

Review

The Sublime and Its Teleology

Kant – German Idealism – Phenomenology

Edited by Donald Loose

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This collection of ten chapters edited by Donald Loose examines the sublime in the Kantian tradition and contemporary philosophy. Although there are references to pseudo-Longinus, Burke, and Schiller, the book focuses on Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Husserl, Heidegger, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean-Luc Marion. The chapters vary in length, style, and topic; six contributions concern the sublime in Kant, two are about German Idealism (Hegel, Schelling), and two on recent continental philosophy. The relative emphasis on the philosopher of Königsberg is perhaps unsurprising given Kant's contribution to the concept of the sublime, the book's subtitle, and the volume's belonging to Brill's *Critical Studies in German Idealism*. The volume contains a foreword by the series editor Paul Cobben, who contributes a chapter, an introduction by Donald Loose (likewise a contributor), bios of authors, and a combined subject-name index. The remaining contributors are Herman van Erp, Birgit Recki, Arthur Kok, Christian Krijnen, Jacob Rogozinski, Simon Critchley, Frans van Peperstraten, and Ruud Welten. The volume will be helpful to those interested in Kant's philo-

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sophy, the history of aesthetics and the sublime, the philosophy of nature, and phenomenology and post-phenomenology.

Although it is of course impossible to do justice to each chapter in this limited space, in what follows I propose to summarize each chapter's contents or aims, followed by evaluative or critical comments. I conclude with some general remarks on the volume as a whole.

To begin, I should note that Loose's eleven-page introduction is basically a summary of each chapter, which do not themselves contain abstracts. His introduction is helpful in getting a sense of the volume, but beyond the first paragraph does not attempt to offer any new insights. What are we talking about when we qualify something as sublime (p. 1)? Is it just a qualification of the beautiful in its most touching or extreme degree, or a qualification of an external object at all? Is it a feeling or a reflecting judgment? (Note the already Kantian ways of posing the question.) Can we reduce the sublime to the aesthetic? Loose adds that the authors all take Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as their primary reference or source, even if the discussions of the Kantian sublime become rarer toward the end of the volume. Loose claims that the argument of the book is to show how the Kantian legacy on this topic is still "a main stream of inspiration" (p. 1) for contemporary (continental) thinking, either by agreeing with Kant or by overcoming his impetus for a philosophy of freedom. In the foreword, Cobben claims that the authors do not repeat the discussion of the 1980s, which concentrated on the aesthetic dimensions of the sublime, but focus on its political dimensions. While it is true the authors do not repeat that "aesthetic" discussion, van Peperstraten does analyze those '1980s' authors Lyotard and Lacoue-Labarthe, and the "political" is mostly absent from the chapters. Even in an essay (Loose's) that does discuss the political dimensions, it turns out to be only in a limited way. There is no essay devoted, say, to how the sublime could play a role in contemporary political life or to how it did

so in the past, or to so-called sublime responses to political events (thus overlooking the trendy, even if perhaps misguided, discussion of the ‘sublime’ responses to the events of 9/11 and terror), or to how the sublime category is applied to political events such as the French Revolution (say, in Kant or Burke), or to how we understand the sublime in various ways depending on our political commitments, or the like.

The volume’s chapters appear one after the other without organizational divisions, and I proceed accordingly. It opens strongly with Herman van Erp’s longish “The Genuine Sublime: Kant on the Sublimity of Moral Consciousness” (40 pp.), which attempts to clarify Kant’s theory of the sublime and its consistency with his philosophy as a whole. His chapter is filled with references to Nietzsche, Herder, Hegel, Weber, and even some of the literature on the sublime – although he refers to Uygur Abaci’s 2008 article against the possibility of pure artistic sublimity, van Erp oddly overlooks the fact that the debate between Abaci and me continued and was published two years later (*Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 2010, volume 68, issue 2). Van Erp claims that unlike other approaches, Kant’s makes a distinction between the genuinely sublime and the sublime in a broader yet improper sense, and secondly, that Kant ties the genuine sublime closely to moral ideas (yet one wonders how, on van Erp’s view, such a genuine judgment would not then become partly intellectual, hence no longer ‘genuine’). Van Erp usefully compares Kant’s theory of the sublime with Burke’s and Schiller’s theories, both of which were known to Kant, and defends Kant from Schiller. The author correctly distinguishes pure aesthetic feeling of sublimity (“awe”) from respect for the moral law. He also argues that moral consciousness is the transcendental precondition for the validity of judgments of sublimity and the criterion for the genuine sublime. He adds that in making a purely aesthetic judgment of the sublime, the judge is *not* clearly aware of this distinction between genuine and proper forms of sublimity.

When this distinction becomes a determining element in our judgments of the sublime, the judgments lose their purely aesthetic character: if connected to teleological or moral concepts, the judgment is no longer pure, but a partly intellectual aesthetic judgment. All of that seems exactly right, and it also suggests (though the author does not note this) that, just as in the case of beauty, there can be impure, dependent sublimity in which teleological concepts (such as moral ideas) play an explicit role for the judge. The author likewise correctly claims that (even if Kant did not say so) the sublime can function as a symbol of the morally good (p. 36), because of the similarity between the sublime and respect for the moral law and since many of the reasons why beauty can function as a symbol of the good also obtain for the sublime. The pleasure in the sublime has the same features as the feeling of beauty: it is a disinterested pleasure, subjectively universal, purposeful without a purpose, necessary, and a feeling of freedom. This point is often missed in the literature. More controversially, van Erp concludes that purely aesthetic judgments cannot overcome the gap between the realms of nature and freedom, and that the bridge must come from moral *action*. Finally, his references to Hegel are telling, as they are the first of many of the volume's implicit or explicit references to Hegel, even if van Erp rightly notes that Kant himself would not have accepted Hegel's claim that nature is liberated from moral considerations and is therefore "free" (p. 15).

I found this chapter to be illuminating even if it was not always clear which views were the author's and which were interpretations of Kant. And while van Erp is right that aesthetic representations do not oblige us to do anything, there is a possible objection to his claim that building the bridge to freedom must and can only come from action determined by moral principles (p. 39). For if that were the case, then the sublime would no longer be a *bridge* to freedom: the bridge would be freedom or morality itself. But arguably we must

distinguish the bridge from the terminal point or target.

In the second chapter, “Kant’s Aesthetics of Morals,” which (alongside Jacob Rogozinski’s) ties for the shortest contribution (10 pp.), Birgit Recki compares the moral feeling of respect with the sublime feeling by giving a close textual reading of the *Critique of Practical Reason*’s chapter, “Of the Motives of Pure Practical Reason” and the third *Critique*’s Analytic of the Sublime. She refers to very little secondary literature in her reading of these passages; in fact, if we leave aside references to Kant or his editor Mary Gregor, she only cites herself. There is no introduction, conclusion, or the like. Although there is no reference to the *intellectualist* versus *sensationalist* readings of the moral feeling, she appears to side with the intellectualists: moral agents are motivated by a feeling that is created unaided by reason. This is the moral feeling of respect, a feeling caused by reason alone, but at the same time a feeling that moves agents to action. She claims that there is a systematic interconnectedness between the second *Critique* and third *Critique* texts, since the analysis of the moral feeling gives Kant a crucial idea concerning the general a priori character of aesthetic feelings. The author rightly notes that there is a conflict between imagination and reason that is analogous if not identical in the cases of the moral feeling and the sublime (thus implicitly agreeing with van Erp).

The chapter would have benefited by a clearer setup of the discussion as well as more references to the many voices in the debate on this fascinating topic. Moreover, it is a bit misleading that Recki claims (p. 49) that many readers have not noticed the fact that Kant talks explicitly about the subject’s “feeling of life,” when Donald Loose’s chapter (p. 64) discusses vital force and the feeling of life, and when discussions on this took place years ago – consider Rudolf Makkreel’s *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant* (1990). It is also worth pointing out that the moral feeling of respect is not the only moral feeling or capacity, broadly construed, but that Kant discusses endow-

ments such as conscience, love of one's neighbor, and respect for oneself (self-esteem) in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (6: 399). This is not to suggest that Recki is unaware of this, since she opens her chapter by citing this passage, but it is worth keeping in mind here.

The third chapter (26 pp.), "The Dynamic Sublime as the Pivoting Point between Nature and Freedom in Kant," is by the editor and is among the best in the volume. Loose focuses on the dynamic rather than mathematical sublime, suggesting that it can be considered the pivoting point between nature and freedom, as his title indicates. His intriguing and plausible thesis, which reflects what I perceive to be a new trend in the scholarship on the Kantian sublime, aims to readjust the characterization of the dynamic sublime as mere *conflict* or resistance to the supremacy of nature. The sublime can be seen as a point of interaction between nature and freedom, even if it is still not a judgment concerning the teleology of nature. Loose employs Hegelian terms ("Pain is then sublated into pleasure," p. 64; "dialectics," p. 65) which give me pause when intended as readings of Kant, but thankfully Loose rejects identifying Kant's position with Hegel's. The author notes that the opposition between nature and reason cannot be sublated (*aufgehoben*) as it would be in Hegel because a dialectical transition from imagination to reason is impossible (p. 54), but that we can still recognize a realization of the mechanics of nature at a higher level, which Loose calls *teleology* (as in the book's title). The author holds that we should not deny any mediation of the sensible through symbolization on behalf of reason, in implicit agreement with van Erp. For Kant the symbolic representation is an indirect representation of the unrepresentable, and offers more than the merely negative representation. Loose argues that the sublime is a mediation of nature and freedom in nature itself, an indication that nature may be a possible *ally of freedom*, to use Loose's delightful phrase.

Loose proposes the interesting idea that realized freedom ultimately remains marked by the sublime task to continue to *resist* the permanent *resistance* to freedom: we have a positive demand to limit or restrain the limitation of our freedom. We can thus better understand Kant's assessment of war, "rightful" (?) rebellion against lawful power (p. 68), the foundation of criminal law, constitutional and international law in light of perpetual peace, and analysis of radical evil. And here we see one reason why Cobben's foreword referred to the "political" dimensions discussed in the volume. Loose's insightful essay benefits from clear organization and writing, and, in an instance of cross-referencing, Loose's chapter is later cited by Cobben (pp. 147, 155).

The fourth chapter, Arthur Kok's "Sublimity, Freedom, and Necessity in the Philosophy of Kant," argues that Kant's analysis of the dynamical sublime plays a key role in understanding Kant's concept of the noumenon. Kok only gets around to discussing the sublime after about 24 pages of his dense 36-page chapter, the second longest. I confess I could not follow every move in the chapter, but one of its aims was to discuss the basic relation between freedom and necessity from three perspectives corresponding to each of the *Critiques*. Kok aims to develop Kant's philosophical investigation of the possibility of metaphysics – a demanding task to say the least, and one that arguably is beyond the limits of a volume on the sublime. He argues that Kant does not adequately distinguish between evidence and necessity (p. 96), and holds that a theoretical perspective on necessity cannot exist without presupposing a practical perspective on necessity. So what is the connection to the sublime? Kok holds that to combine the theoretical and practical perspectives in a hierarchical manner, since after all Kant claims that pure practical reason has primacy over theoretical reason, the dynamical sublime judgment is needed. Of course, the phrase "dynamical sublime judgment" is perhaps a bit odd, for Kant tends to speak of a

judgment of (or on) the dynamical sublime. And it is only in the fifth of the chapter's six sections that Kok turns to the third *Critique* and the sublime. The author considers his analysis of the sublime to be the positive articulation of the noumenon, and, in addition, to be a condition of the possibility of traditional metaphysics (i.e., of soul, God, and freedom) as a whole. He concludes with an outlook on a possible post-Kantian philosophy that strives for a more concise formulation of the nature of the noumenon. In my view, the chapter had too many stipulative claims and definitions, and its sentences contained many italics that distracted from the argument.

The fifth chapter (18 pp.), Christian Krijnen's "Teleology in Kant's Philosophy of Culture and History: A Problem for the Architectonic of Reason," addresses the notion of teleology and thus sheds light on the book's title. The author suggests that Kant's philosophy of culture and history poses a problem for his architectonic of reason. He examines Kant's Critique of Teleological Judgment and the doctrine of the final end (*Endzweck*) and discusses Kant's political essays such as "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim." Krijnen attempts to make Kant's philosophy of culture and history relevant for contemporary philosophy, but thinks that in order to do this, a problem concerning the architectonic of reason (and notion of freedom) must first be tackled. The alleged problem arises from Kant's division of philosophy into theoretical and practical domains. Krijnen skillfully summarizes Kant's views that culture is the end of nature and that it consists in human beings qua self-determining. The problem, it appears, is that Kant tends to think of human action as practical and/or moral, with the result that his teleology of culture and history is thought of within a tension between nature and freedom, where free human action is understood mainly as practical or moral. But the focus on the practical is traceable back to Kant's division of reason and hence to his system of philosophy. Krijnen implies that Kant's concept of freedom is lacking

something. Kant does not develop a concept of freedom that contains the many concepts of freedom that are present throughout his corpus (which would encompass theory, knowledge, and culture). Such a more robust, inclusive concept of freedom would have functioned as a ground for the unity of all of its instantiations, and it is actually what Kant's theory of culture requires. Still, going "back to Kant," Krijnen claims, cannot be the solution for the matter since Kant's determination of theoretical and practical normativity is the cause of the problem (p. 128). Such a statement is in fact a good example of how this volume is sometimes critical of Kant even as it is grounded in his philosophy. The chapter has an extensive bibliography that even lists Loose's and van Erp's chapters, and such cross-referencing adds to the unity of the volume. Krijnen's original reading of Kant's philosophy of culture and history is well executed, even if the connection to the sublime is quite oblique.

Paul Cobben's 26-page chapter, "The Lord and the Sublime: Free Life's Transcendence of Finitude," is the first in the volume to deal at length with Hegel's writings, focusing on the conception of the lord in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Cobben's thesis is "that the lord is the representation of pure freedom which results from the experience of *the fear of death*. This background implies that the representation of the lord mediates between nature and freedom" (p. 134). Cobben compares various forms of Kant's ideas in the third *Critique* with varieties of Hegel's concept of the lord. The author argues that the experience of the fear of death in *Phenomenology* can be compared with the experience of the (dynamic) sublime (p. 154). On the one hand, the lord results from the experience of the superior power of nature, and on the other hand, it represents pure freedom. The initial forms of the lord's representation can be recovered in the *religion of nature*, but the latter is sublated into the *religion of the work of art*, *revealed religion*, and *absolute knowledge* or philosophy. At the level of

philosophy, the lord is most suitably represented as the absolute Spirit. A second thesis is that the religion of the work of art, revealed religion, and absolute knowledge can be considered analogous to Kant's concepts of the beautiful, the mathematical sublime, and the dynamical sublime, respectively.

The chapter contains a useful overview of Hegel's views of the sublation of absolute art, but the attempt to connect the sublime to the discussion (specifically, to how aesthetic experience in Hegel is sublated in religion and philosophy) struck me as a bit forced. Moreover, I would not accept the claim that, "According to Kant, the experience of beauty is sublated in the experience of the sublime, when the free interplay of cognitive powers no longer has the ability to perform a synthesis that results in the feeling of pleasure" (p. 152), not only because it is hard to apply the Hegelian term *aufgehoben* to Kant in any meaningful and accurate way, but also because it misunderstands the role of synthesis in the sublime as well as the relation between the sublime and beauty, portraying sublimity as a kind of failed yet deeper beauty. Like the chapter by Kok, the sublime enters rather late in the scene, and only in one section (amounting to two pages), the penultimate one. The bibliography contains merely four entries: on Hegel, Kant, Birgit Recki, and Cobben, even if Cobben usefully refers to Loose's chapter several times. The connection to teleology is likewise scant, presumably consisting in the analysis of the living organism (pp. 138ff.): the piece thus contains little explicit discussion of the 'sublime and its teleology.'

The title of the seventh chapter, Jacob Rogozinski's "The Sublime Monster," is meant to be provocative. The author questions the demarcation between the monstrous and the sublime. He asks whether a sublime *monster* (in Kant's senses) is possible, and, following Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), declares that it is. Rogozinski examines Kant on the sublime and monstrous in §26 of the third *Critique* and the later *Anthropology*, noting a shift in

Kant's position, and discusses neighboring concepts such as the colossal, terror, horror, and disgust. For Kant, nature contains nothing monstrous (hence providing another connection to teleology), and an object is defined as 'monstrous' if by its magnitude it annihilates the end, which its concept constitutes (5: 253). Kant defines the 'colossal,' in turn, as the mere presentation of a concept, which is almost too great for any presentation (which borders on the relatively monstrous). Rogozinski refers to Aristotle, makes use of terms like *jouissance* (Lacan?) (p. 167), and is in dialogue with Derrida, Hölderlin, and Nietzsche. A third term emerges with this chapter: in addition to 'sublime' and 'sublate' (*aufheben*), we now find 'sublimate,' which is oddly missing from the index. (The differences or convergences are never explained in the volume, however.) His argument seems to be that the *Anthropology* gives beauty a task that the third *Critique* never envisaged, namely, to transfigure an affect of horror in the feeling of the sublime: to sublimate the monstrous *Ungeheuer* (p. 162). Because the mere sublime, i.e., the sublime not blended with beauty, always risks turning into monstrosity, it must be tamed (sublimated) by beauty. The demarcation between the sublime and the monstrous thus becomes "almost undecidable" (p. 166).

Rogozinski offers an innovative reading of the noted passages, though I wonder what is at stake in such a discussion besides offering original readings. And he admits that his view goes beyond or against Kant, "who would certainly not have accepted" Rogozinski's hypothesis that the sublime and monstrous become quite close or *almost* undecidable (p. 166). (And if it *is* decidable, that seems to concede the point.) The terse discussion is thought-provoking, even if one might question his doubting the demarcation between the monstrous and the sublime. I interpret these issues in a somewhat different manner. What seems to be missing in such an interpretation is the understanding that when, in the case of a mathematical

sublime, the imagination can no longer comprehend (*zusammenfassen*) the sensible units, the *idea of reason* is brought to mind, indeed felt. The process does not simply end in an experience of failure, hence is not simply a deflating or repugnant experience of the monstrous. Likewise, I do not think we need to see the pain in the sublime (the part that renders the sublime a negative pleasure) as caused by the horror of the monstrous, but rather can see it (and, if we are interpreting Kant, should see it) as caused by the humiliation of the imagination or sensibility on the part of reason. Moreover, it is quite controversial to claim that for Kant, the sublime always happens without any relation to a concept whatsoever, for Kant claims in the very passage in question (5: 253) that we have to *abstract* from such concepts if they are to be purely aesthetic, thereby leaving room for and implying the existence of partly intellectual or dependent judgments of the sublime (see discussion above). The case appears to be analogous to that of beauty, where there are both pure and impure judgments: which one obtains depends on the extent to which the judging subject abstracts and removes teleological concepts. Furthermore, the sublime is not simply counterpurposive but is a counterpurposive *purposiveness*; hence there is a fundamental difference between the monstrous object and the sublime ‘object’ (i.e., the object that causes or stimulates the experience of the sublime). The sublime object plays a very important role in Kant’s ‘natural teleology of reason’ (if I may use the phrase) since the sublime natural object brings to mind the superiority of reason over nature, which Kantian monsters do not.

The previous essay’s references to Hölderlin’s views of tragedy make for a smooth transition to Simon Critchley’s “The Tragical Sublime” (18 pp.), which pleasingly reads like a chapter written by a native English speaker (which indeed it is). Critchley discusses a number of thinkers, poets, and writers (though Schiller is conspicuously absent), from the Greeks to the Germans to Critchley, and thus the essay has a wider scope

and different tone than the other ones. It is more confessional, first-person, and direct, and it reads like a prolegomena to a future work tentatively called *The Aesthetics of Lethargy and Disgust* (p. 184). Critchley translates *catharsis* with *sublimation*, and he goes beyond Kant and uses ‘sublime’ in a way that is not tied down to Königsberg. Critchley investigates the possible relation between the concept of the sublime and tragedy. In the context of Plato’s critique of tragedy and Aristotle’s description of tragedy in terms of pity, fear, and catharsis, Critchley considers the link between tragedy and the sublime in (pseudo-) Longinus, for whom the feeling of the sublime tethers the potential of the human imagination to the greatness of nature and the cosmos. The risk of tragedy, for Longinus, is that true sublimity can slip into mere bombast. Critchley then turns to the linking of tragedy and sublimity in the early Schelling and his lectures on art given in 1802-1803. Critchley shows how the experience of the tragic turns on the experience of the struggle between freedom in the subject and necessity in the object. What interests Schelling, who draws on *Oedipus Tyrannos*, is the situation where the tragic hero freely submits to necessity in the experience of fate. Critchley suggests that the linking of freedom and necessity through the tragic opens up a possible reconciliation of the realms of nature and freedom in post-Kantian philosophy. The tragical sublime could thereby be the aesthetic completion of philosophy. At the same time, as if his mind were not yet settled, Critchley concludes with some remarks on the *comic* as an alternative to and deepening of the tragic. He sides with Hegel over Schelling not only because Hegel is allegedly more historical, but also because Critchley sees philosophy as at least partly comical, as Hegel did. (And of course Kierkegaard would agree with Hegel at least about that.) In a coda, Critchley acknowledges the healing dimensions of art, citing Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (section 7). In the sublime, art can tame the horrible and in the comic it can discharge nausea and disgust (*Ekel*); he

also gives a nod to the tragic-comic in the spirit of Beckett and Ibsen.

Critchley began the essay with a fascinating question: why did philosophy turn to tragedy at its reflexive moment of crisis, that is, in modernity? I don't think his interesting reflections ever answer this important query. A potentially helpful point here is that philosophy (out of desperation?) looked for assistance from the very thing it had banished: tragedy. But does tragedy save philosophy in modernity, or indeed ever? Critchley suggests that it does not, at least not alone: it needs a comic partner.

The penultimate chapter, Frans van Peperstraten's "The Sublime and the Limits of Metaphysics," turns to Heidegger and contemporary post-phenomenology. Lacoue-Labarthe and Lyotard both maintain that the experience of the sublime can be a point of departure for overcoming traditional philosophy (read: metaphysics). Both agree that Kant still thought of the sublime on the basis of the hylomorphic opposition of matter and form, one of the traditional metaphysical oppositions. Lyotard holds that the sublime should be understood as a presence that cannot be presented. Lacoue-Labarthe is worried that Lyotard's interpretation still belongs to the negative metaphysics of the modern era. Thus Lacoue-Labarthe turns to Heidegger's work for a non-metaphysical understanding of the sublime, even if Heidegger technically failed to employ the term in his writings. The sublime is to be thought of as the event of appearing, which precedes every appearance. Lacoue-Labarthe draws on Heidegger's aesthetics of the work of art as something extraordinary, the event through which truth happens. Lacoue-Labarthe finds the concept (if not the name) of the sublime in the imagery of light and power, and the references to the *ungeheuer* and shock, in Heidegger's essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art," and holds that the sublime can only be solved when taking Heidegger's attempt to overcome metaphysics as a point of departure (note that we have left

Königsberg, but not Germany). Lacoue-Labarthe concludes that the sublime is the presentation of the fact *that* there is presentation at all (the *quod* of presentation). Van Peperstraten discusses Lacoue-Labarthe's view of the sublime and mimesis, and Lacoue-Labarthe's claim that the genius is the artist of the sublime, ultimately rejecting both claims. He also shows how Lyotard keeps genius and the sublime apart. Van Peperstraten suggests that the question about whether the negative approach to the sublime goes beyond metaphysics is not decidable, for it presupposes that metaphysics is something we can delimit, that we can render the limits of thinking in terms of limits (p. 203).

It is indeed interesting, as the author notes (following Lacoue-Labarthe), that Heidegger did not simply forget the sublime, but thematized it under another name such as 'greatness' or (I would add, with respect to the early Heidegger) under the concept of coming out of everydayness while being in the throes of ecstatic affects such as angst or anxiety. In addition to the two plausible reasons for Heidegger's apparent oversight offered by Lacoue-Labarthe, namely, that the sublime is not a term that featured in the early Greek philosophy that Heidegger found so important, and that the sublime was originally a theme belonging to rhetoric rather than philosophy, taken up by philosophy only in the seventeenth century, when philosophy had long been determined by modern metaphysics, I would conjecture that Heidegger failed to take up the sublime because of its strong link to freedom and morality in central accounts such as Kant's and Schiller's.

I found one of van Peperstraten's conclusions to be somewhat disappointing; it occurs in a paragraph packed with a battery of questions. The claim is that, when it comes to the question of whether presentation or its *failure* is primary, when it comes to a choice between positive and negative approaches regarding the fact that there is presentation (the *quod*), "it is clear that there is no fundamental difference between Lacoue-Labarthe and Lyotard at all," and that "at this point there is no

real difference between Lyotard and Lacoue-Labarthe, or between either and Heidegger” (p. 202). This claim left me wondering what had been shown in the eighteen-page chapter, and also surprised me since the thrust of the discussion and the noted series of questions hinted that the author sides with Lyotard. (The author did claim that at the level of what is presented, the *quid*, or *after* presentation, differences between Lyotard and the other two thinkers emerge.)

The final chapter is Ruud Welten’s “Melville’s ‘Sublime Uneventfulness’: Toward a Phenomenology of the Sublime” (18 pp.). Going beyond Kant (whom the author briefly discusses, in addition to Descartes, Burke, and Rudolf Otto), Welten focuses on the experience of surplus from the perspective of classical (Husserlian) phenomenology and contemporary post-phenomenology, in particular the work of Jean-Luc Marion, Emmanuel Levinas, and Michel Henry, aiming to understand the sublime as more than a merely “aesthetic category” (p. 207). The key trait of the sublime is the experience of being overwhelmed by perception (p. 206). The problem that the sublime poses for a phenomenological analysis is that the sublime is something strange, beyond all imagination, uncanny. Welten suggests that the sublime refers to something outside of philosophical discourse and is (thankfully) more than an artificial term without reality. He elucidates the idea of the ‘oceanic experience,’ citing a passage by Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (hence his title) no less than three times. The ‘oceanic feeling’ refers to the experience of horizon as such, or to nothing but horizon, without an object (say, a boat) on the horizon; it refers to our experiencing *that* we experience (this strikes me as an unstated parallel to the previous chapter’s ‘*quod* of presentation’). The overwhelming and disorienting oceanic experience poses a problem that may not be merely limited to a phenomenology of the sublime, but is perhaps inherent to classical phenomenology. The phenomenologist is faced with the impossibility of understanding the sublime state of mind as a

consciousness of *something*, rather than the experience of nothing but horizon (p. 218). The seemingly paradoxical features of the sublime uneventfulness of the oceanic experience is that the sublime is not a property of the object, but a description of the condition of the subject; the sublime experience is characterized by the sensation of too much; and this ‘too much’ is transgressive and tranquil at the same time (p. 211). The problem is that the principles of phenomenology forbid the notion of ‘too much’ for consciousness. For Husserl, the horizon is never an object to itself and it makes no sense to focus on the horizon as such, while in the oceanic experience we are not gazing at the horizon, but simply *gazing*. Here Welten appeals to the non-Husserlian possibility of exceeding the fulfillment, the saturated phenomenon (Marion), or (to use Husserl’s own non-technical term) ‘surplus’ (*Überschuß*), which according to Marion becomes a condition for consciousness itself. The chapter covers a lot of ground and executes its aims admirably, but it is perhaps ironic that Welten downplays the sublime’s traditional connection to freedom and morality (or even the ‘political’ dimensions), since he cites a passage in which Kant asserts the sublime’s being grounded in moral feeling (p. 209).

Conclusion

On the whole, the chapters vary in length, style, depth of analysis, method, and naturally, quality. There is a Hegelianism (‘dialectic,’ ‘sublate,’ ‘mediate’) that emerges in many of the chapters, though not all of them (e.g., not the last two). The book partly achieves its presumed aim of discussing the sublime and its teleology; but not all chapters are about the sublime, and not all about teleology. The title best fits the essays by Loose and van Erp, and perhaps Rogozinski. The chapters on (post-) phenomenology understandably have little to do with teleology. Moreover, *The Sublime and Its Teleology*

does not really live up to its stated promise to focus on the political dimensions of the sublime.

A pressing issue that the volume never answers concerns the relation between the sublime, sublation, and sublimation (*Sublimierung*). In German the *Erhabene* and *Sublimierung* are so distant that one would hardly be inclined to raise the question of their conceptual and philosophical relations, while *aufheben* (to sublimate) and *erheben* of course appear to be closer. One would have expected an introduction or even chapter to discuss their relations, not because this is an intrinsically interesting topic (which it is), but because the chapters themselves generate the question, since the contributors understand and employ these terms in distinct yet related ways.

The volume would have been improved by a native speaker's careful copy-editing (though I certainly esteem an author's attempt to write in a non-native language); a consistent citation method, in particular when it comes to language (German or English?) and style (footnotes only or main text?); and complete reference lists. Some essays had lengthy footnotes, while others had few to none. While hardly any text is typo-free, I wonder whether more careful copy-editing could have prevented typos such as those found on pp. 27, 41, 48, 88 n.15, 91 n.18, 93 n.20, 95 n.24, 104 n.44, 106 n.49, 108 n.52, and 171.

But it is quite refreshing to see a volume devoted to this central concept of rhetoric and aesthetics, philosophy of nature, and political philosophy, even if, as noted, not all of these perspectives are adopted in the chapters. The volume marks an increase in interest in the sublime and further contributes to the concept's sustained relevance to philosophy. The editor Donald Loose, Paul Cobben (series editor), and the Press are to be applauded for their positive contribution to research on the sublime.