the aesthetical contemplation of nature, where man voluntarily surrenders himself to the play of fantasy. The poets know this quite well and therefore do not neglect to employ the extraordinary at least as an ingredient of the fearful. A profound stillness, a great emptiness, a sudden illumination of the darkness, are in themselves very indifferent things, which distinguish themselves by nothing other than the extraordinary and the unusual. Nevertheless, they arouse a feeling of terror or at least strengthen the impression of the same and are therefore of use for the sublime.

If Virgil wants to fill us with horror about the infernal realm, he makes us especially attentive to the emptiness and stillness of the same. He calls it *loca nocte late tacentia*, vast silent fields of the night, *domos vacuas Ditis et inania regna*, empty dwellings and hollow kingdoms of Pluto.

In the initiations into the mysteries of the ancients, a fearful solemn impression was especially seen to, and for that purpose they especially also made use of silence. A profound silence gives the imaginative power a free sphere of play, and excites the expectation of something fearful, which shall come. In the saying of prayers, the silence of a fully assembled community is a very effective means to give fantasy an impetus and to place the mind in a solemn disposition. Even popular superstition makes use of it in its reveries; for, as is well known, a profound silence must be

observed if one has to unearth a treasure. In the enchanted palaces that are found in fairy tales, a dead silence rules, which awakens dread, and it belongs to the natural history of the enchanted forests, that nothing living stirs therein. Also solitude is something fearful, as soon as it is prolonged and involuntary, as, for example, exile to an uninhabited island. A vastly extended desert, a lonely, many-mile-long forest, wandering around on the boundless sea, are clear conceptions, which arouse dread, and are employed in poetry for the sublime. But here (with solitude) there is nevertheless already an objective basis of fear, because the idea of a great solitude also bears within itself the idea of helplessness.

Fantasy shows itself still far more active making an object of terror out of the mysterious, the indeterminate, the impenetrable. Here it is actually in its



Leonardo da Vinci, "Hurricane over horsemen and trees."

element, for since reality places no limit on it, and its operations are limited to no particular case, the vast realm of possibilities stands open to it. But that it inclines directly to the frightful, and fears more than it hopes from the unknown, lies in the nature of the preservation drive, which guides it. Abhorrence works incomparably faster and more powerfully than desire, and for this reason it is the case, that we suspect something bad behind the unknown more than we expect something good.

Darkness is frightful, and just for this reason suitable for the sublime. But, it is not in itself frightful, but rather because it conceals the objects from us and therefore hands over to us the full sway of the imaginative power. As soon as the danger is clear, a great part of the fear disappears. The organ of sight, the first guardian of our existence, fails to work for us in the darkness, and we feel ourselves defenselessly exposed to the hidden danger. For this reason superstition places all ghostly phenomena in the midnight hour, and the realm of the dead is conceived as a realm of eternal night. In the poetic works of Homer, where mankind still speaks its most natural language, darkness is represented as one of the greatest evils.

There lies the land and the city of the Cimmerian people.
 These grope about constantly in night and fog, and never
 does
 The god of the shining sun look radiantly upon them,
 But rather frightful night envelops these wretched men.
Odyssey, Book XI

“Jupiter,” the brave Ajax calls out in the dark of the battle,
 “free the Greeks from the darkness. Let it become day, let
 these eyes see, and then, if you will, let me fall in the light.”
Iliad

The *indeterminate* is also an ingredient of the frightful, and on no other basis than because it gives freedom to the imaginative power, to paint the image according to its own discretion. The determinate, on the contrary, leads to distinct cognition, and removes the object from the arbitrary play of fantasy, while it subjects it to the understanding.

Homer’s representation of the underworld becomes all the more fearful just because it swims, as it were, in a mist, and the ghostly forms in Ossian are nothing except the vaporous cloud formations, to which fantasy arbitrarily gives the contour.

Everything which is veiled, everything mysterious, contributes to the frightful, and is for this reason capable of the sublime. Of this kind is the inscription which one read at Sais in Egypt over the temple of Isis: “I am everything which is, which has been, and which will be. No mortal man has lifted my veil.” Just this uncertainty and mystery gives something dreadful to the men’s concep-

tions of the future after death; these feelings are expressed very successfully in Hamlet’s well-known soliloquy.

The account, which Tacitus gives us, of the solemn procession of the goddess Hertha, becomes fearfully sublime through the darkness which he spreads over it. The carriage of the goddess disappears in the interior of the forest, and no one employed in this mysterious service comes back alive. With awe one asks oneself, what that may indeed be, which to him who sees it, results in the loss of life, *quod tantum morituri vident*.

All religions have their mysteries, which maintain a holy horror, and just as the majesty of Divinity resides behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies, the majesty of kings also is wont to surround itself with mystery, in order to keep the respect of its subjects in continuous tension through this artificial invisibility.

These are the most excellent subspecies of the contemplative-sublime of power, and since they are grounded in the moral determination of man, which is common to all men, one is justified in presupposing a susceptibility for it in all human subjects, and the lack of the same cannot be excused as with merely sensuous emotions through a play of nature, but rather may be attributed to the subject as an imperfection. Sometimes one finds the sublime of cognition combined with the sublime of power, and the effect is all the greater, if not merely the sensuous capacity for resistance, but also even the capacity for representation, finds its limits in an object, and sensuousness with its twofold demand is dismissed.

II. The Pathetic-Sublime

If an object is objectively given to us not merely as power in general, but rather at the same time as a power destructive to man, if it therefore does not merely show its power, but rather really expresses it hostilely, then the imaginative power is no longer free to refer it to the preservation drive, but rather it must, it is compelled objectively thereto. But actual suffering permits no aesthetic judgment, it cancels the freedom of the mind. Therefore, it may not be the judging subject, on whom the fearful object demonstrates its destructive power, i.e., we may not suffer ourselves, but rather merely sympathetically. But even sympathetic suffering is already too aggressive for sensuousness, if the suffering has existence outside of us. Sympathetic suffering outweighs all aesthetic pleasure. Only when suffering is either mere illusion and fiction, or (in the case that it had occurred in reality) when it is not directly presented to the senses, but rather to the imaginative power, can it become aesthetic and produce a feeling of the sublime. The conception of

another's suffering, combined with an emotional state and with consciousness of our inner moral freedom, is pathetically sublime.

The sympathy or the sympathetic (imparted) emotional state is not a free expression of our state of mind, which we first had to bring forth automatically in ourselves, but rather an involuntary affection of the capacity for feeling determined by natural law. It does not depend at all upon our wills, whether we want to sympathize with the suffering of a creature. As soon as we have a conception of it, we have to sympathize with it. Nature, not our freedom, acts, and the motion of the mind rushes forward to make the decision.

Therefore, as soon as we objectively receive the conception of suffering, a sympathetic feeling for this suffering must ensue within us by virtue of the immutable natural law of sympathy. By this means we make the suffering, as it were, into our own. We co-suffer. Compassion is not only sympathetic grief, being moved by another's misfortune, but rather every sad emotional state without distinction, in which we have a feeling for another; thus, there are as many kinds of compassion, as there are different kinds of the original suffering; compassionate fear, compassionate terror, compassionate anxiety, compassionate indignation, compassionate despair.

But, if the exciting emotional state (or the pathetic) should provide a basis for the sublime, then it may not be driven to the point of actual self-suffering. Even in the middle of the most violent emotional state we must differentiate ourselves from the self-suffering subject, for freedom of the mind is done for, as soon as the deception is transformed into complete truth.

If compassion is heightened to such a liveliness, that we seriously exchange ourselves with the one suffering, then we no longer rule our emotional state, but rather it rules us. If, on the contrary, sympathy remains within its aesthetical boundaries, then it unites two principal conditions of the sublime: sensuously lively conception of suffering, combined with the feeling of one's own security.

But this feeling of security when faced with the conception of another's suffering, is by no means the basis of the sublime and, in general, not the source of the pleasure that we derive from this conception. The pathetic becomes sublime only through consciousness of our moral, not our physical freedom. It elevates our state of mind and becomes pathetically sublime, not because we see ourselves shielded from this suffering through our good fate (for then we would still always have a very bad guarantor for our security), but rather because we feel our moral self shielded from the causality of this suffering, namely, its influence on the determination of our will.

It is not absolutely necessary, that one feel equanimity

effective in oneself, to assert one's moral freedom in the face of a seriously arising danger. The discussion here is not about that which occurs, but rather about that which should and can occur, about our destiny, not about our actual activities; about our power, not about the application of the same. While we see a heavily laden cargo-ship sink in the storm, we can feel ourselves very unfortunate indeed in the position of the merchant, whose entire fortune has been swallowed up here by the water. But at the same time we nevertheless also feel that this loss affects only contingent things, and that it is a duty to elevate oneself above it. But nothing can be a duty, which cannot be fulfilled, and what should occur, must necessarily be able to occur. But that we can disregard a loss, which is justly so heavy to us as sensuous beings, demonstrates a capacity in us which proceeds according to completely different laws than the sensuous and has nothing in common with the drive of nature. But everything is sublime which brings this capacity in us to consciousness.

One can therefore say to oneself quite well, that one would bear the loss of these goods nothing less than calmly—this does not hinder the feeling of the sublime at all—if only one feels, that one should disregard it, and that it is a duty to allow it no influence on the self-determination of reason. Of course, all aesthetical power of the great and sublime is lost on him who not even once has a sense for it.

Therefore, it requires at least a capacity of the mind to become conscious of its cognitive determination, and a receptivity for the idea of duty, even if one recognizes the limits, which weak mankind may place on its execution. In general, it would be difficult for delight in the good as well as in the sublime, if one could have sense only for that which one has attained oneself, or believes oneself able to attain. But it is an estimable character trait of mankind, that it acknowledges a good thing, at least in aesthetical judgment, even though it must speak against itself, and that it pays homage, at least in feeling, to the pure idea of reason, even though it does not always have enough strength to actually act accordingly.

For the *pathetic-sublime* two principal conditions are therefore required. First, a vivid conception of suffering, in order to arouse the compassionate emotional state in suitable strength. Second, a conception of the resistance against suffering, in order to call into consciousness inner mental freedom. Only through the first does the object become pathetic, only through the second does the pathetic at the same time become sublime.

From this principle flow the two fundamental laws of all tragic art. These are, first: representation of suffering nature; second: representation of moral independence in suffering.

—translated by William F. Wertz, Jr.