

First Section

[2:207]

On the distinct objects of the feeling for the sublime and the beautiful

The different sentiments of gratification or vexation rest not so much on the constitution of the external things that arouse them as on the feeling, intrinsic to every person, of being touched by them with pleasure or displeasure. Hence arise the joys for some people in what is disgusting to others, the passion of a lover that is often a mystery to everyone else, or even the lively repugnance that one person feels¹ in that which is completely indifferent to another. The field for observations of these peculiarities of human nature is very extensive and still conceals a rich lode for discoveries that are as charming as they are instructive. For now I will cast my glance only on several places that seem especially to stand out in this region, and even on these more with the eye of an observer than of the philosopher.

Since a human being finds himself happy only insofar as he satisfies an inclination, the feeling that makes him capable of enjoying a great gratification without requiring exceptional talents is certainly no small matter. Stout persons, whose most inspired author is their cook, and whose works of fine taste are to be found in their cellar, get just as lively a joy from vulgarities and a crude joke as that of which persons of nobler sentiment are so proud. A comfortable man, who likes having books read aloud to him because that helps him fall asleep; the merchant to whom all gratifications seem ridiculous except for that which a clever man enjoys when he calculates his business profits; he who loves the opposite sex only insofar as he counts it among the things that are to be enjoyed; the lover of the hunt, whether he hunts fleas, like Domitian,² or wild beasts, like A—: all of these have a feeling which makes them capable of enjoying gratification after their fashion, without their having to envy others or even being able to form any concept of others; but for now I do not direct

[2:208]

¹ *empfindet*

² Domitian was Emperor of Rome from 81 to 96 CE. According to Suetonius, “[a]t the beginning of his reign he used to spend hours in seclusion every day, doing nothing but catch[ing] flies and stab[bing] them with a keenly sharpened stylus”; *The Lives of the Caesars*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, rev. edn London: Loeb Classical Library, 1930, Book VIII, vol. II, p. 345.

any attention to this. There is still a feeling of a finer sort, thus named either because one can enjoy it longer without surfeit and exhaustion, or because it presupposes, so to speak, a susceptibility of the soul which at the same time makes it fit for virtuous impulses, or because it is a sign of talents and excellences of the intellect; while by contrast the former can occur in complete thoughtlessness. It is this feeling one aspect of which I will consider. Yet I exclude here the inclination which is attached to lofty intellectual insights, and the charm of which a **Kepler** was capable when, as **Bayle** reports, he would not have sold one of his discoveries for a principedom.³ This sentiment is altogether too fine to belong in the present project, which will touch only upon the sensuous feeling of which more common souls are also capable.

The finer feeling that we will now consider is preeminently of two kinds: the feeling of the **sublime** and of the **beautiful**.⁴ Being touched by either is agreeable, but in very different ways. The sight of a mountain whose snow-covered peaks arise above the clouds, the description of a raging storm, or the depiction of the kingdom of hell by **Milton** arouses satisfaction, but with dread;⁵ by contrast, the prospect of meadows strewn

³ Pierre Bayle says of Kepler, “[w]e may place him among those authors, who have said, that they valued a production of a mind above a kingdom”; “Kepler,” in *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, trans. Pierre Des Maizeaux, 2nd edn, London: 1736, vol. III, pp. 659–60. The article on Kepler is not included in the modern volume of selections from Bayle edited by Richard Popkin (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1991).

⁴ The sublime, and the contrast between the beautiful and the sublime, were a constant theme in European letters after the republication of the ancient treatise *Peri hypsous*, falsely attributed to the rhetorician Dionysius Cassius Longinus (c. 213–73 CE), translated into English as early as 1652, and, famously, into French by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (*Traité du sublime*, Paris: 1674). The most famous work of the eighteenth century on the beautiful and the sublime was by Edmund Burke (*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, London: 1757; 2nd edn, 1759). Burke’s book became known in Germany via the 1758 review by Moses Mendelssohn, “Philosophische Untersuchung des Ursprungs unserer Ideen vom Erhabenen und Schönen,” *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften* 3.2. Kant would cite Burke several times in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, notably in the General Remark following § 29 (Academy Edition 5:277).

⁵ Virtually all of Book I of *Paradise Lost* offers a graphic description of the imagined terrors of hell. Some sample lines are:

The dismal situation waste and wild,
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end

with flowers, of valleys with winding brooks, covered with grazing herds, the description of Elysium,⁶ or **Homer's** depiction of the girdle of Venus⁷

Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed:
Such place eternal justice had prepared
For those rebellious, here their prison ordained
In utter darkness, and their portion set
As far removed from God and light of heaven
As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole.

(*Paradise Lost*, Book 1, lines 60–74;
John Milton, ed. Stephen Orgel and
Jonathan Goldberg, Oxford University
Press, 1991, p. 357)

⁶ Presumably Kant has in mind the description of Elysium that Virgil gives in the *Aeneid*, Book VI, beginning at line 853:

His duty to the goddess done, they came
To places of delight, to green park land,
Where souls take ease amid the Blessed Groves.
Wider expanses of high air endow
Each vista with a wealth of light

...

Within a fragrant laurel grove, where Po
Sprang up and took his course to the world above,
The broad stream flowing on amid the forest.
This was the company of those who suffered
Wounds in battle for their country; those
Who in their lives were holy men and chaste
Or worthy of Phoebus in prophetic song;
Or those who better life, by finding out
New truths and skills;

...

“None of us
Has one fixed home. We walk in shady groves
And bed on riverbanks and occupy
Green meadows fresh with streams . . .”

(Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald,
New York: Random House, 1981, Book VI,
lines 853–903, pp. 182–3)

⁷ Hera requested Aphrodite to help her reconcile the feuding Greeks and Trojans:

“But if words of mine could lure them back to love,
back to bed, to lock in each other’s arms once more

...

they would call me their honored, loving friend forever.”

Aphrodite, smiling her everlasting smile, replied,
“Impossible—worse, it’s *wrong* to deny your warm request,
since you are the one who lies in the arms of mighty Zeus.”

With that she loosed from her breasts the breastband,
pierced and alluring, with every kind of enchantment
woven through it . . . There is the heat of Love,

also occasion an agreeable sentiment, but one that is joyful and smiling. For the former to make its impression on us in its proper strength, we must have a **feeling** of the **sublime**, and in order properly to enjoy the latter we must have a **feeling** for the **beautiful**. Lofty oaks and lonely shadows in sacred groves are **sublime**, flowerbeds, low hedges, and trees trimmed into figures are **beautiful**. The night is **sublime**, the day is **beautiful**. Casts of mind that possess a feeling for the sublime are gradually drawn into lofty sentiments, of friendship, of contempt for the world, of eternity, by the quiet calm of a summer evening, when the flickering light of the stars breaks through the umber shadows of the night and the lonely moon rises into view. The brilliant day inspires busy fervor and a feeling of⁸ gaiety. The sublime **touches**, the beautiful **charms**. The mien of the human being who finds himself in the full feeling of the sublime is serious, sometimes even rigid and astonished. By contrast, the lively sentiment of the beautiful announces itself through shining cheerfulness in the eyes, through traces of a smile, and often through audible mirth. The sublime is in turn of different sorts. The feeling of it is sometimes accompanied with some dread or even melancholy, in some cases merely with quiet admiration and in yet others with a beauty spread over a sublime prospect. I will call the first the **terrifying sublime**, the second the **noble**, and the third the **magnificent**. Deep solitude is sublime, but in a terrifying way.⁹ For this reason great and extensive

[2:209]

[2:209]

^a I will only provide an example of the noble dread which the description of a total solitude can inspire, and to this end I will extract several passages from Carazan's dream in the *Bremen Magazine*, Volume iv, page 539. The more his riches had grown, the more did this miserly rich man bar his heart to compassion and the love of others. Meanwhile, as the love of humankind grew cold in him, the diligence of his prayers and religious devotions increased. After this confession, he goes on to recount: One evening, as I did my sums by my lamp and calculated the profit of

the pulsing rush of Longing, the lover's whisper,
irresistable—magic to make the sanest man go mad.
And thrusting it into Hera's outstretched hands,
she breathed her name in a throbbing, rising voice:
"Here now, take this band, put it between your breasts—
ravishing openwork, and the world lies in its weaving!"
(Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles, New York:
Viking, 1990, Book xiv, lines 251–66, pp. 376–77).

⁸ In the second and third editions: for.

⁹ The example comes from the *Bremisches Magazin zur Ausbreitung der Wissenschaften und Künste und Tugend. Von einigen Liebhabern derselben aus den englischen Monatschriften gesammelt und herausgegeben* (Bremen Magazine for the Propagation of the Sciences and the Arts and Virtue. Collected and edited from the English monthlies by some lovers of the former) 4 (1761): 539.