

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY NOW

Kant on Sublimity and Morality

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Preface

How such a synthetic practical proposition is possible *a priori* and why it is necessary are tasks whose solution does not lie any longer within the bounds of a metaphysics of morals. (Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, GMM: Ak.445)

One of the more interesting questions in Kant's famous moral and epistemological works is what boundary conditions or horizons enable his moral and epistemological claims. What struck me in my first reading of Immanuel Kant's 'Analytic of the Sublime' in 1997 was that it seemed to assign itself a crucial role in his morality. Yet, the extant scholarship either denied sublimity's positive role in morality or minimized it on grounds that the sublime is merely an aesthetic analogue of morality, and hence unable to serve any moral functions. The primary aim of this book is to argue against these readings of Kantian sublimity and morality by examining the work that morality does in the sublime and, conversely, the work the sublime does in morality. I show that the relationship between sublimity and morality is closer and more important than has been understood. The sublime fills an essential function in the moral project guiding Kant's critical works and it does so at times precisely in virtue of its being an aesthetic analogue to morality.

Historically, the sublime has been understood as the idea, concept or experience of what is great in magnitude, power, number, nobility or elevation. As I demonstrate in my genealogy of the sublime, moral readings of the sublime date back to the earliest extant text on the sublime, that of the second century CE writer Longinus. The European revival of Longinus in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries inspired work on the sublime by nearly every famous writer of the era. But Kant (1724–1804) is certainly the most systematic and influential of the thousands to have written on the sublime in the modern era. Kant broke the historical mold of rambling, unsystematic commentaries on the topic by offering a systematic

framework for considering the sublime and, accordingly, his work is far more influential than that of any other writer on the sublime since Longinus. This is not to say that Kant was wholly or even largely original. Even in construing sublimity in moral terms, as he did in his main works on the sublime, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (*Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, OFBS, 1764) and the ‘Analytic of the Sublime’ in the *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, third *Critique*, CJ, 1790), Kant was only following a long line of similar writers. His examples and descriptions of sublimity and its relation to morality borrow heavily from the aesthetic tradition dating back to Longinus. However, James Kirwan exaggerates greatly in saying that, with one significant exception, Kant’s ‘description of the range of the sublime, and even his grounding of it, represent . . . no advance on the writings of his predecessors in the field’ (Kirwan 2005: 53), that ‘Kant’s text inaugurates nothing’ (Kirwan 2004: 4) and that Kant did much less to set subsequent debates on aesthetics, which, Kirwan alleges, are dominated by Hegelian, rather than Kantian readings, than to end eighteenth-century debates to which his work belongs (*ibid.*: 1–2). Against Kirwan, I will argue that Kantian sublimity differs from the tradition both formally and in its systematic moral functions, that no previous account of sublimity is associated with a morality of the Kantian style and that the Kantian sublime has been immensely influential. I agree with Paul Guyer that ‘Kant’s interpretation of both the beautiful and sublime differed from what was commonplace’ (Guyer 1993: 254), but I would like to ascribe the main difference in Kant’s interpretation of the sublime, and hence the source of his importance and originality, to his systematic framework and transcendental methodology, as in his epistemology, not to the details of his claims. By incorporating the sublime within the epistemological, ethical, aesthetic and teleological structures of his critical system, Kant adds something new and profound to empiricist and rationalist debates concerning sublimity. However, in associating the originality of Kantian sublimity with its moral functions, I do not accept Kirwan’s thesis that Kantian sublimity’s novelty consists in its substitution of ‘a genuinely moral import [for] . . . the commonly *felt* moral import of the experience of sublimity’, which Kirwan describes as ‘of the greatest significance to the history not only of the sublime but also of aesthetics in general’ (Kirwan 2005: 53). Kantian morality is in my view significantly

more justifiable than the casual virtue ethics and utilitarianism of previous eighteenth-century accounts of sublimity, yet Kirwan begs the question as to what constitutes genuine moral import, feeling, as in these accounts, or reason, as in the Kantian account. For the former, what is commonly felt as morally significant *is eo ipso* morally significant. Kantian sublimity's moral innovation consists not in adding 'genuine' moral meaning, but in systematizing traditional accounts of the sublime by reference to transcendental reflective judgements and a synthetic a priori morality. This systematic turn transforms the debate in many ways, not the least of which are the introduction of justificatory and explanatory standards to a largely uncritical, descriptive set of discourses and the enforcement of greater consistency and interconnection with moral and epistemological questions.

Kant is by many criteria the most influential philosopher of the past three centuries, at least on other philosophers, as evidenced by the fact that as of April 2011 there are 17,166 references to Kant in the *Philosopher's Index*, four thousand more than Aristotle, six thousand more than Plato and seven thousand more than Hegel or Heidegger; and far more American Philosophical Association papers are on Kant than on any other philosopher. Within the smaller field of aesthetics, Kant is equally influential. Although Mary J. Gregor could write as late as 1987 of 'the long-standing neglect of the *Critique of Judgment* as a whole' (CJ: xvi), at present it is fair to say only that the *Critique of Judgment* has been neglected *relative to* Kant's epistemological and moral works and that the 'Analytic of the Sublime' has been neglected relative to the 'Analytic of the Beautiful', for the *Philosopher's Index* lists 1,324 citations on Kant and aesthetics, 517 on Kant and beauty or the beautiful, and roughly 300 citations of Kant and sublime or sublimity (depending on search order), nearly half of all references to the sublime and sublimity.

Of course, citations entail neither influence, nor accuracy. If genuine influence, defined as the effects of correct perceptions of Kantian sublimity on later developments, presupposes accuracy of reception, then it is indeed arguable that Kant's influence in the realm of sublimity, particularly in Continental philosophy, art history and comparative literature over the thirty years following the publication of Jacques Derrida's and Jean-François Lyotard's readings of the 'Analytic of the Sublime', is significantly weaker than it seems, because many readings of the Kantian sublime mischaracterize his

views. But this standard is surely too stringent, particularly in philosophy, where interpretations are so contested. Thus, for instance, it would follow from this argument that Jean-François Lyotard's line by line '*explication de text*' of the 'Analytic of the Sublime', *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, was not genuinely influenced by Kant's 'Analytic of the Sublime', since it misconstrues the relation between Kantian sublimity and morality. But surely we can agree that work is influenced by Kant if its terms, concepts and arguments derive primarily from him. By this standard, the Kantian sublime is extremely influential, even in its derivative moments, for it is the central reference point and terminological/conceptual source for post-Kantian accounts of the sublime.

This book follows a tripartite, temporal plan. I begin with a genealogy of the sublimity–morality relationship prior to Kant in order to see in what respects his accounts both depend on and depart from those of the tradition. I then give a detailed argument for the role of sublimity in Kantian morality. Finally, I examine how post-Kantian Continental readings of sublimity and morality both build on and diverge from Kant. Given the great body of available texts, my genealogies of pre-Kantian and post-Kantian sublimity and morality are necessarily selective. In chapter 1, I discuss the ancient Greek critic Longinus; in chapter 2, I discuss Joseph Addison, the third earl of Shaftesbury, Frances Hutcheson, Edmund Burke and several other major figures in eighteenth-century British aesthetics; and in chapter 3, I discuss the eighteenth-century German aesthetic tradition of Alexander Baumgarten and Moses Mendelssohn. The purpose of this genealogy of pre-Kantian sublimity and morality is to show the philosophical context in which Kantian sublimity arose, to augment sparsely detailed views of Kant's highly derivative relations to his predecessors, to correct common misconceptions of Kant and the history of sublimity and to demonstrate that empiricist accounts of sublimity and morality lack the critical and evaluative dimensions necessary to transcend mere psychological description. More specifically, I attempt to restore Longinus' importance to the history of sublimity, to question claims to Kantian sublimity's reliance on Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, to deflate exaggerated accounts of Edmund Burke's importance, to introduce Alexander Baumgarten's accounts of sublimity to an Anglo-American audience for perhaps the first time, to detail many of Kant's debts to Longinus and eighteenth-century criticism and to trace the weakness of

pre-Kantian sublimity to its failure not only to describe experience accurately, as Edmund Burke charges, but also to show why genuinely evaluative moral accounts, as opposed to descriptions of moral experience, require some reference to sublimity for their execution and justification.

In the middle section of the book, chapters 4 and 5, I examine in detail Kant's own accounts of the relationship of sublimity to morality, both within the 'Analytic of the Sublime' in the third *Critique* and outside the third *Critique*. Throughout the section, I distinguish my position from that of extant Kant scholarship. My account is heavily detailed in order to convey the significance and functions of morality in Kant's accounts of sublimity throughout his career. Failure to attend to the full range of Kant's remarks on sublimity is at the basis of deflationary accounts of Kantian sublimity as 'merely' analogous to morality. I develop and defend my claims to the systematic moral functions of Kantian sublimity, examine potential problems in sublimity's involvement with respect and moral feeling and refute a series of objections to sublimity's role in morality, including anthropomorphic and psychologistic criticisms of Kant.

The final section examines the legacy of Kantian sublimity and morality in post-Kantian German idealism and late twentieth-century Continental philosophy. I show that while the moral functions of Kantian sublimity were understood immediately by his successors, recent Continental philosophers, with the notable exceptions of Theodor W. Adorno and Jacques Derrida, have interpreted these functions in ways opposite to Kant. Without speculating on the psychological grounds for such misreadings, I argue that Continental readings of Kantian sublimity have opposed claims to its positive moral functions on the assumption that a moral role would subvert sublimity's ability to radically deconstruct the dichotomies between the limited and the unlimited, the bounded and the boundless and the rational and the irrational. But this assumption is unwarranted. As I demonstrate, Kant's close association of sublimity and morality merely extends the subversive effects of sublimity to morality. By showing that Kantian morality depends on the experience of sublimity, without thereby undermining their claim to universality, I show that there can be no absolute boundary between morality and aesthetics or subjectivity and objectivity in the Kantian critical system.

In making these arguments, I rely on primary sources. Where I use secondary sources, my primary concern is to treat the strongest arguments against my position. Considerations of space precluded my customary exhaustive treatment of secondary sources. All translations of Kant are my own, though I have consulted other translations, especially those of Pluhar and Guyer.¹ Not everyone will agree with the choices made in these translations. In general, they have been guided by the view that Kant's German should be discernible as much as possible in the English. Where Kant offers a gloss on the meaning of one of his technical terms, usually in Latin, I use the English correlate as much as possible. For instance, he glosses the term *Vorstellung* as '*repraesentatio*'. Hence, I translate *Vorstellung* as 'representation', rather than 'presentation', even though the term 'representation' seems to add distinct interpretations (repetition of some original presentation, for one) to the German. My second controversial application of the above principle is to try to replicate in English the natural associations of German words with the same root word. By retaining these etymological relations, I seek to make it clear to the English-speaking reader what is taking place in Kant's text. The consequence of ignoring these etymological relations is that the overriding ideas are lost; indeed, as I discuss in chapter 4, that is what has happened in the recent Cambridge translations of Kant because of their failure to associate the family of terms linked both to sublimity and to determination and determinability (*bestimmen, Bestimmung, Bestimmbarkeit*). One key example of my translation practice is to use the root 'sublim-' wherever possible in translating the various word forms related to the German term *erhaben*; when this practice is too awkward, I use a term related to the primary historical meaning of the Greek, French and German words for the sublime, elevation. Some will object that these word forms have different meanings in German. However, I believe that this move is justified by authorial intention and context, for Kant always uses *erhaben, das Erhabene, die Erhabenheit* and *erheben* in the context of the sublime, sublimity and acts of sublimation or elevation. He expresses this connection clearly in defining the sublime:

Also heißt die Natur hier erhaben, bloß weil sie die Einbildungskraft zu Darstellung derjenigen Fälle erhebt, in welchen das Gemüth die eigene Erhabenheit seiner Bestimmung selbst über die Natur sich fühlbar machen kann.

Thus nature is called sublime [*erhaben*] here, merely because it elevates [raises, makes sublime, *erhebt*] the imagination to the exhibition of those cases in which the mind can make it possible to feel the proper elevation [sublimity, *Erhabenheit*] of its determination even over nature itself (CJ: 262).

A mixed German-English version of the sentence makes it plain that Kant uses the terms *erhaben/erheben/Erhabenheit* all in the sense of sublime elevation. Nature is *erhaben*, because it *erhebt* the imagination to exhibit cases in which the mind can feel the proper *Erhabenheit* of its determination beyond nature. The verb *erheben* means to raise or elevate, *erhaben* means raised, elevated or sublime and *das Erhabene* and *die Erhabenheit*, like their French and Greek correlates (*sublime*, *ὑψος*), mean the sublime. In CJ: 262, then, nature's label as sublime derives from its making sublime or 'sublimating' the imagination in order to experience the fact that its essential capacities of freedom transcend nature, even as they have effects in nature.² However, I avoid translating *erheben* and *Erhebung* as 'sublimate' or 'sublimation' because they have nothing to do with psychological transference or the unconscious, unlike the twentieth-century psychological term, used by Lacan to refer at times to the sublime. To articulate the systematic functions of sublimity in Kant, we need to recognize his very consistent use of the various forms of *erheben/erhaben/Erhabenheit/Erhaben* to mean sublimity, the sublime or the act of elevating consciousness to the sublime. I make no distinction between the terms 'sublimity' and 'the sublime', and I use the former term more often, primarily for stylistic reasons. However, I would argue that there is no thematic reason to prefer the one term to the other. Most Kant scholars, as Peter Warnek points out, use the term 'the sublime', since 'sublimity' seems to refer to a quality, whereas 'the sublime' refers to a substantive. Yet, Kant himself uses both terms, as well as a host of other terms cognate with '*erhaben*', interchangeably to refer to a subjective experience. *Erhabenheit* (sublimity) appears approximately seventeen times in CJ and *Erhaben/das Erhabene* about as often, with the exception of titles and section headings. The substantive *Erhaben* appears most frequently in the genitive form (usually in the phrase *das Gefühl des Erhabenen*, the feeling of the sublime, but sometimes in the phrases *der Begriff* or *die Idee des Erhabenen*, the concept or the idea of the sublime); verb forms of *erhaben*

(uncapitalized: for example, 'I call sublime that which') are by far the most frequent variants of the root word. Nowhere does there appear to be a distinction in how Kant uses the different forms, except that the verb *erheben* refers to the action of raising or elevating the mind to a sublime experience, whereas *erhaben/Erhabenheit/das Erhabene* all refer to the sublime experience. Hence, there is no good reason to follow other Kant scholars in preferring 'the sublime' to 'sublimity' in Kant.

I recognize that this approach to translation and terminology is imperfect. It sometimes differs from standard translations, it may obscure some distinct uses of cognate terms and it cannot extend to all cognates. Thus, for example, in translating *Stimmung* as attunement, I myself conceal the close relationship between *Stimmung* and *Bestimmung*, determination. But it is because of the indeterminacy of translation, in Quine's phrase, that I prefer literal translations and cognates. For all its flaws, this method both preserves many of the Kantian associations of root words and makes the translations sufficiently transparent to allow the reader minimally versed in Kant's German to know what it is that I am translating. Where the translation is particularly open to significantly different interpretations, I provide parenthetical references to the German words that I am translating.

1 • Longinus and the Origins of the Sublimity–Morality Connection

Eighteenth-century debates on the sublime tell us much about the origins of Kantian sublimity and its connections to morality, for Kant relies heavily on these debates.¹ But many fail to see that eighteenth-century accounts of the sublime themselves rely on the ancient Greek author Longinus (long confused with the neo-Platonist Cassius Longinus *c.*220–73 CE, author of a rhetoric text (in Burke: 468)). No figure is more important to the history of sublimity. Longinus dictated the terms of all subsequent writing on sublimity and articulated positions that in some respects are more amenable to Kantian morality than any of the important eighteenth-century empiricist and rationalist accounts known to Kant. For this reason, a reading of Longinus serves the historical function of subverting attempts to derive Kantian sublimity from British empiricist aesthetics or to assert the originality of the latter. Reading Longinus also helps to show the origins of Kant's transformation of traditional associations of sublimity and virtue into a critical account of sublimity's functions in a universalistic morality. Longinus' account of the conditions and moral relevance of sublimity prepares the ground for the Kantian critical account in ways that exhibit the limitations of eighteenth-century empiricist aesthetics. Yet, the Longinian account shares many of the limitations of eighteenth-century aesthetics for Kantian morality. Longinus' acceptance of Aristotelian virtue ethics, his failure to warrant his assertions and his lack of a systematic critique of experience make it impossible for him to show how subjective experience might operate within a universal morality. As a result, his account of sublimity remains a mere collection of loosely associated, unargued claims. Hence, we will see that Kant's revisions of the Longinian tradition provide an explanation for sublimity and assign sublimity specific functions within his critical morality.

The sublimity craze in early modern Europe began with Nicolas Boileau's (1636–1711) phenomenally successful 1674 French

translation of Longinus' work, *περι ὕψους*. The English and German translations of the text, following the French *Traité du sublime*, were *On the Sublime* and *Vom Erhabenen*, respectively, meaning 'on height' or 'on the elevated' (see Wood: 189). Although the tenth-century Parisinus manuscript of Longinus' text, missing about one thousand lines, had already appeared in three editions and been translated into Latin and Italian by the end of the sixteenth century, and into English by John Hall in 1652 (Grube: vii; Wood: 10), Boileau's translation 'produced a spectacular reaction'; for the next 150 years, Longinus was a 'household name' (Russell, introduction to Longinus 1964: xliii), so much so that Russell can claim that 'European literary criticism' owes its second-greatest debt, after Aristotle, to Longinus (Russell: ix).² Longinus' influence was particularly strong in England and within a few years the sublime began to appear in the writings of all the great English critics, from John Dryden in 1676 to John Dennis in 1701 and 1704, Alexander Pope in 1709, the third earl of Shaftesbury in 1711, Joseph Addison in 1711–12, Jonathan Swift in 1733 and Sir Joshua Reynolds in the 1760s (Russell: xlii). The sublime also became the focus of British, French and German philosophical work.³ The most prominent were Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Moses Mendelssohn's 'On the sublime and naive in the fine sciences' (1758) and Immanuel Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) and the 'Analytic of the Sublime' in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

From the perspective of modern aesthetics, which lacks access to any of his own ancient sources, Longinus did much more than merely inspire this torrent of writing. Indeed, he seems to have set forth the entire framework, subject matter, terminology, methods, definitions and examples used by eighteenth-century writers on the sublime, as well as the specific associations between sublimity and morality.

A partial list of ideas derived from Longinus includes:

- the mathematical and dynamical sublime,
- the methodological determination of the sublime (by reference to examples from classical authors),
- the description of sublimity as universal, elevated, noble, pleasing, boundless, heroic, grand, magnificent, formless, overpowering, a hybrid of nature and rule-governed *techne* and a moral, psychological ('subjective') experience.

(This psychological experience is linked closely to genius, enthusiasm, emotion – but not pity, grief or fear – affects, character, imagination, reason and other mental powers.)

In order to establish the relevance of Longinian sublimity to Kantian morality, it is necessary first to correct conventional accounts that place Longinus within an exclusively rhetorical, rather than psychological or aesthetic, tradition, concerned with identifying the essence of elevation, height or greatness in *speech and writing*, in words rather than images or vast, grand objects (Russell, introduction to Longinus 1964: x–xi; cf. Monk; Wood; Kirwan; Shaw: 5, 12, 71; etc.). The notion that rhetoric is exclusive of psychological and moral questions depends on a misreading of Aristotle. While Aristotelian rhetoric is indeed a linguistic art of rule-governed persuasion centred on proof, Aristotle argues that rhetoric, as a branch of ethics, may also work on character and emotions, and thus involve psychological *and moral* elements (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*: I.1–2). Nor can rhetoric be separated radically from aesthetics, for the persuasive, emotional and psychological elements of rhetoric engage the same mental powers as aesthetics, defined as the study of the images or representations experienced or considered by sensibility (Greek *αἴσθησις*, *aisthesis*), imagination, understanding and reason. Now if one turns away from the Aristotelian text and defines rhetoric differently as a non-psychological, non-aesthetic form of *techné*, as in Monk and others, then Longinus certainly does not offer a merely rhetorical reading of sublimity, for his account of sublimity as a *techné* contingent on mental activity recognizes the significance of practical questions of method and use in public speaking and, above all, ‘the essentially moral and psychological basis of the problem . . . how can we develop our capacities to some degree of greatness?’ (Russell: x). For Longinus, the moral and psychological task of self-development is simultaneously aesthetic, since words both originate in and conjure up mental representations or images and emotions. The moral function of aesthetic representation derives in part from the motivating, elevating power of these representations. Because *ῥῆσις* refers to words that evoke images associated with overpowering enthusiasm and passion, it operates by raising the passive reader violently beyond ‘himself’ through the affects, rather than by free and rational persuasion. By generating this self-transcendence, sublime experience situates the person in the virtuous position of a higher selflessness. Yet, the emotional force

motivating this self-transcendence could be appropriated for all manner of actions, virtuous or otherwise. There is no clear control function regulating what actions sublimity may engender. Images or mental representations (*eidolopoiias*) not only make strong contributions in persuasiveness to ‘dignity, elevation and power’, but they apply to the mental ideas originative of all speech, and particularly sublime speech, speech ‘carried away by enthusiasm [*enthousiasmos*] and passion’ (L 1907: XV, 82–3). These affective, imagistic, ideational, rule-governed and linguistic understandings of the sublime demonstrate that Longinus conceives sublimity in moral, aesthetic and psychological terms transcending traditional ‘rhetorical’ readings of his work.

As befits its place in this Aristotelian ‘rhetorical’ tradition, the morality developed in Longinian sublimity is primarily the very same Aristotelian virtue ethics still dominant in virtually all eighteenth-century writings on the sublime, including Kant’s early work and older elements of the ‘Analytic of the Sublime’. Longinus describes sublimity in implicitly Aristotelian ethical terms, arguing that ‘sublimity depends upon where [*pou*, the place] and how [*pos*, manner] and the circumstances and that for the sake of which [*ὄν ἐνεκα*, the motive]’ (ibid.: XVI, 92–3). This reference to context, manner, circumstances and motive (final cause, that for the sake of which) could be drawn straight from Aristotle’s account of right action (e.g. *Ethics*: II.1106b20, 1109a27, III.1110b33–11a6). Here we have no a priori guide to what context, manner, circumstances and motive are appropriate to sublimity, for the Longinian criteria for judging the sublime exhibit the Aristotelian concern to establish moral standards by reference not solely to reason or universal rules, but to practised moral judgement and the affects of the person as well. This reliance on moral exemplars, developed moral judgement and affects implies either an ideological reference to a foundational standard deemed moral in itself or an infinite regress, where each judgement or moral action is so considered by its reference to a prior, similarly ‘justified’ judgement. Hence, this reliance on an Aristotelian form of morality is inherently problematic. But if we ask what specific moral virtues sublimity involves, rather than speaking abstractly of moral foundations or virtue in general, we cannot easily associate the excess of Longinian sublimity with many of the moderate Aristotelian virtues. Where there is a clear link, from the very definition of the sublime, is to the Aristotelian virtues

of greatness and magnanimity, yet this relationship directly connects the traditional account of sublimity to the transcendent form of Kantian sublimity and morality. Longinus argues that sublimity in literature is akin to the ‘high-souled’ disdain for ‘riches, honours, distinctions, sovereignties and all other’ external values to men of good sense (L 1907: VII, 54–5). The sublime collapses into admiration of the mortal, the lawless, the shameless, when softened by greed, as in peacetime, we become ignoble ‘slaves of pleasure’ (ibid.: XLIV, 156–61). Sublimity requires transcendence of mortal pleasures. This view, anticipating Kant, demonstrates that for Longinus, as for Kant, sublimity’s relationship to pleasure and the affects consists in the drive to master them, and thereby to transcend the limits of human existence. In this respect, Longinus provides just the dominating, transcendent relationship to the affects called for by the Kantian critical account.

Indeed, Longinus already sets forth the elements of the moral ‘transformation’ of sublimity that Paul Guyer attributes first to Kant. In distinguishing two types of pre-Kantian eighteenth-century sublimity, the psychological and the theological-moral, Guyer argues that ‘[w]hat Kant did was to transmute the psychological account into an alternative moral account in which humanity is elevated rather than humbled’ (Guyer 1993: 259). As we shall see, there were, in fact, numerous pre-Kantian readings of sublimity as moral elevation. But at least fifteen hundred years earlier, Longinus provided perhaps the first and most influential example of this particular moral reading in describing sublime height or elevation as *transcendence* of the merely human or mortal (a characteristic both of the sublime object and the spectator experiencing the sublime) in imagination’s passing beyond the universe and all space to human purpose in this world (L 1907: XXXVI, 136–7; XXXV, 132–5), and in giving a moral reading of this form of transcendence.

The similarities to Kant’s moral account of sublimity go much farther. In fact, it can be argued that Longinian categories, ranging from the association of sublimity with self-transcendence to the account of the power struggles of the faculties within the sublime, provide the framework for a Kantian moral reading of sublimity. Longinus and Kant agree that the tension between imagination and reason is definitive of sublimity, that reason and imagination are necessary to it (L 1907: XVI, 94–5), that morality depends on a power struggle between these two mental powers and that sublimity

is incompatible with an excess or disorder of the passions, which Kant calls fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*) and Longinus calls *παρενθουρσος* or false enthusiasm (*παθος ακαιρον και κενον*), a hollow, untimely ‘display of passion’, immoderacy (L 1957: III, 6–7), or ‘intoxication personal and independent of the subject matter’ (L 1907: III, 48–9). Thus, the destruction of a certain unstable, temporary mean or balance between the powers of reason, imagination and the passions destroys the sublime. In allying beauty and sublimity in moral terms (ibid.: XXVII, 96–7), then, Longinus repeatedly describes them both as harmonic phenomena (ibid.: XXVIII, 114–15; XXXIX, 142–3). However, like Kant, he stresses the interplay of tension and release, disorder and order, imagination and reason, rather than simple harmony. If there are not two forms of sublimity at issue here, a simple or naive and a complex style, but only one (and Longinus does not answer this question), the harmony and dissonance described by Longinus might be combined into a single Kantian ‘harmony’ defined by the unification of contradictions or tensions, as in Sappho’s desire to effect ‘a concourse of the passions’ (ibid.: X, 70–1). But it is certainly the case that for both Longinus and Kant, the tension definitive of sublimity, between sensibility or imagination and reason, is harmonious or morally productive in enabling the spectator’s transcendence of sensibility. It might be asked whether the disharmony of sensibility or imagination with reason would always enable moral transcendence. In the Kantian case, the inclinations of sensibility must be negative, and negative inclinations covertly serve reason’s moral ends by obstructing sensibility, but in the Longinian case inclinations often serve positively to reinforce rational commands, an effect that for Kant would occasion suspicion of the autonomy, purity or rational control of moral commands.

The most morally significant similarity between Longinus and Kant is the view that sublime height or elevation, both in the experiencing subject and the sublime object (ibid.: XXXVI, 134–7), constitutes an unrestricted transcendence of the merely human or mortal (ibid.: 136–7; cf. Weiskel: 3). Nature implants in humans, as spectators of the vast, mighty universe, ‘the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we . . . Wherefore not even the entire universe suffices for the thought and contemplation within the reach of the human mind, but our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space’ to recognize the purpose of our

existence in what is great in our life; humans ‘reserve their admiration [*thaumaston*, wonder] for that which is astounding [*paradoxon*]’ (L 1907: XXXV, 132–5). The sublime experience of what is transcendent frees the spectator’s thought and imagination, prepared already by nature to admire what is elevated, to think and imagine freely what transcends spatio-temporal existence. Hence, sublimity serves to detach the spectator from earthly inclinations in favour of the universal. Longinus, like Baumgarten, Kant and many others, regards sublimity as a means of achieving virtue through the transcendence of earthly greed; as Philip Shaw argues, the sublime ‘elevates man above the tawdry concern with wealth and status’ (Shaw: 18). But this view is problematic in that it is unaccompanied in Longinus by a rational, universal system of non-natural morality reliant on transcendence and it fails to distinguish clearly between the capacities and functions of thought and imagination, neglecting the ancient philosophical tradition in which (visual) imagination is linked to finite material representations in the visual sphere.

In Longinus’ account, the sublime exhibits for experience transcendent standards by reference to which the insignificance and baseness of all quotidian desires become evident. There is no cognitive judgement dismissing greed as wrong for particular reasons; the accepted rightness of virtue is, rather, given visceral demonstration and the person is motivated to live virtuously. Sublimity’s role in preparing the virtuous person is clear. Virtue requires the transcendent greatness and nobility of the magnanimous man or the disengaged, purely theoretical life of the contemplative ‘man’, not, normally, the practically engaged man acting from the conventional midpoint between extremes of, say, passion and reason. The sublime is its own type of virtuous extreme. This association of virtue with sublime transcendence of nature enables the segregation of evaluative and factual realms, a step crucial to any conventionally successful morality. Yet, transcendence of nature remains dependent on our natural love for the supernatural. This move avoids the circularity of Aristotelian references to moral exemplars, although, as we have seen, Longinus elsewhere looks to the moral exemplar to establish standards for virtuous behaviour and to the exemplary author to exhibit the sublime. But, by conditioning virtue ultimately on natural functions, he undermines its claim to transcendence. The fact that we have some natural function cannot establish that it is morally good to possess that function or that the function is present

in us for some transcendent purpose. While mere nature can explain the presence and pragmatic effectiveness of various functions, as in Darwinian natural selection, it cannot establish their transcendent value, and the mere love of transcendence, as a human emotion, is not thereby elevated beyond natural experience to this posited evaluative dimension.

However, for Longinus, the natural hierarchy of power somehow assumes moral significance. His stress on the mind's sublime transcendence of finitude, like Kant's, depends upon a model of sublimity and morality defined by the drive to mastery. For Longinus, power (*dynamis*) is a characteristic of sublimity. He writes that Demosthenes 'overpowers with thunder and with lightning' (L 1907: XXXIV, 132–3), and that Homer's sublimity is 'overpowering' (ibid.: IX, 62–3). These are externalized examples of the dynamical sublime. The external dimension suggests the fundamental incompatibility of sublimity with most conventional morality, in associating factual power with evaluative greatness. But Longinus anticipates Kant and many eighteenth-century writers on the sublime by also *internalizing* these power struggles, situating them within the mental powers. This internalizing move seems to attach moral significance to the mere fact of some particular, privileged, internal rank ordering of the mental powers. But there is here the kernel of a transcendental, evaluative argument, in that Longinus, like Kant, suggests that the highest mental powers are those that enable transcendence of nature. The naturally endowed mental powers somehow contain within themselves the possibility of going beyond nature.

Yet, Longinus at times defines this internalized sublimity in terms of sublimity's enslavement of the listener's reason and will by the emotions, whereas Kant argues that sublimity requires reason's dominance over sensibility. For Kant, reason is master, and sensibility is reduced to slavery. For Longinus, if enslavement to pleasure destroys sublimity, sublimity itself constitutes its own form of slavery. When vehemence and passion are infused in spoken words combined with argumentative passages, 'it not only persuades the hearer, but even makes him its slave [*douloutai*]' (ibid.: XV, 88–9); sublimity is defined as the struggle to convince by the *violence* of rhetorical force (Shaw: 4–5). Sublimity's combination of reasoning and imagination overpowers the spectator's will by circumventing the strictures of rational persuasion. As Longinus describes the

battle between imagination and reason, power of its own nature (*physis*) determines conviction and arguments *concealed in images* motivate with much greater power than rational demonstration by itself (L 1907: XV, 90–1). Thus, for Longinus and Kant, reason is involved in sublimity, but the emotional forces of sublime experience motivate moral action far more strongly than reason alone. However, the effects of power differ significantly for Longinus and Kant in that, for the former, the power of sublimity enslaves the listener, undermining moral autonomy, whereas for the latter sublimity's negativity enables moral autonomy by clearing away any positive subjective inclinations obstructing rational power over nature.

If the psychologistic character of sublimity's affective function undermines its moral utility from a Kantian perspective, Longinus corrects for this problem by positing universal standards for the judgement of sublimity, and thus, grounding a normative connection of sublimity and morality. He argues that genuine *ὑψος* 'stands the test of repeated reading and reflection by experienced critics'; it is universal (Russell: xii, genuine examples of sublimity 'please all and always') (L 1907: VII, 56–7)). This universality is made possible by the universal psychological effects of genuine *ὑψος*, namely, that it 'pleases all conditions of men'. The experience of its judge, its quantity and its effects on the reader's affects provide a general basis for distinguishing true from false sublimity.

The conflict between Longinus' two singular, non-discursive, non-rule-governed criteria (judicial expertise and its effects on the reader) and the third universal, discursive, rule-governed criterion (its universality) exposes the inherent tensions within his account of the sublime. He first adopts the argument that the cultivation of expertise is necessary for the judgement of sublimity and then undermines any requirement of expertise by arguing that genuine *ὑψος* pleases men of *any* condition. Later critics objected to the claim to universal pleasure (Russell: xii), both on grounds that contingent affects such as pleasure are non-universalizable and that the sublime is characterized not merely by pleasure, but by displeasure or a combination of the two. Kant himself would have accepted the second criticism and added a third, namely, that the judge's requirements of reflective cultivation and long experience make it impossible for the sublime to please all conditions of men, although he also posits a certain degree of cultivation as the condition for the

sublime in the *Critique of Judgment*. But Longinus and Kant would agree that the sublime is subjectively universal, and thus, independent of the reader's will, choice or activity.

We shall see many of the details of this brief account of Longinus repeated over and over in eighteenth-century accounts of the sublime. Addison, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Young, Gerard, Burke, Baumgarten and Mendelssohn offer views in large measure derivative of Longinus. But while Longinus already articulates the elements crucial to a Kantian moral account of sublimity, even if he weakens his account by omitting any systematic delineation of the functions of the mental powers in sublimity, Kant's eighteenth-century precursors offer few of the necessary conditions for a systematic treatment of sublimity's moral functions. However, this does not mean that we should ignore these accounts of the sublime, for it is important to examine their subtler disagreements, distinct emphases and more proximate influence on Kant in order to identify Kant's originality in his association of sublimity and morality.