**Kant Notes: The Beautiful, The Sublime, Art, and Genius**

The Beautiful The Sublime

Form in the object Formlessness of the object

Limitation Limitlessness (with the thought of totality)

Beauty evinces a sense of order in nature The sublime is evinced by chaos and wildness

suggesting unimaginable magnitude and power

Sensuous presentation of an Presentation of an indeterminate concept

indeterminate concept of Understanding of Reason

Accord of imagination and understand- Conflict of imagination and reason

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The sensuous presentation of an Idea The sublime connected with Ideas of reason

of understanding, sensuous form awakened by the inadequacy of the object

In the sublime the mind abandons sensibility and

rises to a higher level

Finality of form preadapted to us An outrage to the imagination, as if contravening

our power of judgement, contra-final

Direct pleasure Indirect pleasure, a result of a check on vital

Forces followed by a discharge of emotion

Feeling of Life Feeling of a higher, supersensible power in us

(moral freedom)

Positive pleasure Negative pleasure, feeling of transcendence

overcoming fear

Playful Serious, earnest

Restful contemplation Energizing, sets reason or reflection in motion

Free play of imagination and under- Imagination checked, reason prompted to

standing transcend it

We ascribe beauty (as if) to the object The sublime lies not in the object but our

reaction to it

The object merely lends itself to a presentation

of the sublime in the mind

Beauty shows nature as if it were art & The sublime arouses a feeling of finality in our-

Art as if it were nature (teleology) selves, our moral teleology

Beauty suggests a teleological ground in The sublime suggests a purpose in ourselves

Nature higher than nature, independent of nature

Beauty in nature is sought outside our- The sublime is sought within ourselves

Selves

Summary plus:

1. The sublime is awakened in us when the imagination reaches its limits and incapacity and leaps to the idea of a “supersensible substrate,” a relation to being or a being beyond the sensible world.
2. The feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation as moral beings, our moral freedom, superior to the whole of nature—the idea of humanity in our own self
3. The sublime evinces the supremacy of our reason over our sensibility and imagination, two forms, the mathematical sublime (quantitative limitlessness) and the dynamical sublime (the mind’s feeling of moral superiority to the power and might of nature).
4. The first is a sublime relative to the understanding, the second is the sublime relative to reason in its capacity for Ideas transcending the world of the senses.
5. The sublime is the awakening of the idea of freedom, that is, man’s supersensible capacity to give himself moral laws, self-legislation that relates him to the “noumenal” rather than merely the “phenomenal” (sensible) world.
6. Just as beauty is a “symbol of morality” (meaning not that it is moral, but that is both akin in some was to moral judgement and linked to morality—inability to appreciate beauty and disinterest in it is the sign of a defect of character for Kant), so to the sublime is a kind of symbol of freedom.

The Beauty of Art (as opposed to Nature) and Genius

1. Art is the presentation of “aesthetic ideas” by means of beautiful forms.
2. It is a form of beauty that is “dependent” because it connected to a conscious purpose in the mind of the artist and his audience
3. It also involves forms of nature that are purposive for our understanding, such as living things, so it is “mixed” too.
4. An aesthetic idea is the counterpart of a rational Idea, but one presented to intuition by the imagination,
5. And exciting meaningful yet indeterminate (undefinable) thought or reflection. Art, in other words, opens up unfathomable meaning, is a constant source of new ideas and insights. The true work of art is thus inexhaustible. It endlessly invites new reflections and discoveries.
6. The true work of art is the product of “genius,” not just talent, imitation, taste, or thought, all of which are certainly elements, ingredients, or preconditions of true art. It is capacity for creating aesthetic ideas, imaginative or intuitive presentations of indeterminate concepts by means of sensuous presentations
7. By the same token, genius occurs only in artistic creation—not in science or technology, or in other modes of human intellectual endeavor—including philosophy. By Kant’s own account, Kant not only isn’t, but cannot be, a genius. Other forms of invention or discovery or construction like science assume that one can identify the steps by which on arrives at one’s results—but not in art.
8. Genius is more than a talent, and imitation of genius is more than copying. It is that through which nature gives the rule to art—that is, a power to discover or invent rules where no rules are previously given. Genius is not bound by rules because it makes the rules.
9. Genius is a capacity for exemplary originality, the disposition and ability to create original examples or models that may be followed by other geniuses, that may awaken their own originality to create their own exemplary models—a kind of secret communication between geniuses, a secret society of the creative and original.

CJ § 57, Remark I (Bernard translation, underlining added):

“We can consequently explain genius as the faculty of aesthetical Ideas; by which at the same time is shown the reason why in the products of genius it is the nature (of the subject) and not a premeditated purpose that gives the rule to the art (of the production of the beautiful). For since the beautiful must not be judged by concepts, but by the purposive attuning of the Imagination to agreement with the faculty of concepts in general, it cannot be rule and precept which can serve as the subjective standard of that aesthetical but unconditioned purposiveness in beautiful art, that can rightly claim to please every one. It can only be that in the subject which is nature and cannot be brought under rules or concepts, i.e. the supersensible substrate of all his faculties (to which no concept of the Understanding extends), and consequently that with respect to which it is the final purpose given by the intelligible [part] of our nature to harmonise all our cognitive faculties. Thus alone is it possible that there should be a priori at the basis of this purposiveness, for which we can prescribe no objective principle, a principle subjective and yet of universal validity.”