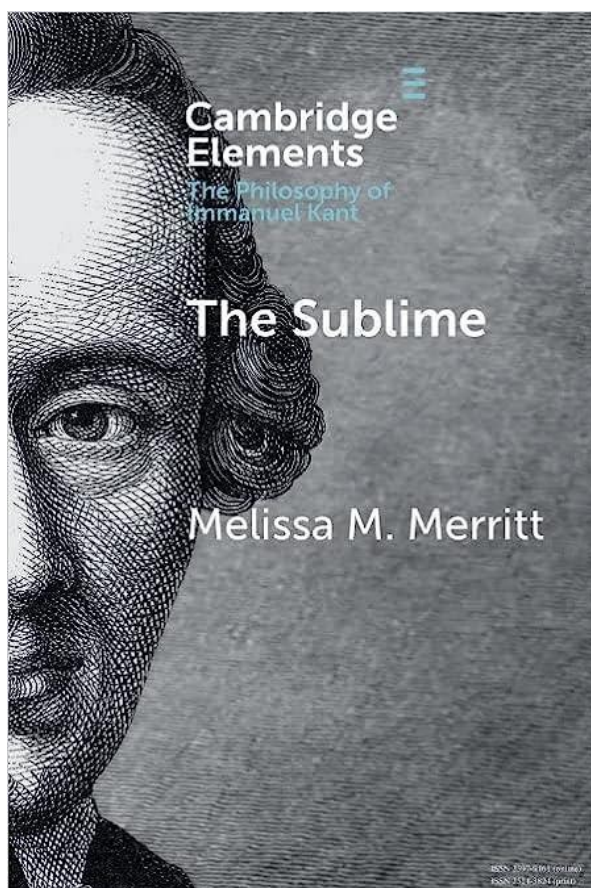


FORUM
MELISSA M. MERRITT
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Cambridge Elements: The Philosophy of Immanuel Kant
The Sublime
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INTRODUCTION

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The sublime stands out as one of the most challenging topics in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant because of the manifold issues it conveys. It relies on an aesthetic perspective that embraces theoretical and practical concerns, including the *Bestimmung* of the human being.

Melissa Merritt's *The Sublime* opens up the discussion on the Kantian sublime starting from the comparison between Kant and his predecessors: it highlights some aspects that Kant took up from the previous debate but also the peculiar features that make his account unique and distinct from any others.

Merritt's first concern is to consider the eighteenth-century Anglophone tradition on the sublime and its distinctive emphasis on the direct experience of nature as a source of a particular elevation of mind considered 'sublime'. Although these writers dealt with the sublimity of vast, open vistas, works of human engineering and architecture, none of them offered a presentation of absolute greatness. In Merritt's mind, the reason for this lack lies in not considering nature as an end in itself (p. 9). The greatness of nature, indeed, is presented as some sort of stimulus by which the subject's attention might be brought back to itself. This point is interesting since what on the one hand might be considered to be a 'lack', on the other hand seems to flow into «the idea that the appreciation of natural sublimity allows us to revel in something about our own minds that is ordinarily hidden» (p. 9), shaping what Merritt refers to as the 'reflective turn'. Kant belongs to the reflective tradition insofar as his theory of the sublime deals with the immensity of nature as the occasion that discloses the peculiar powers of our mind. Yet Kant also goes beyond the Anglophone tradition and picks up from the German rationalist tradition the idea of sublimity as absolute greatness, linked to the moral perfection of virtue. Regarding the sublime and the topic of absolute greatness, Merritt points out a further element that in the Anglophone tradition is absent and that, instead, in the Kantian sublime is a key feature, namely, the distinction between sensible and supersensible order of being. That is, the sublime brings displeasure because it does not fit with

our sensible existence, but brings pleasure with respect to our rational being, which completes the picture of the human being.

Thus, the 'reflective turn' of the Anglophone tradition characterises the Kantian sublime because it leads the subject to look deeply at itself¹, yet the possibility to address the absolute greatness marks a departure from this tradition and calls upon the relation between the sensible and the supersensible side of the human being, and in particular the crucial theme of the *Bestimmung*. I take this as one of the most important contributions offered by the book of Melissa Merritt: she sheds light on the human *Bestimmung* as a calling that the human being figures out in the experience of the sublime. Such an experience elevates the human being above himself in such a way as to define his personality and the very meaning of humanity, which is linked to the ability to set purposes freely and, accordingly, it expresses the independence from the mechanism of the whole of nature.

The human *Bestimmung*, understood as a vocation of the human being, allows Merritt to address a further crucial topic in the Kantian sublime, namely the distinction between the mathematical and the dynamical sublime, and the alleged division of their fields as a result. She refers to this division as the 'standard view', which relies on the sense of the human vocation to show that both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime require the same background commitment to moral ends. The human vocation is a calling understandable as the fulfilment of the duty to fit in for our rationality: the sense of humanity consists in cultivating body and mind, natural and moral perfections, and both the mathematical and dynamical sublime account for this cultivation.

As regards the duty of cultivating our cognitive capacities in compliance with our *Bestimmung*, Samantha Matherne points out the importance of recognizing the elevated exercise of the imagination: thanks to the sublime we discover an aesthetic use of the imagination other than the ordinary one, and, in this sense, our human calling is grasped not only with respect to our reason but also recognizing the valuable aspects of our sensibility.

The contributions of the discussants throughout the forum confirm the importance of the relationship between the two

¹ «Sublimity is not contained in anything in nature, but only in our mind» (KU 5: 264, p. 147).

modes of sublimity (mathematical and dynamical) and their alignment in the human *Bestimmung*: Rachel Zuckert traces some considerations on theoretical reason back to this division, and shows in particular some concerns on the activity of theoretical reason with respect to one's moral vocation; Luigi Filieri shares the unified account of the mathematical and dynamical sublime, but rather than approaching them according to a horizontal perspective, he suggests reading these two modes of sublimity in hierarchical-systematic terms, that would also confirm the primacy of pure practical reason. Donald Ainslie, instead, takes from the description of the mathematical and the dynamical sublime the possibility of challenging the Kantian view of morality as 'sublime' by presenting Hume's alternative view of morality as 'mundane'.

A further key element of Merritt's essay is feeling, as Merritt not only highlights that the sublime can only be appreciated in the register of feeling (p. 27), but she also spells out different feelings of the sublime, such as respect and admiration (p. 56). This difference will be taken into account also in the course of the forum. Particularly, the sublime as a feeling recalls the peculiarity of the aesthetic judgment in contrast with the logical judgment, for the latter determines a representation under a concept, whereas the former relates the representation to feeling and therefore is non-cognitive. Among the various problems raised by Paul Guyer's contribution, he recognises, in particular, a 'harder problem' related to this peculiar status of the aesthetic judgment: how is it possible that a feeling (which is non-cognitive and non-conceptual) expresses a determinate content, such as the cultivation of virtue? What does it mean for feeling to reveal a determinate message concerned with morality? The possibility of finding an answer will allow Paul Guyer to consider also works of genius and aesthetic ideas.

This symposium will put forward these and many other considerations; at the end, Melissa Merritt will answer questions from the commentators.

Before letting the reader enjoy the discussion, I would like to thank all the forum participants for the rich and stimulating exchange they had, and for the many brilliant perspectives they offered on the Kantian sublime in this work.

DONALD C. AINSLIE
(University of Toronto)

The *Cambridge Elements* series «consist[s] of original, succinct, authoritative, and peer-reviewed ... research» that «provide[s] comprehensive coverage of the key topics» in various disciplines². Melissa Merritt's lovely monograph on the sublime – one of the *Elements* volumes addressing Immanuel Kant's philosophy – more than meets the publisher's description. I first read it when, as a non-specialist, I was wanting to learn more about Kant's alignment of our reaction to the «starry heavens above» with our reverence for the «moral law within» (KpV 5: 161).

But I should note that Merritt's approach is resolutely historical and interpretive. She does not assess the *merits* of Kant's view of the sublime. That task will be the focus of my comments, with David Hume providing my exemplar of an alternative view. The contrasts between these philosophers' ethical theories are stark: Hume, the naturalist, necessitarian, sentimentalist, spectator theorist; Kant, the non-naturalist, libertarian, rationalist, theorist of practical reason. Their differences extend to their analyses of the sublime, with Hume naturalizing it while Kant moralizes it. I think that Hume ultimately offers a more adequate account of morality, where it is understood as mundane rather than sublime.

Merritt starts her book with the 18th-century antecedents of Kant's view of the sublime, where it came to be understood in terms of those entities that we find both terrifying and at the same time attractive; they reveal to us our insignificance in the majestic and awe-inspiring order of things. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, where he devotes a section to the topic, Kant distinguishes between the “mathematical” sublime, which he takes to apply to large magnitudes, and the ‘dynamical’ sublime, which he takes to apply to things with overwhelming power. In both cases, he explains our reactions in terms of our recognizing the «supersensible substratum» (KU 5: 255) underlying our cognitions of natural objects.

Interpreters often take Kant to align the mathematical sublime with the activity of theoretical reasoning and the dynamical sublime with practical reasoning. Merritt convincingly

² <https://www.cambridge.org/core/publications/elements>.

argues, however, that both kinds of experiences of the sublime ultimately depend on our grasp of our *moral* nature. In the case of the dynamical sublime, Kant is clear that the power of the sublime object allows us to see ourselves as ‘superior’ to nature: «[T]he humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion» (KU 5: 262). In the case of the mathematical sublime, Merritt points to the role of the ideas of reason that are necessary for our reactions to those vast objects that both outstrip our sensory capacities and yet are taken to be a whole. And these ideas of reason play a regulative role in our investigation of nature. We are to search for ever more complete explanations of the empirical realm, and for Kant this task is part of our vocation or calling (*Bestimmung*) as rational animals (Merritt .32&ff). In particular, the duties we owe to ourselves include a duty to cultivate our understanding as an aspect of our self-perfection. In an experience of the mathematical sublime we ultimately feel «respect for our own vocation» (KU 5: 257), a respect which is not different in kind from that we feel for the moral law. Thus «a feeling for the sublime in nature cannot even be conceived without connecting it to a disposition of the mind that is similar to the moral disposition» (KU 5: 268).

Though Merritt’s discussion helps to bring out how thoroughly Kant links the sublime to the moral, she does not focus on *why* he would treat morality in this way to begin with. In what sense does morality loom over us, both as repellent and yet at the same time attractive? In the *Groundwork*, he makes passing mention of morality’s sublimity (G 38-9, 50-1, 53; 4:425-6, 439-40, 441), but he comes closest to a defense of this conception of morality in the second *Critique*, when offering an account of how we are subjectively moved by the objective requirements of morality. Our animal nature leads us to over-value what we desire, as if it were good in itself; Kant calls this tendency «self-conceit» (KpV 5: 74). Nonetheless, our rational nature allows us to recognize that we should do what morality requires, ‘striking down’ our self-conceit and leading us to feel ‘respect’ for the moral law. Unlike our desires and inclinations, the feeling of respect arises from our rationality. We thus find ourselves both repulsed by moral duty, in that it requires that we sacrifice what we naturally desire, and at the same time attracted to it for calling on our highest nature. «This idea of personality, awakening respect by setting before our eyes the sublimity of our nature (in

its vocation) while at the same time showing us the lack of accord of our conduct with respect to it and thus striking down self-conceit, is natural even to the most common human reason» (KpV 5: 87).

But is Kant's argument here successful? Should we moralize the sublime – or treat morality as sublime – in this way? It is hard to answer this question directly. So much of Kant's account is tied up with his other theoretical commitments, in particular his transcendental idealism, with its distinction between a world of appearances and things in themselves, where our 'supersensible' nature points to how we are in ourselves. One option then is to assess Kant's view by contrasting it with a different conception of morality, such as the mundane sentimentalism that Hume articulates, especially in his *Treatise of Human Nature*.

Whereas Kant sees morality through the lens of practical reason – and the laws of a free will that agents impose on themselves – Hume sees morality through the lens of a spectator on social life. He takes us to be concerned primarily with the character traits we display to ourselves and others and thus takes our moral concern to extend beyond the voluntary and to include non-voluntary behaviour (T 3.3.4)³. Such traits are best seen from an external perspective, though sometimes we are not properly positioned with respect to someone and must correct our initial reactions by taking up the verdict of those in the 'steady', 'general', or 'common' point of view (T 3.3.1.15, 3.3.1.30). Hume's argument for his position focuses primarily on his claim that moral evaluations are affective rather than a result of reasoning (T 3.3.1). Drawing on his prior thesis that «reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions» (T 2.3.3.4), he concludes that rationalist theories (he has Samuel Clarke in mind) are unable to capture how morality obviously *matters* to us. Moral evaluations must, at root, be a matter of feeling – of moral sentiment – rather than of reasoning.

This is not to say that Hume is a mere subjectivist, for whom morality is simply a matter of individual taste. To make a long (and controversial) story short, I think he should be seen, in Book 2 of the *Treatise*, as offering a moral Anthropology of sorts, an

³ References to Hume's *Treatise* are given parenthetically with 'T' followed by the Book, Part, Section, and paragraph numbers as given in the Oxford Critical Edition (*A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*, Vol 1. David F. Norton and Mary J. Norton, (eds), Oxford: Clarendon, 2007).

explanation of how our passions, especially what he calls the 'indirect, person-oriented passions of pride, humility, love, and hatred, are essential to our moral understandings of one another (see Ainslie 1999). Our virtues and vices «receive their being» (T 2.1.7.7) from these passions, once stabilized by «custom and practice» (T 2.1.6.9). They thus 'command' our approbation (T 3.3.1.13; see also T 3.1.2.4, 3.3.1.16, 3.3.1.18, 3.3.1.25, 3.3.1.27). We go wrong when we fail to grasp them in the right way. Even if morality is not discerned by reason as a matter of fact or a relation of ideas, the indirect passions allow us to perceive a moral world that we find (and constantly reconstitute) in our interactions with one another. Failure to react appropriately to this world is a kind of error (see Ainslie 2007). Hume summarizes his view of virtue with what he calls the «ultimate test of virtue and merit»:

[T]is a most certain rule, that if there be no relation of life, in which I cou'd not wish to stand to a particular person, his character must so far be allow'd to be perfect. If he be as little wanting to himself as to others, his character is entirely perfect. (T 3.3.3.9)

This conception of morality, by being grounded in human nature, does not require an appeal to the supersensible in order to be intelligible. Rather it reflects our everyday ways of understanding one another as friends, teachers, relatives, co-nationals, and more. It also speaks to the virtues and vices arising from our self-relation, such as self-contentment, peace of mind, or self-loathing. Hume does not expect anyone to live up to the standard of perfection he articulates, and instead assumes that we will each have a mixture of virtues and vices; he is not a subscriber to the unity of the virtues thesis (see Ainslie 2007, 105).

For Hume, then, morality is ultimately *mundane*. He will nonetheless occasionally appeal to the sublime in describing virtue, even though he does not offer the kind of detailed treatment of the sublime we find in Kant. His conclusions about the sublimity of morality are also much more ambivalent, perhaps because he thinks that theorists of the sublime such as Addison see it as involving our encountering the divine affectively:

The *Supreme Author* of our *Being* has so formed the soul of man, that nothing but himself can be its last, adequate, and proper happiness. Because, therefore, a great part of our happiness must arise from the *Contemplation* of his *Being*, that he might give our

souls a just relish of such a *contemplation*, he has made them naturally delight in the apprehension of what is great or unlimited.⁴

Hume's naturalism precludes this kind of appeal to the divine (T 3.1.2.7), and indeed he thinks religious systems typically distort or pervert our moral judgement.

I should be clear, however, that Hume offers nothing like a *theory* of the sublime. Rather, he introduces it in passing when explaining a different phenomenon (how our judgements about objects are influenced by what we compare them to so that, e.g., large objects seem larger when compared to something small), which turns out to depend on hidden emotional reactions that always accompany our experiences. When an object is sufficiently large, these reactions combine in such a way that we come to feel them:

[T]is evident, that any very bulky object, such as the ocean, an extended plain, a vast chain of mountains, a wide forest; or any very numerous collection of objects, such as an army, a fleet, a crowd, excite in the mind a sensible emotion; and that the admiration, which arises on the appearance of such objects, is one of the most lively pleasures, which human nature is capable of enjoying. (T 2.2.8.4)

Though not using the label, Hume here focuses on what Kant categorizes as the mathematical sublime. Importantly, he sees our experience of the sublime as *continuous* with our everyday experiences, not requiring the invocation of anything out of the ordinary (or supernatural). And, while Hume does not include a concomitant negative feeling as a constituent part of our response to the sublime, he does acknowledge that a mixed response is possible:

Every part, then, of extension, and every unite of number has a separate emotion attending it, when conceiv'd by the mind; and tho' that emotion be not always agreeable, yet by its conjunction with others, and by its agitating the spirits to a just pitch, it contributes to the production of admiration, which is always agreeable. (T 2.2.8.4)

⁴ Addison 1799, 149.

Presumably he has in mind such ‘dynamically’ sublime phenomena such as thunderstorms or abysses, which both scare us and yet simultaneously please us (at least when we are safe from their impacts). Hume connects his understanding of the sublime with the moral when he says that:

If this be allow'd with respect to extension and number, we can make no difficulty with respect to virtue and vice, wit and folly, riches and poverty, happiness and misery, and other objects of that kind, which are always attended with an evident emotion. (T 2.2.8.4)

Later in the *Treatise*, he invokes the sublime in connection with virtue twice, and in neither case is it an unambiguously good thing. The context is his examination of those exceptional traits that make someone truly stand out («greatness of mind», T 3.3.2). When we encounter such a person, we feel respect, which is for Hume a mixture of love and humility, with the latter resulting when we compare ourselves to the great person and end up feeling worse about ourselves. Hume goes on to note that, even when someone is not truly great but acts as if she were, sympathy will cause us to take on her self-conceit and thus, by comparison, feel humility. And, given that we all tend to overestimate our positive qualities, the «rules of good-breeding» (T 3.3.2.10) have been established, where we are all to feign modesty and thus spare one another unpleasant comparisons. Nonetheless, even though:

we condemn an extravagant pride and ambition, however regulated by the decorums of good-breeding and politeness[,] ... as such a passion is still agreeable, and conveys an elevated and *sublime* sensation to the person, who is actuated by it, the sympathy with that satisfaction diminishes considerably the blame, which naturally attends its dangerous influence on his conduct and behaviour. Accordingly we may observe, that an excessive courage and magnanimity, especially when it displays itself under the frowns of fortune, contributes, in a great measure, to the character of a hero, and will render a person the admiration of posterity; at the same time, that it ruins his affairs, and leads him into dangers and difficulties, with which otherwise he wou'd never have been acquainted. (T 3.3.2.14; emphasis added).

The sublime here seems only to evoke the large size of the conceited person's positive feelings about himself. And, because it inspires him to take risks on the basis of his excessive self-assurance, we end up admiring him to some extent despite his viciously 'extravagant' self-regard. Hume again links the sublime to a conflicted verdict on a person's traits when he considers «[h]eroism, or military glory». On the one hand, «the generality of mankind ... consider it as the most *sublime* kind of merit. Men of cool reflection are not so sanguine in their praises of it. The infinite confusions and disorder, which it has caus'd in the world, diminish much of its merit in their eyes» (T 3.3.2.15; emphasis added).

Overall, Hume seems to think that our finding virtues to be so impressive that they count as sublime to be an indication that something has gone awry. Our earth-bound moral practices, which he takes to focus on the useful and agreeable, are temporarily undermined:

[W]hen we fix our view on the person himself, who is the author of all this mischief, there is something so dazzling in his character, the mere contemplation of it so elevates the mind, that we cannot refuse it our admiration. The pain, which we receive from its tendency to the prejudice of society, is overpowered by a stronger and more immediate sympathy. (T 3.3.2.15)

Rather than enforcing a respect for morality, our feelings of the sublime instead interfere with accurate evaluation⁵.

Kant, of course, rejects naturalist accounts of morality such as Hume's. He holds that:

Empirical principles are everywhere unsuited to having moral laws grounded on them. For the universality, with which they are to be valid for all rational beings without distinction, the unconditioned practical necessity, which is imposed on these beings through them, drops out if the ground of these principles is taken from the *particular adaptation of human nature* or from the contingent circumstances in which it is placed. (G 53, 4:442).

⁵ Merritt points to a similar worry in Kant's treatment of moral «enthusiasm», where an «aesthetically sublime» but nonetheless «blind» affect counterfeits the feeling of respect (KU 5:272). See Merritt 2012.

Mundane, merely human, theories of morality fail to explain how it addresses all rational beings, thus relatedly missing out on its universality and necessity. But Hume or those of his ilk could respond by saying that their account also can meet versions of these requirements once they have been suitably interpreted and modified for a mundane conception of morality. It is question-begging to take the criteria in narrowly Kantian terms.

Consider the suggestion that morality should address all rational beings. For Hume, because morality has its origins in human passions, particularly the indirect passions, and they take human beings as their objects, morality is at root a *human* affair. As he says in a letter to Francis Hutcheson that «since Morality ... is determin'd merely by Sentiment, it regards only human Nature & human Life» (March 1740, 16; see Grieg 1932, 40). He is simply not concerned about non-human rational beings, presumably because, in the 18th-century, their possibility carries the whiff of religion – a perfect deity, angels, and the like. In our secular age, we might instead consider artificial or alien life forms. But consider Hume's attitude towards non-human animals; they too have the indirect passions and enter into reciprocal emotional relationships with us, and our love or hatred can extend to them on analogical grounds (T 2.1.12). Thus if we encounter non-human rational beings, and they similarly engage emotionally with us, they will also enter into our moral community⁶. If they instead display only the chilling rationality of, say, the cyborgs from the *Terminator* movies, we would rightly treat them merely as natural forces we could oppose. Moreover, Hume's focusing his moral concern on *human beings* rather than on *rational* humanity offers him an easier route into understanding our attitudes towards non-rational humans – those with severe cognitive impairments or those at the extremes of life (newborns and those close to death).

Turning now to Kant's requirement that morality speak to us categorically – with necessity – Hume can respond in two ways. On the one hand, as a spectator theorist, he can redescribe the issue as a requirement that he explain how moral qualities

⁶ David Wiggins puts this point as follows: «Hume can return to the commonsensical point that the [Humean moral] standard itself does not limit its constituency to human beings [even if it is generated by moral sentiment].... No doubt, it is intended to reach whoever can comprehend it» (Wiggins 1991, 91).

'command' approval or disapproval of us, no matter where our own self-interest lies. As I have described above, his account does meet this requirement, even if the command is relativized to human nature in a manner that Kant would not accept. On the other hand, Kant's concern as given in the second *Critique* – that morality should be shown to decisively defeat self-interest in our practical reasoning – is more difficult for Hume: Reason is the 'slave' to the passions when we decide what to do. We could, however, when considering our options in a situation, recognize one as required by virtue, and our 'sense of duty' might motivate us to conform our actions to it (T 3.2.1.8). What Hume does not offer is an account of how that sense of duty *should* always be able to prevail. He does not accept that a moral 'ought' implies that we can be motivated to act accordingly. Recall that he expands the moral to include nonvoluntary behaviour (T 3.3.4). There is a real difference with Kant here, but one we should not find surprising given Hume's mundane conception of morality. It does not loom over us, demanding our respect no matter what.

Hume would be especially concerned by Kant's appeal to a moral 'vocation', a term with clear religious connotations. While Kant eschews dogmatic theological claims, he retains what seems to be a religious conception of morality within his critical strictures. And why should we do that? I think Hume's non-religious conception of morality offers a telling contrast.

What Merritt has done so well in *The Sublime* is to demonstrate how Kant's view depends centrally on core theses in his practical and theoretical philosophy, all of which are highly controversial. By appealing to Hume, I have gestured above at a more naturalistic and (ironically) mundane account of the sublime. The questions remain: Should we take the sublime in our stride as one more human phenomenon? Or should we see it as a clue to the supersensibility of our core moral and theoretical powers? Thomas Nagel has said that «contemporary ethical theory continues to be dominated by the disagreement between [the] two giants» (Nagel 2012, 41). Hume and Kant. There is no straightforward way to resolve this disagreement, but by a close investigation of the various elements of their (and their successors') positions, including those on the sublime. Merritt's book is an important resource for this task.

RACHEL ZUCKERT
(Northwestern University)

Melissa Merritt's book is a beautifully written, historically nuanced, philosophically rigorous, and humane treatment of Kant's account of the sublime. It is at once a marvelously clear resource for those first coming to Kant's dense text – the stated goal of the Cambridge University Press series of which this monograph is part – and a compelling scholarly interpretation. Among many excellences, a distinctive strength of the monograph is Merritt's emphasis on the systematically crucial connections Kant draws between the sublime and morality. Correlatively, Merritt allocates due attention to Kant's account of the dynamic sublime – concerning the subject's experience of transcending a powerful, threatening natural object in virtue of her moral vocation -- by contrast to most commentators, who tend to focus almost exclusively on the more worked-out account of the mathematical sublime – a response of dizzied awe before a nearly ungraspably large object, which (Kant claims) is truly awe for the ideas of theoretical reason, which surpass sensible nature. As Merritt rightly argues, however, this scholarly discussion has tended to ignore the fact that on Kant's view theoretical reason, in its aspirations to metaphysical knowledge, is *unsuccessful* (p. 37). Thus, the idea (or activity) of theoretical reason at issue in the mathematical sublime cannot truly validate a sense of the superiority of reason over sensible nature; it is, she proposes, a «placeholder» for the way in which human reason *really does*, successfully, determine itself and thereby transcend nature: in formulating the moral law and in directing human beings to attain virtue (p. 38).

Merritt also nicely responds to objections against the «self-regarding» character of Kant's view of the sublime raised by many readers, beginning with Kant's student, Johann Gottfried Herder (p. 24). This line of objection probably has multiple facets, but I mention two: a) a descriptive concern (does 'appreciation of one's own reason' appropriately characterize an experience that *prima facie* seems to be awe at an external object?), and b) the moral concern that it is arrogant so to appreciate oneself (as superior to all of nature), particularly when one is appreciating one's bare «capacity» for morality (*Vermögen*; see KU 5: 261), absent any

actual moral achievement. Concerning a), Merritt argues persuasively that, given his epistemological and value-metaphysical commitments, Kant must conclude that recognition of supersensible, absolute value in an external natural object is impossible; purported experience of this kind is «enthusiasm» or indeed *Schwärmerei* (the mistaken claim to «see... beyond the bounds of sensibility» [KU 5: 275]) (see pp. 77-78). In response to b), Merritt cites Kant's more prevalent reference to the subject's moral «vocation» (*Bestimmung*; see KU 5: 262, 277-78). She argues that, on Kant's view, the subject is not appreciating *himself* or his mere capacity, but rather his *calling*, a task or «practical problem» assigned to him, a demand to cultivate himself morally (p. 44) as well as his commitment to work towards meeting that demand (pp. 47-48n80). (A further textual advantage in favour of Merritt's interpretation: it makes sense of Kant's claim that in the sublime one experiences the mind's «higher purposiveness»; on her view, this can be understood as the subject's directedness-to-a-[moral-]purpose [KU 5: 246].) The appreciating subject is thus aware of the superiority of morality over nature, but also, perhaps just as much, of her own insufficiency, her need to cultivate herself to meet this moral demand.

Like Merritt's observations concerning Kant's view of theoretical reason and its import for the mathematical sublime, this argument represents a decisive step forwards in interpretation of Kant's account of the sublime. The two points also bring out aspects of Kant's account of the sublime that I will sum up as 'theoretical displacement': on theoretical grounds, we must take our experience to be other than it appears to be, perhaps to be about something that is not even present in that experience. I therefore take this opportunity to raise some questions about such displacement (including, as one may discern, new forms of a) and b)), to invite Merritt to elaborate further on the shape of Kant's account, given her insights. Most immediately, I wonder: what could it be to appreciate, contemplatively, a *demand* upon one (or, a state of being-directed-to-something-else)? It is reasonably clear what a *practical* affective orientation towards a demand, or representation of something non-present, might be: motivation to pursue a course of action, or, perhaps, hope concerning its outcome. But, as Merritt emphasizes (pp. 50-

60), despite its strong relation to morality, the feeling of the sublime is supposed to be contemplative and disinterested (not motivational). How does one *contemplate* something that is not present (or even *as* not-present, as to-be-accomplished)? One might wonder too whether such contemplation would please or elevate – would it not rather be stressful and humiliating, an experience of one’s insufficiency as moral rational being (in addition to, in the sublime, of one’s weakness as sensible being)?

Such displacement – the absence of the object of feeling and experience, as well as Kant’s radical theoretical redescription of that experience in so proposing – is more striking if one focuses on the mathematical sublime. Kant’s theoretical redescription of this experience (rendering it, in Merritt’s terms, «reflective») can seem reasonably close to its phenomenology: one has a sense not just of being overwhelmed the large object, but also thereby, elevatingly, of having one’s attention as it were opened out to an idea of infinity, or of the whole universe. This opening out is (according to Kant) the activity of theoretical reason, aspiring to a cognitive grasp of objects beyond the contents of the actual sensible perception (and so itself in fact the object of appreciation). But, in light of Merritt’s compelling observations, this move becomes more complicated: can we understand this dizzying experience as one *about* the subject’s *moral* vocation? If experiencing subjects are not aware at all of such an object of their own feeling – if the relation of the experience to one’s moral vocation is identified not phenomenologically, but theoretically (as, e.g., the only ultimately justified form of rational self-determination) – how is the feeling or experience *of* it? And if it is not, how or why does this related, but not directly involved aspect of reason contribute to the experience? In Merritt’s terms, how exactly does the activity of theoretical reason function as a «placeholder» for one’s moral vocation? Or, though Merritt does not focus on Kant’s interest in justifying judgments of the sublime: how is the feeling of dizzying awe related to moral feeling, such that, as Kant asserts, it can be justifiably demanded of others? (See KU 5:266.)

Finally, I confess that Merritt’s sophisticated response to the moral concerns about the Kantian sublime has not dispelled my worries of the b) kind. My lingering concerns are nicely captured in Merritt’s opening epigraph by Elizabeth Carter, writing to Elizabeth Montagu: the grandness of the sublime can be morally

troubling, because it distracts from «duties in the ordinary affairs of the world», Carter suggests; moral engagement often demands caring, attentive action towards small everyday matters, rather than contemplative elevation beyond them. (Carter's lovely reference to the song of linnets also obliquely reminds us of the moral dangers of a view holding human beings to be the sole loci of ultimate value within the natural world.) Carter suggests that one should not be distracted from concrete moral obligations by elevating greatness – but also, I think, that it is distracting, even inappropriate, to *contemplate* a moral demand, as it were theoretically, merely feeling or experiencing it, rather than take it upon oneself to act according to it.

Let me emphasize in closing that these concerns are meant not to detract from, but to reinforce the brilliance of Merritt's interpretation. Merritt's book is not only an invaluable scholarly resource, but insightful precisely in bringing out these intriguing, if also troubling elements of displacement which are, I have learned from her, central to Kant's account, and, perhaps, to the sublime itself.

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Melissa Merritt's *Cambridge Element* on Kant's account of our experience of the sublime is an incisive and persuasive essay. Her thesis is that Kant starts with the assumption that the sublime can only be something «absolutely great» (as Kant says at KU §25, 5: 248), and that since the only candidate for absolute greatness epistemically available to us is (not God but) our own morality — think here of the opening claim of Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, «It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a **good will**» (GMS 4: 393) — «the Kantian sublime has an irrevocably moral source» (p. 3). «If true sublimity is absolute greatness, and therefore cannot be found in nature, then the absolute greatness at issue» in the experience of the sublime «must lie in some kind of freedom from the causal order of material nature, a freedom that expresses itself in the self-determination of a rational being» (p. 6). More specifically, first, since the experience of the sublime is *aesthetic*, and that means it is a form of *feeling*, not just, as Kant often says about feeling, the feeling of pleasure *or* displeasure, but in the case of the sublime a complex feeling of pleasure *and* displeasure, its moral content must somehow be conveyed *through* feeling, and, second, the morally relevant content that is so conveyed is our own capacity to *cultivate our virtue*. «By Kant's lights *what is* sublime, strictly speaking, is our disposition to virtue» (p. 7).

There can be no doubt that Kant's treatment of the sublime is a central part of Kant's project in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to bridge the «incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible» (KU 5: 175-6). I asked long ago what gulf Kant is worried about, since the *Critique of Practical Reason's* postulate of the existence of God *as the author of nature* seemed to provide all the guarantee that can be given that our efforts to be moral can be efficacious *in nature*, thus the gulf seems already to have been bridged. My answer was that Kant must have thought that such a postulate of pure practical reason would suffice for a purely rational being, but that since we humans are not purely rational beings, but rational *animals*, that is, complex beings with feelings as well as reason, the abstract

ideas of morality limned in the foundational works on moral philosophy have to be made accessible to us as beings with sensations and feelings (see Guyer 1990, 137-46). That is ultimately the project of the third *Critique*, what ties its two halves, the critiques of aesthetics and teleology, together, indeed Kant's project throughout the major works of the 1790s. *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* shows how the central ideas of morality can be brought home to us in the form of religious symbols, the essays on 'Theory and Practice' and *Towards Perpetual Peace* show how the ideals of morality can be achieved in the actual progress of human history, and the *Metaphysics of Morals* shows what duties follow from the fundamental law of morality valid for all *rational* beings for *human* beings in the actual embodied, terrestrial condition of our mode of existence. Kant's treatment of the sublime is very much a part of this larger project.

So I certainly support the general lines of Merritt's interpretation. In what follows I will highlight a few points that I think are important but could use further discussion. I will by no means have enough room to discuss everything I would like to about this stimulating essay.

(i) Merritt begins with a concise discussion of British and German treatments of the sublime prior to Kant, on the basis of which she then presents Kant's own position as a synthesis of aspects of these two traditions. You cannot go wrong in presenting Kant trying to take what is best from empiricism and rationalism and combine them in his own way, whether in theoretical philosophy, moral philosophy, aesthetics, or teleology. In particular, Merritt argues that from the Anglophone tradition Kant took the idea of a «reflective turn», the idea «that the appreciation of natural sublimity allows us to revel in something about our own minds that is ordinarily hidden», but that this tradition does not recognize anything «absolutely great» (p. 9). So Kant turns to his more immediate context, the German rationalist tradition, particularly to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*, which addresses the sublime under the category of «aesthetic magnitude», and distinguishes between «natural» and «moral» aesthetic magnitude as well as between «relative» and «absolute» aesthetic magnitude (p. 17). But Baumgarten is not very clear about what constitutes moral magnitude, let alone absolute moral magnitude, and like many in both traditions seems

to equate moral magnitude with especially admirable moral character, so the aesthetic presentation of morally admirable heroes would count as moral aesthetic magnitude. As I would put it, Kant's innovation consists in applying the «reflexive turn» to *our own* potential for moral magnitude, that is, the potential of each and every one of us for moral magnitude, indeed for moral magnitude that is «absolute» in the sense that on Kant's account of freedom we are always free to do what morality demands no matter what threats or blandishments nature offers to us. Thus Kant interprets the experience of the sublime as the experience of «something about the mind [that] is 'superior' to nature — where this superiority is cashed out as the possibility of [the mind's] independence from nature's influence or determination» (p. 20). This is of course achieved in the determination of the will by the moral law, on Kant's account. The experience of the sublime in some way reveals to us the possibility of our own mind's, or will's, independence from determination by nature, even from the awesome, potentially destructive forces of mighty waterfalls, seas, etc., that trigger the experience of sublimity (although they are not themselves literally sublime), and our freedom to determine ourselves by the moral law instead of by fear of such forces. The «apprehension of natural immensity puts us in mind of the essential task of being human, which is ultimately and most fundamentally to cultivate moral virtue as the realisation or completion of our rational nature» (p. 26). This experience is a compound of displeasure and pleasure, because the experience of powerful natural forces that could easily destroy us is unpleasant, but the further recognition that such natural forces can never force us to act contrary to the moral law and prevent the cultivation of virtue is pleasing.

This is, of course, an account of what Kant calls the *dynamical* sublime. It raises two questions: first, it raises the question of what the experience of the *mathematical* sublime is supposed to reveal to us; second, it raises the question of how exactly Kant supposes *feeling that is not subsumed under any determinate concept* — a hallmark of the aesthetic for Kant (KU 5: 203; 5: 211; and many others) — can reveal something of this sort that is «ordinarily hidden from us» — or, since the power of our own freedom is *not* hidden from us insofar we are rational beings, reveal or confirm it to us as rational but also sensible *animals*.

(ii) Merritt addresses the first of these questions in some detail. The problem is that Kant explains the experience of the mathematical sublime as one in which the imagination can take in parts of some vast, indeed apparently infinite natural scene one-by-one («aesthetic apprehension»), but cannot take in the whole scene as one («aesthetic comprehension»). That is frustrating, but then we realize, in some sense, that it is our own reason and its idea (in Kant's technical sense) of the «unconditioned» that is setting the task at which we are failing, and that recognition, in whatever form it takes, is pleasant. There seem to be two questions here, one, *why* this recognition is pleasing, but second, what does this have to do with *morality*, or our capacity for it, the only thing that Kant recognizes as 'absolutely great'? Merritt focuses on the second of these, and argues that what Kant treats as general form of duty of commission rather than omission to ourselves in the Doctrine of Virtue of the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), namely the duty of self-perfection, includes the duty to perfect both our physical and our intellectual capacities, and among the latter both our capacities for theoretical and moral reasoning, so that the perfection of our reason, even our ability to reason about the quantitatively unconditioned, is actually part of our moral duty (pp. 48-50). I think that this argument might use support from some text prior to Kant's 1797 doctrine of virtue, particularly because Kant's lectures on ethics prior to 1797 (thus the Kaehler and Collins transcriptions that seem to go back to a common source in the mid-1770s, the Mrongovius transcription from 1784-85, and even the Vigilantius transcription of lectures on the metaphysics of morals from 1793-94) do not discuss this positive but imperfect duty of theoretical and moral self-perfection⁷. An obvious place to look for support would be Kant's doctrine of the *unity* of reason as expressed in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (KpV 5:121), that is, his view that theoretical and practical reason are not two separate faculties, but one and the

⁷ For the Kaehler transcription, dated 1777, see Kant I., *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie*, edited by Werner Stark, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter & Co., 2004; for the Collins transcription, dated 1784-5 but almost word for word identical to Kaehler, thus presumably a copy of an older version, and for Vigilantius, see Kant I., *Lectures on Ethics*, edited by J.B. Schneewind, translated by Peter Heath, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997; and for the Mrongovius transcription, which does date from 1784-85, see the *Akademie* edition, vol. 27.2.2, pp. 1393-1581.

same faculty applied to do different tasks, knowledge and action. This would explain why any experience that reveals or confirms our possession of a faculty of reason at all reveals or confirms our possession of the faculty that is the basis of morality. It might also explain Kant's otherwise mystifying remark in his exposition of the concept of the *mathematical* sublime that

Even a faculty for being able to think the infinite of supersensible intuition as given (in its intelligible substratum) surpasses any standard of sensibility, and is great beyond all comparison even with the faculty of mathematical estimation, not, of course, from a theoretical point of view, in behalf of the faculty of cognition, but still as an enlargement of the mind which feels itself empowered to overstep the limits of sensibility from another (practical) point of view. (KU 5:255, emphasis added).

It is not clear why this reference to the *practical* point of view should occur so early in the exposition of the *mathematical* sublime, unless we remember that for Kant *there is only one faculty of reason*, so any revelation of that faculty to us *is* a revelation of our possession of practical reason and the independence from determination by mere nature that Kant thinks such reason makes possible for us.

(iii) This solution needs further development, but the harder problem is what does it mean for *feeling* to reveal determinate content, such as that the cultivation of virtue, as Merritt puts it, is both possible and a necessary task for us, when Kant begins his entire discussion of aesthetic experience and judgment with the *contrast* between feeling and cognition and claims, at least in the case of what he calls «free beauties» — hummingbirds and mollusks, but also designs *à la grecque*, foliage on wallpaper, and so on — «that they do not represent anything, no object under a determinate concept» (KU 5: 229). This problem does not arise in the closely related case of the moral feeling of respect, because there Kant claims that this feeling is produced or «self-wrought» by reason (GMS 4: 401n), or by the immediate determination of the will by the moral law (KpV 5: 71), but not that it reveals the moral law to us, or has the moral law as conceptual content. Merritt provides an extensive discussion of the similarities and differences between the feelings of the sublime and of respect at pp. 52-61. But I did not find her to clearly raise, *a fortiori* to answer the question of how the feeling of the sublime in either of

its form is supposed to reveal anything like a determinate message about our capacity for morality. She does say that

The idea is not that one would need to have grasped the supersensible principle of one's rational nature explicitly [in the experience of the sublime], *in abstracto*, but rather that one must have grasped it concretely, in knowing what to do and how to live. This involves cultivating the readiness to be *moved* by one's recognition of what morality requires of one, situation by situation. (p. 42)

The second of these sentences certainly chimes with Kant's claim, in the General Remark following the Analytics of the Beautiful and the Sublime, that while the experience of «the beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, without interest», that of the sublime prepares us «to esteem» something, «even contrary to our sensible interest» (KU 5: 267). But these remarks still do not tell us what it means for non-cognitive, non-conceptual feelings to bear determinate meaning.

One possibility to consider here is that we might actually sidestep this question. For Kant's claim is that *free* beauties, the objects of *pure* judgments of taste, do not involve the subsumption of their objects under any determinate concepts and do not have any content that bears conceptual interpretation, *but he does not claim that the objects in nature that trigger our experiences of the sublime are in any sense free or that our judgments about sublimity are in any sense pure*. In fact, the overall structure of Kant's exposition in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment is that he discusses the *simplest* cases of aesthetic judgments and their objects in §§1-15 of the Analytic of the Beautiful, and then from §16 onward discusses more complex cases, in which the free play of our cognitive powers, in the first instance those of imagination and understanding, that has been identified as characteristic of our experience of free beauty becomes a *necessary condition* of but not the whole story about more complex aesthetic experiences that *can* involve concepts, but now concepts in some sort of free play *with* our perceptions of form, or for that matter formlessness, on the part of the imagination. We see this going on in Kant's account of «adherent beauty» in §16, in his account of the «ideal of beauty» in §17, where the beauty of the human form is taken as an expression of the unique moral potential of human beings, and then later in Kant's account of the beauty of «beautiful art»

(*schöne Kunst*, which perhaps should not be translated as seems most natural, namely «fine art», because that expression now connotes exclusively *visual art*), in which Kant claims that truly successful works of art, namely works of genius, *always* have content, namely *ideas of reason, moral ideas*, presented by aesthetic *means*, or by a play between the ideas and the forms and attributes of the work of art — what Kant calls «aesthetic ideas» The point is that on a full analysis of the whole range of aesthetic experiences, concepts, ideas, or content do *not* have to be excluded, as long as there is some form of free play between the form of the aesthetic object and its intellectual content. Perhaps the case of the sublime should be understood like this too, although the details would have to be worked out: that is, our experience of the sublime could have overt conceptual content, but yet we also feel or recognize that the expression of this content by vast or powerful natural objects is not law-governed or rule-driven, and thus is a form of play — even though there is also a way in which the experience of the sublime is serious while that of the beautiful is playful.

To be sure, one difference between works of artistic genius and the natural triggers of the experience of the sublime is that works of art are (at least semi-) intentional works of human artificers⁸, and are expressions of their ideas and of the free play in their minds, whereas we do not regard natural objects as artifacts of a divine artificer — or at least Kant does not suppose that thinking of nature as the product of God is part of our aesthetic experience, although Moses Mendelssohn, from whom, as Merritt points out, Kant learned so much, does. In fact, Kant does say, immediately following his account of the character of artistic genius, that «Beauty (whether it be beauty of nature or of art) can in general be called the **expression** of aesthetic ideas» (KU 5: 320). Obviously Kant does not think that natural objects, beautiful or otherwise, are actually the articulate expressions of some superhuman mind, and neither do most of us post-Berkeleyans. But perhaps the way to make sense of this remark is to suppose Kant does think, as indeed seems to be true, that we human beings naturally and typically *read significance into natural objects* — that what John Ruskin called the «pathetic fallacy»,

⁸ I say ‘semi-intentional’ because Kant considers works of genius ‘gifts of nature’ insofar as they exceed anything the artist determinately intends; see KU §46, 5:307-8.

reading emotions into natural objects as opposed to describing our emotions in response to them (see Ruskin 1856), or some intellectual version of that, might be a fallacy literally speaking, but is nevertheless a natural human disposition. It would then be natural for us to read moral significance into our emotions before immense and powerful natural objects even if those objects do not literally have any such meaning, and further it would be morally appropriate for us to build upon that disposition, as we build upon other «aesthetic preconditions of the mind's susceptibility to concepts of duty» (MM, Doctrine of Virtue, Introduction, section XII, 6:399) in order to accomplish our moral goals with the means that nature affords us. And this would make sense of Kant's remark in §29 of the exposition of the dynamical sublime, in apparent contrast to his claim in the following General Remark that the experience of the sublime *prepares* us to love something contrary to our sensible interest, that «The disposition of the mind to the feeling of the sublime *requires* its receptivity to ideas» (KU 5: 265), or seems to *presuppose* some degree of moral literacy (which Kant does suppose we do all have). We would already have to have some idea of our capacity for freedom and potential for virtue in order to read it back into our experience of nature. Maybe Kant imagines a sort of feedback loop, in which we have to have some degree of moral cognition in order to read moral content into our experience of sublime nature, but that natural tendency can then in turn reinforce our natural disposition to be moral (and help us combat our equally natural disposition toward self-love; see *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Part One).

All of this is to say that some exploration of Kant's theory of genius and art could have helped Merritt's project, at least as much as her useful comparison of the feelings of the sublime and of respect. But she already accomplished so much in her brief text of 79 pages that this should not be taken as a criticism, just as an example of the stimulation I experienced from her work.

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Merritt's *The Sublime* provides a comprehensive reconstruction and critical analysis of the context in which Kant's notion of sublimity has arisen and developed. Written with outstanding clarity, this contribution to the Cambridge Elements series not only offers a consistent and insightful reading of some key paragraphs from the third *Critique*, but also locates them within a broader historical horizon, tracking the notion of the sublime throughout different philosophical traditions.

A relevant distinctive mark of this project is indeed the reference to the Stoic doctrines of virtue and the related problem of the affective balance required in order to make the soul receptive towards the good. This is far more than a way to achieve historical and conceptual completeness when accounting for the source of Kant's views, for it rather mirrors Merritt's more general interpretive aim. As the Prologue has it, in order to make full sense of the Kantian sublime, we have to appreciate and account for its moral source, namely the bond between aesthetic feeling and moral value: the way in which a pure judgment of reflection is able to bring to the fore what one may call the power of pure practical reason.

I take this to be one of the main merits of *The Sublime*. The very reason why the sublime belongs in the third *Critique* is not just its aesthetic character per se, but rather also the fact that the sublime – analogously to the beautiful – is an instance of the tool Kant ends up appealing to in order to bridge the gap between nature and freedom: the reflecting power of judgment. Merritt frames the whole view through these lens. The moral background and presuppositions behind this element of Kant's aesthetic are the *Leitfaden* guiding us through Kant's texts and the issues they raise.

In general, one might say that Merritt's book shows how the sublime makes sense of Kant's moral-teleological understanding of the vocation of the human being. The human being's existence «contains the highest end itself, to which, as far as he is capable, he can subject the whole of nature, or against which at least he need not hold himself to be subjected by any influence of nature» (KU 5: 435). The experience of the sublime gives us a privileged access to one of the most fundamental traits of human nature, as

the human being is capable of freedom and an end-in-itself. In the experience of the sublime, nature is in a way subjected to a power reaching further than any possible displays of its forces. Analogously, our inability to grasp (imaginatively) the greatness and might of nature by no means leads nature to overtake and humiliate the faculty of pure reason. Quite the opposite, reason's reaction, in its two lawful employments (the theoretical and the practical) is – so to speak – to perform the fullest extent of its joint powers and point to the ultimately moral vocation of the human being.

In what follows, I would like to share some remarks concerning two topics that exemplarily follow from Merritt's overall interpretive scheme: 1) the distinction and unification of the mathematical with the dynamical sublime; 2) the status of the feeling of respect at stake in the experience of the sublime. These remarks are meant to foster the discussion and try to better understand: 1) how exactly we should understand the unity of the sublime; and 2) how exactly we should qualify the feeling of respect for natural sublimity.

As for topic 1), let me first sum up briefly Merritt's statements. At pp. 33-34 Merritt orients herself towards a unified understanding of mathematical and dynamical sublimity. Since sublimity in general depends on the development of one's capacity for moral feeling, then Kant's twofold account is not meant to set out a clear-cut distinction between two autonomous or mutually exclusive ways to experience the sublime. The challenge is to a reading according to which natural sublimity should be identified in a strict and univocal way, either in terms of the mathematical sublime or in terms of the dynamical sublime. Contrarily to this view, Merritt claims that both instances are equally close to «the subject's background commitment to moral ends» (p. 34). This is strengthened at p. 39, where Merritt mentions a sort of transition from greatness related to size to greatness related to value. The common root or, more precisely, the vanishing point where the mathematical and dynamical sublime converge is the notion of the human *Bestimmung*: our ultimately moral destination (or vocation). Drawing from § 27 in the third *Critique*, Merritt rightly observes that Kant relates respect to «natural sublimity tout court» (p. 46), and by no means limits this claim to either the mathematical or dynamical sublime.

This view is not only consistent, but it also makes perfect sense of the reason why the sublime, in a peculiar way, bridges the gap between nature and freedom. It goes without saying that a non-properly moral understanding of the mathematical sublime – whereas the dynamical sublime would be the only one relating to practical reason – would make the former unable to uncover the path of the moral destination of human nature.

This being said, however, I also think this view compels us to deal with another distinction – one that Merritt addresses at pp. 39-40 – which might be in tension with a unified understanding of the sublime in general. Let me quote a passage from *The Sublime*:

The appreciation of mathematical sublimity relates a sensible representation to reason in its role in theoretical cognition, whereas the appreciation of dynamical sublimity relates a sensible representation to reason in its role as the higher ‘faculty of desire’ (KU 5:247) – i.e., to reason in its role as the determining ground of the will in practical cognition. Thus, the distinction between mathematical and dynamical sublimity tracks the distinction between the theoretical and the practical employment of reason.

Two remarks. The first is that this rendering of the distinction between the theoretical and practical employment of reason might not serve well the idea that, in the end, the experience of the sublime can be unified. The second is that the distinction between the theoretical and the practical standpoint here seems to be, so to speak, horizontal; that is, to rely on some kind of bifurcation of the faculty of pure reason.

My question would be: does the sublime not – according to the unified mathematical-dynamical view – require us to understand the distinction between the theoretical and the practical employment of reason in more hierarchical-systematic terms? If it is true – and I think Merritt is right in pursuing this path – that both instances of the sublime ultimately refer to the moral standpoint, then we could frame the mathematical sublime as relating not only to the theoretical employment, but also to the practical. Said differently, it is by relying on Merritt’s insights that we could go beyond the parallelism between, on the one hand, mathematical sublime-theoretical reason and, on the other hand, dynamical sublime-practical reason. In these terms, the sublime also accounts for the primacy of pure practical reason – in its connection with the theoretical employment – in a very peculiar

way: one that makes full sense of its role in bridging the gap between nature and freedom.

The view that the theoretical employment points to pure reason's ability to conceive of the unconditioned – thereby counterbalancing nature's greatness and remedying the imagination's inability to grasp it – might then be understood not in terms of a merely speculative unconditioned to be distinguished from the practical, but rather as already pointing to freedom as an unconditioned form of causality. The latter, in turn, is key to the moral vocation of the human being: one that can subject nature to its demands, namely one that nature cannot subject – whatever the greatness and might of its phenomenal displays. I think this is in line with the idea that it is not just a matter of grasping, in a merely abstract way, «the supersensible principle of one's rational nature». Rather, this principle is to be grasped concretely by knowing «what to do» and being ready «to be *moved* by one's recognition of what morality requires of one» (p.42).

All of this is not meant as a criticism. The aim is to understand better the implications of a unified account of the mathematical and the dynamical sublime. If the former already involves the faculty of practical reason, then the general taxonomy of the sublime in its relation to reason's employments may ought to be revised and so to say re-oriented according to the primacy of practical reason – whereby this primacy is not just *over* the theoretical employment but, as Kant says, in its connection with the latter. The sublime would then show not only the superiority of reason over nature, but also qualify this superiority in terms of the primacy of reason's practical employment in general.

Concerning the second issue, the status of the feeling of respect at stake in the experience of the sublime, I would ask Merritt whether a third option – beyond admiration directed to things on the one hand, and true respect only directed to persons on the other hand – might represent a suitable candidate for the feeling for natural sublimity. Before addressing my remarks, let me first sum up briefly Merritt's views in section 4: *Varieties of Sublime Feeling*.

In line with the moral perspective that innervates the whole study, Merritt interestingly begins her analysis by discussing respect in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The aim is to show that the moral feeling of respect, flowing from ends freely set to

oneself and the recognition of the moral law as the principle of personality, is essentially always directed to persons, exclusively. This is relevant in order to understand the feeling of respect at stake in the experience of the sublime. Merritt shows that, since admiration (*Bewunderung*) is 1) directed to things and 2) non-exhortative, as it does not compel to acting in a certain way, this feeling is «a more suitable candidate for the feeling for natural sublimity than respect» (p. 59). Moreover, since the good is an object of interest to the faculty of desire, while the sublime relies on a reflecting and disinterested kind of judgment, mere admiration seems to fit better than respect within the scope of contemplation. According to Merritt, Kant is looking for a middle point between two poles:

Kant wants to suggest that our interest in morality accounts for the richness, and direction, of our enjoyment of natural sublimity; but he also wants to keep any determinate moral commitments running in the background, making the aesthetic judgement possible, but not taking part in it as such. (p. 60)

How is this problem to be solved? Merritt brings Mendelssohn's distinction between astonishment and admiration into play in order to show that, while Kant endorses this distinction, at the same time he cannot endorse Mendelssohn's understanding of admiration. Further discussion follows in section 5, devoted to *The Stoic Sources of the Kantian Sublime*. The Kant-Mendelssohn controversy diverges on this point: while the latter ultimately relates admiration to «the perfection of divine agency», the former argues that satisfaction properly lies «in the arousal of *practical* reason» and the related «commitment to *one's own* agency» (p. 76).

With this, Merritt somehow closes the circle. The aim of the book is to make sense of the moral root of the experience of the sublime, and it is exactly with the sublime disclosing a peculiar enjoyment for one's own moral personality that the book reaches its conclusion. Analogously to the issue of the unity of the mathematical and the dynamical sublime, in this case I also take Merritt's arguments to be convincing, precise, historically informed and well structured.

Here my question concerns respect in terms of self-respect, or «respect for our own vocation» (KU 5: 257). It is true that moral respect is directed to persons – while the sublime mainly

seems to involve admiration directed to nature. However, it is also true, as Merritt herself notices, that the sublime ends up disclosing an enjoyment for the moral law as the principle of personality (see p. 57). Though I cannot properly respect the greatness and might of nature in the same way I owe respect to a person, as I instead *merely* admire them, this does not undermine the view that what I feel upon the arousal of practical reason can be accounted for as a form of respect for my own person. As a person, I recognize and respect myself as a being able to set ends freely, a being able to perform duties and act according to the moral law. The path the sublime discloses leads us to freedom as an unconditioned form of causality that can subject nature to its own demands – without being subjected to nature’s greatness or might.

Admiration might not be enough. Analogously, the moral respect at stake in the second *Critique* might be bounded too tightly to the interest in the good to be legitimately brought in a reflecting kind of judgment. Yet natural sublimity, according to Kant, is a way to freedom and not a way to admire nature. In acknowledging freedom – by feeling pure practical reason’s power to counterbalance nature’s greatness and might – I feel the vocation of the human being as something I owe respect to. A form of respect I owe to myself. Moreover, this respect immediately takes on an intersubjective scope, for this vocation – and the respect I owe to it – is not just mine. All human beings – namely persons able to perform duties according to the moral law – share this status, for this is actually what human nature consists of.

The latter point fits perfectly with Kant’s account of a disinterested judgment of reflection. There is neither a cognitive nor a practical interest in the feeling of the sublime, rather only a practical orientation of this very feeling towards the rational sources of morality. I think this might leave room open for a disinterested judgement of reflection aiming at no moral good while being, at the same time, an emotional experience of the fundamental condition of the good: freedom.

It remains true that admiration is non-exhortative, while respect for the moral law is essentially bound to the demands of practical reason. Self-respect, however, seems to be exhortative in a non-normative way. The experience of the sublime makes me hear, from within, the call of practical reason and the power of freedom – the distinctive marks of the human being’s vocation. Here as we have no determined good as an object of interest, then

the disinterestedness of the reflecting judgment is not undermined. At the same time, we have some sort of exhortative call from the faculty endowed with the power to resist nature's greatness and might: freedom as the condition of moral agency.

I would like to conclude my comments by highlighting one last relevant point that Merritt's *The Sublime* meritoriously brings to our attention. One of the achievements of this study is that it leads us to understand the vocational nature of the human being. When dealing with human nature it is basically unavoidable to look for some sort of essence and identify its key fundamental features. Human nature would then consist, roughly put, of sensible drives shared with other animal species, Anthropological dispositions leading to different characters, rational means, and freedom. Yet it is relatively easy to notice that human nature is the sole nature among the scope of living creatures to have not only a faculty of reason making science possible, but also and most fundamentally, a vocation. The reason why we are teleologically oriented towards morality is freedom, and this might lead to a more dynamic understanding of human nature. True, the question *What is the human being?* can still be raised legitimately, yet all possible answers also require us to understand how the human being is fulfilling its moral vocation. I think that the way Merritt deals with the Kantian sublime shows how relevant is the moral standpoint in order to make full sense not just of Kant's ethics (or aesthetics), but rather of his overall understanding of human nature. Human nature cannot be investigated according to the same tenets of our investigation into nature in the broader sense, for human nature is human because of freedom – and the latter is no nature.

As she is approaching the conclusion of the book, Merritt writes that Kant explains the sublime «as an enjoyment that draws from the satisfaction of reason, and thereby stands to gather strength the more that it is sustained» (p. 76). As the first *Critique* taught us as early as in 1781, reason's satisfaction depends on its own systematic unity. This means that, if the experience of the sublime involves some kind of satisfaction for reason, then it is because of its peculiar way to contribute, as it were, to reason's systematic unity by intertwining nature and freedom: the sublime displays freedom's arousal from practical reason's reaction to nature's greatness and might. To Merritt's statement that the enjoyment in the sublime gathers «strength the

more that it is sustained», I would then add that it also gathers more strength than it is spent when attempting at the imaginative grasp of nature's greatness and might. This sort of emotional surplus, in turn, fuels the (indirect) enlivenment of the faculties and raises the moral vocation of the human being on the highest standpoint, whereby our awareness of our own teleological-moral vocation is also the awareness of our power to (at least, try to) conform the world we live in to the realm of pure ends. Our being, as it were, is a nature that is capable of freedom.

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Raging seas, threatening cliffs, violent volcanoes, lofty waterfalls, the starry heavens: these are familiar examples that Kant cites in his theory of the sublime. However, also central to his theory of the sublime is the claim that, «we express ourselves on the whole incorrectly if we call some **object of nature** sublime... for what is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form» (KU 5: 245). This is rather puzzling: how can the sublime involve an aesthetic experience of objects that are not properly sublime?

In *The Sublime* Melissa Merritt offers an illuminating interpretation of Kant's answer to this question, which turns on appreciating the moral foundations of his aesthetic theory of the sublime. To this end, Merritt argues that, for Kant, what is 'properly sublime' is «the human calling (*Bestimmung*) to perfect our rational capacity according to the standard of virtue» (p. 1). And she claims that, on his view, an aesthetic experience of incredibly large or powerful objects in nature «resonates with» this calling (p. 50). In developing this reading, Merritt sheds light on the moral commitments that orient and unify Kant's treatment of the mathematically and dynamically sublime (§3), as well as on the distinctive type of feeling («admiration», rather than «respect») that the sublime involves (§4).

Merritt, moreover, bookends her reading of Kant's texts with a productive discussion of the ancient and modern context of his theory. She begins (§2) by arguing that Kant's view should be understood against two modern backdrops: first, the «reflective turn» in the Anglophone tradition, according to which the sublime «allows us to revel in something about our own minds that is ordinarily hidden» (p. 9), and, second, the linking of sublimity as «absolute greatness» to the moral perfection of virtue in the German rationalist tradition. And she concludes (§5) by meditating on the Stoic sources of Kant's (and Mendelssohn's) morally inflected account of the sublime and the oft-cited example of the starry heavens.

Merritt accomplishes a great deal in this slim volume. She offers insight into the context, content, and philosophical stakes of Kant's theory of the sublime. And she does so in a way that is accessible and deft.

In what follows, I consider the potential implications that Merritt's interpretation has for how we should understand the role of sensibility in Kant's account of the sublime. In particular, I explore the possibility that her reading points toward a Kantian commitment to the sublime resonating not just with our calling to perfect our rational capacities, but also with our calling to perfect our sensible, and, more specifically, imaginative capacities. And I suggest that this might clarify why Kant thinks we should pursue the sublime.

On Merritt's interpretation, sensibility figures in largely negative terms in an experience of the sublime on Kant's account. In this vein she claims that, for Kant, the sublime involves «a palpable recognition of the limits of our sensible capacities» and it «challenges our resources as *sensible* beings» (pp. 38, 50). And she traces the «disagreeable aversion» we feel in relation to the sublime back to this recognition of our sensible limitations (p. 31). Merritt, in turn, attributes to Kant the view that the positive aspects of an experience of the sublime are rational in orientation: the sublime «resonates with – indeed, even ‘promotes’... – our calling as essentially *rational* beings» (p. 50). *Per* Merritt, it is in virtue of this resonance with our rational calling that Kant thinks we enjoy the sublime:

this pleasurable *feeling*... concerns the ‘purposiveness’ of the sensible representation for one’s own cognitive powers – and specifically for reason..., we like the sensible particular with some sense of its being ‘for’ us, as rational beings (p. 40).

While there can be little doubt that Kant is committed to the sublime resonating with and promoting us as rational beings, what I want to explore is the possibility that it resonates with and promotes us as beings who are not just rational, but rational and sensible. More specifically, I want to explore the possibility that they resonate with the imaginative part of our sensibility. Merritt nods at the idea that the sublime might «‘enlarge’ the imagination» in a footnote, but she sets this aside as taking her too far afield into other aspects of Kant's aesthetic theory (p. 32, n. 63). But what I shall propose is that Merritt's own interpretation gives us reason to think that the imagination is, indeed, enlarged in our experience of the sublime.

As I have discussed, according to Merritt's reading of Kant, the sublime invokes «the human calling (*Bestimmung*) to perfect

our rational capacity according to the standard of virtue» (p. 1). In clarifying what this calling amounts to for Kant, Merritt distinguishes between two duties of self-perfection: the «basic» duty of «cultivating one's cognitive capacities» and the «ultimate» duty of «cultivating one's *will*» (p. 44). Though Merritt often focuses on the latter duty, I shall focus on the former. And my proposal is that, for Kant, part of the way in which the sublime resonates with this duty is by 'calling on' us to cultivate our imagination in an elevated way.

Perhaps the first point to make is that, as Merritt emphasizes, Kant's aesthetics turns, in part, on the idea that our liking for the beautiful and the sublime «draw[s] from what is necessarily constitutive of us inasmuch as we possess a cognitive capacity at all» (p. 29). In analyzing this claim, Merritt tends to emphasize our cognitive capacities that are conceptual in nature: «Kant describes the distinctive liking as a satisfaction in the amenability of the singular representation to 'the **faculty of concepts** of the understanding or of reason, as promoting' it (KU 5: 244)» (p. 29). However, in this context, Kant does not just highlight our conceptual cognitive capacities. He claims that our satisfaction in the beautiful and sublime turns on the involvement of another cognitive capacity, the imagination: «the imagination is considered, in the case of a given intuition, to be in accord with the **faculty of concepts** of the understanding or of reason, as promoting the latter» (KU 5: 244). Here, Kant indicates that our satisfaction in the beautiful and sublime turns on a representation being amenable to a certain positive interaction between our imaginative and conceptual cognitive capacities.

In the context of the beautiful, this commitment manifests in Kant's account of the «free play» between imagination and understanding being the source of our pleasure in the beautiful (KU §9). Matters are more complex in the context of the sublime, where Kant indicates that the relevant «play» is a «harmonious» «conflict» between imagination and reason (KU 5: 259). As I understand Merritt's line, this harmonious conflict amounts to relationship in which the «assault on imagination invigorates reason» (p. 32, n. 63). But my suggestion is that Merritt's interpretation, in fact, points to a way in which Kant thinks our imagination is elevated in its play with reason in relation to the sublime.

Recall Merritt's claim that part of our calling on Kant's view is the basic duty of cultivating our cognitive capacities. In her discussion of this duty, Merritt again highlights our conceptual cognitive capacities (see p. 44; p. 48, n. 81). However, insofar as Kant also designates our imagination as a cognitive capacity, it seems that our calling demands that we cultivate our imagination as well. And, indeed, as Merritt notes, in his discussion of the mathematically sublime, Kant claims that the sublime «arouses efforts of imagination whereby it 'demonstrates its limits and inadequacy, but at the same time its vocation [*Bestimmung*] for adequately realizing that ideas as a law» (KU 5: 257)» (p. 46). Merritt reads this passage as suggesting that in our encounter with the mathematically sublime, «one recognizes both the imperative (the 'law') and the inadequacy of one's capacity to attain it» (p. 46). However, if this is the case, then it seems that we imaginatively learn a rather pessimistic lesson in relation to the sublime: we are not imaginatively adequate to live up to reason's calling and, hence, cannot fulfill our duty to cultivate all of our cognitive capacities in accordance with this calling. There is, however, another more optimistic way of reading this passage, according to which although a certain exercise of imagination in relation to the sublime will be inadequate, there is some other exercise of our imagination that is adequate to this calling.

Here are a couple of exercises in which our imagination might be adequate to this calling that I take to be broadly consistent with Merritt's reading. The first would be an exercise internal to our encounter with the sublime. In her discussion of the dynamically sublime, Merritt notes that although no object in nature can be absolutely great, «what is sensibly present must *figure as* absolutely great» (p. 39). In the case of the mathematically sublime, Merritt suggests that «a sensible presentation figures as absolutely great when one cannot hold it together as a whole, in a single intuition» (p. 39). But what mental activity makes this figuring possible? It is certainly tempting to think it is some sort of imaginative activity. Kant, after all, describes imagination as responsible for «figurative» synthesis (KrV B151). And he accords to imagination a «symbolic or *figurative*» use (Anth 7: 191). Though the details would surely need to be filled out, one idea that might be consistent with Merritt's reading is that although in an encounter with the sublime our imagination is assaulted in its literal exercise in

relation to the sublime, it is elevated in a figurative or symbolic exercise in which it represents a natural object 'as if' absolutely great in a way that serves reason.

In addition to this use internal to an experience of the sublime, we might also cultivate an imaginative disposition to respond to the sublime in a way that is adequate to our calling. According to Merritt, «a person's readiness to appreciate natural sublimity depends, on Kant's view, on a background commitment to essentially moral ends» (p. 51). It seems that this readiness might, in part, involve an imaginative disposition to aesthetically respond to the relevant natural objects. According to Kant, our aesthetic engagement with the sublime requires that we imaginatively take up an object. However, given how immense natural objects 'assault' the imagination, it seems have reason to imaginatively close ourselves off from them. We might refuse to put ourselves in situations where such objects appear, and when they do appear, we might refuse to apprehend them. From the imaginative point of view, being open to aesthetically engaging with such objects thus seems to require some effort. However, as Merritt has argued, this effort is something that serves us as rational beings. Insofar as this is the case, a second way in which we might imaginatively respond to our calling is by cultivating an imaginative disposition of aesthetic openness to the sublime.

Regardless of how the details are spelled out, my basic proposal is that Merritt's emphasis on the role that our calling plays vis-à-vis the sublime on Kant's account paves the way to recognizing an elevated exercise of imagination in service of reason in this aesthetic context. Our encounter with the sublime, I am suggesting, provides a venue in which we, in accordance with our 'basic' duty to self-perfection, can cultivate this cognitive capacity, as we discover in addition to a literal use of our imagination which is stymied, an aesthetic use of imagination in service of reason that is promoted. Indeed, one might think that it is only appropriate that the aesthetic, as a space of contemplation and reflection, is a space for us to cultivate our imagination in a way that is not available to us in the ordinary course of events.

One potential advantage of this proposal is that it helps clarify why we should engage with the sublime. If the only aspect of ourselves that benefits from engagement with the sublime is reason, then one is left wondering why we need to go through this aesthetic route. Doesn't reason already attune us to our calling?

Why aesthetically seek out the feeling of admiration in the sublime, when this is a mere «analogue» of the feeling of respect that we can experience more directly through the effect of reason (p. 52)? If, however, the sublime is something that promotes both reason and imagination, then it makes sense why we should engage with the sublime. Whereas the feeling of respect is something that humiliates sensibility, our aesthetic engagement with the sublime offers us an opportunity to cultivate sensibility in accordance with reason through our imagination. If this is right, then it is in virtue of affording us this distinctive opportunity that we have reason to pursue the sublime.

To summarize, when we follow Merritt's interpretation of the sublime as something that resonates with our vocation to its conclusion, then we should be wary of an overly 'rationalist' view, according to which we are only called to cultivate our conceptual or rational capacities. Insofar as this calling is 'the human calling', it is a calling to cultivate ourselves as creatures who are at once rational and sensible. And instead of thinking that the only way to cultivate sensibility is by humiliating or disciplining it, I have suggested at least one kind of cultivation that involves an elevation of sensibility: an aesthetic cultivation of our imagination to serve reason in the face of the sublime. This, at least, is one possibility among many others that Merritt's insightful reading of Kant's theory of the sublime inspires.

Replies to commentators
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I would like to begin by thanking Donald Ainslie, Luigi Filieri, Paul Guyer, Samantha Matherne, and Rachel Zuckert, for their rich and incisive discussions of my monograph *The Sublime*, which I wrote for a Cambridge University Press series (Elements in The Philosophy of Immanuel Kant). I would also like to thank Giulia Milli for organising the symposium, giving me this wonderful opportunity to think through some challenging queries both about the interpretation, and the philosophical merits, of Kant's conception of the sublime.

Donald Ainslie is convinced by my interpretive claims about the moral source of the Kantian sublime, but presses me on the value of Kant's account. As Ainslie sees it, Kant supposes that morality is something that «looms over» us, vaguely menacing and yet perhaps unaccountably attractive at the same time: its sublimity lies in this strange mixture. In sketching this picture, Ainslie gestures to Kant's account of respect in the second *Critique*, where he talks about the moral law's «humiliation» of the claims of physical self-love. But that remark about humiliation (*Demütigung*) is only one moment in a developmental progression that would lead — if a human being develops as she should — to *humility* (*Demut*), a glad disposition to compare oneself to the normative standard of virtue that is thought through the moral law. Humility is a developed attraction to that standard, without forgetting one's distance from it. Notably, Kant calls humility itself «a sublime state of mind» (*eine erhabene Gemütsstimmung*, KU 5: 264). I bring this up because Ainslie contrasts the Kantian view of morality as «sublime» with the Humean view of morality as «mundane». Yet for Kant, true sublimity of mind is mundane in some sense. The image one might bring to mind is someone gazing out at the starry heavens with both feet rooted firmly on the ground. As Kant wrote in his own notes: «We can see other worlds in the distance, but gravity forces us to remain on the earth; we can see other perfections in the spirits above us, but our nature forces us to remain human beings» (20: 153). Admittedly, this is not «mundane» in quite the sense that Ainslie has in mind, but it is not an enthusiastic flight into the supersensible, either.

Ainslie's fundamental question is sceptical: why should we take morality to be sublime at all? I am sympathetic to the question. My reply in this context can only sketch why Kant thinks of morality in these terms. Kant's most distinctive contribution to the history of ethics is a conception of morality as rational autonomy. Kant also thinks that ordinary moral thinking tacitly grasps the ethics of autonomy, in the recognition of the unconditional goodness of a good will.⁹ Further, Kant argues that the ethics of autonomy requires a metaphysical commitment to two distinct orders of being — domains of nature and freedom, each governed by its own law. For Kant, the sublimity of morality is effectively a consequence of this conception of morality as it pertains to the human being. The human being belongs both to the domain of nature, as a living thing, and to the domain of freedom, as person. *Sublime* is an adjective derived from verbs for *raise* or *lift up*: we are called to raise ourselves to a standard of rational personhood as living human beings.

A broad thesis in the book is that Kant's account of our appreciation of natural sublimity is rooted in his views about the sublimity of morality. The remainder of my replies will address questions about that thesis.

Rachel Zuckert lodges a worry about what she calls «theoretical displacement» in Kant's account of our appreciation of natural sublimity: that is, «on theoretical grounds, we must take our experience to be other than it appears to be, perhaps about something that is not even present in the experience». For on my interpretation, our appreciation of the vast and mighty in nature stands in for an appreciation of the supersensible personality in ourselves — or more particularly, our calling to develop towards the normative standard of such personality, i.e. virtue. To set up the worry about displacement, Zuckert observes that the reflective judgment by which we appreciate the sublimity of nature should be contemplative, and disinterested, by Kant's lights. Now, suppose we are held rapt at the precipice of the Grand Canyon. What exactly are we contemplating here? On my interpretation, it would seem that we are somehow contemplating our own supersensible personality. What sense, really, can be

⁹ Famously invoked as the starting point of his argument in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (4:393).

made of the suggestion that we are contemplating something that cannot even be there (or anywhere)?

I take this to be an important objection to Kant's third-*Critique* theory of aesthetic judgments of the sublime¹⁰. In this space, I will not try to address the philosophical complaint about Kant's view directly, but will simply try to elaborate further on my interpretation — in the effort to clarify it in ways that may allow for an indirect response to Zuckert's worries about displacement. In connection, let me adduce a relevant interpretive concern raised by Paul Guyer. On my account, it would seem that the aesthetic judgment of natural sublimity must have *content*, if what we are really appreciating is our «sublime» vocation as essentially rational animals; yet at the same time, it is unclear how the judgment could have such content, since an aesthetic judgment of reflection is not supposed to involve concepts. As Guyer puts it: «what does it mean for *feeling* to reveal determinate content, such as that of the cultivation of virtue, when Kant begins his entire discussion of aesthetic experience and judgment with the *contrast* between feeling and cognition»?

In the book, I aimed to avoid this sort of objection by invoking a distinction between what we might call the *foreground* and the *background* of consciousness — a distinction, moreover, that we find Kant deploying in the early sections of the *Anthpology* (see Merritt and Valaris 2017, and Merritt 2018, 81-112). Let us return to our example. You're looking out into the Grand Canyon. You're held rapt by its vastness, absorbed by the seemingly endless layers of sediment in the rock. You have a sensible presentation of its particular vastness and so forth, which you struggle to comprehend in one view. This effort and failure gives you a feeling of alienation, of not-being-at-home in nature. Now, Kant is quite clear that our capacity to enjoy natural sublimity requires culture (*Kultur*): it requires a certain development with moral ideas, which is packed into a one's character. Owing to such development, the Grand Canyon *holds your attention*, and does so in a *particular way*. You appreciate the vastness of time sensibly manifest in the layers of rock stretching out all around you, and down into the basin below; you feel your own vanishing smallness, as if swallowed by these layers of time. Then, what was

¹⁰ As I note in the book, a version of this objection is nicely developed in Cochrane 2012.

in the background surfaces in the foreground. Kant claims that the recognition of our physical insignificance brings to light «a capacity for estimating ourselves as independent of» nature, indeed «a self-preservation of quite another kind than that which can be threatened and endangered by nature outside of us» (KU 5: 261-2). Our enjoyment of natural sublimity brings to mind that our own personhood is something to preserve, or look after. Such an orientation of mind must of course draw upon a determinate concept of the good. This concept and any other relevant moral ideas figure in the background of the aesthetic judgment of natural sublimity: they are among the resources that make this appreciation possible. But while these ideas may be brought *to mind* by one's appreciation of natural sublimity, they are not themselves *in mind* in that aesthetic experience.

If we can let that stand as a reply to Guyer's interpretive query, we may return to Zuckert's concerns about displacement, which are rooted in complaints from J.G. Herder about the implicit arrogance, or self-marvelling, in the Kantian conception of the sublime (see Zuckert 2003). I am myself sympathetic to such concerns. However, I offer the following in Kant's defence. Herder complains that what we admire is ourselves, not nature, in our appreciation of natural sublimity. But in fact what we fundamentally admire — *bewundern* — on Kant's account is the constitution of the human being, a rational animal who yet can be *so moved* as to regard well-being and even life itself as trivial when their demands conflict with the requirements of morality.¹¹ I think it is fair to say that Kant finds the very idea of a «rational *natural* being» (see MS 6: 379) *prima facie* astonishing; and I also think that he supposes that this astonishment properly gives way to admiration, the «more steadily» one contemplates this constitution. What we are admiring here is a certain wisdom in the way we are set up: that as bad as we may be, we are nevertheless equipped with everything we need to make ourselves good.

Zuckert might then object that my elaboration only intensifies the problem of displacement: for craggy peaks and so forth are not to be admired on these terms. I take that to be a fair complaint about the curious status of the Analytic of the Sublime

¹¹ Two moral-pedagogical passages that evoke this object of *Bewunderung* most vividly are *Religion* (6:49) and *Metaphysics of Morals* (6:483).

in the third *Critique* as a «mere appendix» (KU 5: 246) to the work's central task of establishing the principle of the power of judgment. The principle of the power of judgment is the «purposiveness of nature» (*Zweckmäßigkeit der Natur*), which Kant explains as nature's suitability for the exercise and development of our cognitive capacities (see e.g. EE 20: 204, 20: 215, KU 5: 186). The content of this principle is effectively that we are *at home* in nature; but our appreciation of natural sublimity, at least on the terms of the Analytic of the Sublime in the third *Critique*, is instead one of alienation, of our *not* being at home in nature. Relatedly, the exemplars of natural sublimity in the Analytic of the Sublime are raw and disordered — craggy peaks, surging seas, and the like.

A large part of what is at stake in these issues is Kant's complex relation to Stoic philosophy, and neo-Stoicism in the German rationalist tradition (especially Moses Mendelssohn). Stoics take nature to be rationally governed, and wisely appointed down to its smallest detail; and indeed, Kant takes the sublimity of the starry heavens, as presented in the famous passage from the second *Critique* (KpV 5: 161-2), from this tradition. There is no *displacement* in the Stoic appreciation of natural sublimity, because Stoics suppose that nature *really is* rationally ordered; so when we appreciate wisdom in the way things are set up, we are admiring the right reason that governs the universe. Moreover, to enjoy natural sublimity can only be to feel oneself part of this wisely ordered whole: there is no other order of being, no domain of freedom distinct from the domain of nature.

Kant takes Stoic claims about the rational order of nature to be dogmatic and uncritical; at the same time, the third *Critique* aims to rehabilitate, in critically respectable terms, Stoic ideas about the rational order of nature in order to address a problem about the comprehension of philosophy in its «real part» (i.e. as a metaphysics of nature, and a metaphysics of morals) as a system (see EE 20: 195-196). Perhaps this explains why Kant no longer speaks of the starry heavens as «worlds upon worlds» (KpV 5: 162) in the third *Critique*, but rather as a disordered spray of stars (KU 5: 270): the third-*Critique* emphasis on the nature as raw and disordered (in the aesthetic appreciation of its sublimity) allows him to underscore that he has not lost sight of the ontological distinction between nature and freedom that is the absolute bedrock of Kantian philosophy.

Relatedly, Luigi Filieri presses me on the conclusions I draw from Kant's suggestion that admiration (*Bewunderung*) is directed to things, whereas respect (*Achtung*) can only be directed to persons (KpV 5: 76). In the book I took those remarks as grounds to denominate respect as the feeling for moral sublimity, and admiration as the feeling for natural sublimity. But this move no longer seems fully sound to me. Let me sketch how I now understand these taxonomic matters. Kant takes there to be a higher faculty of feeling, the expressions of which might reasonably be denominated modes of *respect*, in some broad sense. I take *respect* in this broad sense to be rationality's felt recognition of itself. Under this genus we could identify various modes of moral respect, all of which are rooted in the idea of respect for the moral law. Respect for the moral law is feeling that is internal to the recognition of what morality requires of one: it's a way of being *impressed* by the requirement as *implicating me*. Esteem respect is a certain way of feeling in the recognition of someone who, by all appearances, manifests the standard thought through the moral law: similarly, it's a way of being *impressed* by the practicability of that standard, as *implicating me*.¹² There are also non-moral modes of esteem respect, paid to another for exemplifying, through skill or talent, an exhortative standard in a domain of shared interests, or ends; I doubt such non-moral modes of respect should count as expressions of the higher faculty of feeling, but I am not prepared to take up the matter here.

Now, respect of any sort is exhortative; and admiration, as I explained in the book, is not. Admiration can of course be paid to persons as well as to things: to return to one of the book's examples, I *admire* Simone Biles for her gymnastic skill — while it would be absurd for me to *respect* her for it, since I do not share the relevant ends (I am no gymnast, and do not care to be).¹³ But Kant has something particular in mind, when he speaks of the admiration of nature. Most of the relevant passages have to do

¹² Recognition respect for persons as such is somewhat more complicated, and perhaps only contestably a mode of feeling, so I will set it aside here. See Darwall 2008.

¹³ There is more to say here: for someone else to serve as an exhortative standard for another, they must not only share the relevant ends, but they must be comparably resourced to pursue those ends. If I did suddenly take up gymnastics, it would remain absurd for me to *respect* Biles for her gymnastic skill.

with admiring nature when we are suddenly struck by some sign of its comprehensibility, or wise arrangement: the famous «starry heavens» passage (KpV 5: 161-2) is of this sort, but so are Kant's remarks about inquirers who are overcome with admiration at key moments of discovery (e.g., KU 5: 187, EE 20: 216, or Anth 7: 261). We can similarly track the way admiration figures in his discussion of the «intellectual interest» in the beautiful (KU 5: 301, 5: 482n) — a grateful gladness in the *existence* of natural beauties, as emblems of nature's creator. Admiration of this sort plainly belongs to the higher faculty of feeling (see especially Anth 7: 261). For the object of admiration in these passages is not mere nature, but apparent *creation*.

However, when we turn to the Analytic of the Sublime, we do not find admiration of nature figuring in this way. Here we could again adduce the difference between the presentation of the “starry heavens” in the second *Critique* — «worlds upon worlds» in fine intricacy — and its presentation in the third *Critique* as a disordered spray of stars. Admiration in Kant's usage fits the first sort of case but not the second. There is little suggestion that we *admire* nature for raw and rude disorder. Indeed, on closer inspection, Kant avoids assigning any name at all to the feeling for natural sublimity in the Analytic of the Sublime: he loosely likens it to «admiration or respect» (KU 5: 245) — and only just once, at the outset. Perhaps he means to identify it as a distinct feeling of its own, somewhere under the umbrella of the higher faculty of feeling.

Samantha Matherne takes up — and beautifully elaborates — an idea that I had relegated, far too hastily, to a footnote: namely, Jacques Lyotard's suggestions about the role of the aesthetic judgment of the sublime in «enlarging» the imagination. Rather than see that as an interpretive approach wholly unrelated to my own, Matherne shows how it might contribute to my views about the developmental significance of the aesthetic judgment concerning the sublime. More particularly, she returns to a point on which I lay some stress: namely, that nothing in nature can in fact *be* absolutely great — it can rather only *figure as* such, in its sensible presentation. And this *figuring as* is quite plausibly attributed to the imagination, as she suggests. One can readily see why it might be salutary to be able to see nature that way — and why this capacity would be developed as part of the broader development of reason in the human being. I am very

grateful for her suggestions, which help me appreciate better the greater interpretive and philosophical significance of the sublime for Kant.

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The following abbreviations, which track the German titles of Kant's works, are used:

Anth	<i>Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht</i>
EE	<i>Erste Einleitung in die Kritik der Urteilskraft</i>
GMS	<i>Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten</i>
KpV	<i>Kritik der praktischen Vernunft</i>
KrV	<i>Kritik der reinen Vernunft</i>
KU	<i>Kritik der Urteilskraft</i>
MS	<i>Die Metaphysik der Sitten</i>
V-Anth/Collins	<i>Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1772/1773 Collins</i>
V-	
Mo/Kaehler(Stark)	<i>Immanuel Kant: Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie (Hrsg. Von Werner Stark, Berlin/New York, 2004)</i>
V-Mo/Mron II	<i>Moral Mrongovius II</i>

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