THE KANTIAN SUBLIME AND THE REVELATION OF FREEDOM

In this book Robert R. Clewis shows how certain crucial concepts in Kant’s aesthetics and practical philosophy – the sublime, enthusiasm, freedom, empirical and intellectual interests, the idea of a republic – fit together and deepen our understanding of Kant’s philosophy. He examines the ways in which different kinds of sublimity reveal freedom and indirectly contribute to morality, and discusses how Kant’s account of natural sublimity suggests that we have an indirect duty with regard to nature. Unlike many other studies of these themes, this book examines both the pre-Critical *Observations* and the remarks that Kant wrote in his copy of the *Observations*. Finally, Clewis takes seriously Kant’s claim that enthusiasm is aesthetically sublime, and shows how this clarifies Kant’s views of the French Revolution. His book will appeal to all who are interested in Kant’s philosophy.

ROBERT R. CLEWIS is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Gwynedd-Mercy College.
THE KANTIAN SUBLIME
AND THE REVELATION
OF FREEDOM

ROBERT R. CLEWIS
per Elisa
Conversely, even that which we call sublime in nature outside us or even within ourselves (e.g., certain affects) is represented only as a power of the mind to soar above certain obstacles of sensibility by means of moral principles, and thereby to become interesting.

I should like to dwell a little on the last point. The idea of the good with affect is called enthusiasm. This state of mind seems to be sublime, so much so that it is commonly maintained that without it nothing great can be accomplished. Now, however, every affect is blind, either in the choice of its end, or, even if this end is given by reason, in its implementation; for it is that movement of the mind that makes it incapable of engaging in free consideration of principles, in order to determine itself in accordance with them. Thus it cannot in any way merit a satisfaction of reason. Nevertheless, enthusiasm is aesthetically sublime, because it is a stretching of the powers through ideas, which give the mind a momentum that acts far more powerfully and persistently than the impetus given by sensory representations. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kritik der Urteilskraft 5:272)

The color of the sublime is red. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kritik der Urteilskraft 5:302)
# Contents

*Preface and acknowledgments*  
ix

*Abbreviations and notes on Kant’s texts*  
xi

## Introduction

1. The *Observations* and the *Remarks*  
1.1 The *Observations*  
1.2 Three forms of the sublime, and the grotesque  
1.3 Virtue  
1.4 The *Remarks*: history and background  
1.5 Four senses of freedom  
1.6 Enthusiasm: the passion of the sublime  
1.7 Conclusion  

2. The judgment of the sublime  
2.1 Preliminary issues  
2.2 The mathematical and the dynamical sublime  
2.3 A third kind: the moral sublime  
2.4 Dependent and free sublimity  
2.5 The monstrous and the colossal  
2.6 Sublimity elicited by art  

3. Moral feeling and the sublime  
3.1 The moral feeling of respect  
3.2 Sublimity as presupposing freedom  
3.3 Sublimity as supporting morality  

4. Various senses of interest and disinterestedness  
4.1 Interest  
4.2 First-order and second-order interests  
4.3 Empirical and morally based interests  
4.4 Conclusion  

vii
## Contents

5 Aesthetic enthusiasm  
5.1 Enthusiasm in the corpus  
5.2 Affect  
5.3 Enthusiasm as morally ambiguous  
5.4 Enthusiasm as an aesthetic feeling of sublimity  
5.5 “Without enthusiasm nothing great can be accomplished”  
5.6 Conclusion: Kantian enthusiasm and the revelation of freedom  

6 Enthusiasm for the idea of a republic  
6.1 The charge against Kant  
6.2 Means and ends  
6.3 Freedom and the idea of a republic  
6.4 The consistency of Kant’s position  

7 Conclusion  
7.1 Summary  
7.2 Sublimity’s basis in freedom  
7.3 The transition to freedom  

Appendix 1: On the Remarks  
Appendix 2: Some features of the feelings discussed in this book  
Appendix 3: Classification of what elicits sublimity  
Bibliography  
Index
Preface and acknowledgments

I would like to thank SAGE Publications for allowing me to use in chapter 6 some of the material found in “Kant’s Consistency regarding the Regime Change in France,” Philosophy and Social Criticism, 32(4) (2006): 443–60.

It is my pleasure to acknowledge the many people who have contributed to the writing and completion of this book. I sincerely regret that there is space to mention only a few of the individuals who have influenced this project.

Susan Shell and Richard Kearney read early drafts of selected chapters and offered invaluable advice throughout its various stages. This book could not have been written without Susan Shell, who first shaped my understanding of Kant’s Bemerkungen in den “Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen.” Richard Kearney selflessly offered his advice and assistance from the beginning of my work on the project, and his comments on an early chapter on enthusiasm encouraged me to expand the chapter into this book.

Henry E. Allison constructively influenced my Kant interpretation when I was a graduate student in Boston. I would like to thank him for his honest criticisms and encouragement. As an assistant professor in the Philadelphia area, I have benefited from auditing graduate philosophy courses given by Paul Guyer and by Noël Carroll. Paul Guyer’s writings have informed my way of conceiving of sublimity as a feeling of freedom, and I would like to thank him for speaking with me about my project and for sharing his knowledge of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Noël Carroll has helped me think more critically about Kant’s notions of interest and disinterestedness, and has enabled me to read Kant with contemporary aesthetic issues in the background.

Numerous institutions and foundations have generously supported this project. Krzysztof Michalski and the staff at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen have been incredibly kind to me ever
Preface and acknowledgments

since my stay there in 2003. Norbert Fischer and Hermann Schnackertz welcomed me to the Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in 2001–2. Otfried Höffe kindly hosted me as a visiting scholar at the Universität Tübingen in 2002. I would like to thank Manfred Frank for welcoming me to his reading group during that time.

The Bradley Foundation, Katholische Universität Eichstätt Stiftung, the Boston College Philosophy Department, and the Ernest Fortin Foundation provided some funding in the early stages of the manuscript, and the Bosch Foundation generously provided financial assistance in the summer of 2006.

For their insights and assistance, I thank Patrick Byrne, Richard Cobb-Stevens, Alfredo Ferrarin, Jean-Luc Marion, Rob Miner, David Rasmussen, William J. Richardson, Eileen Sweeney, and Jacques Taminiaux; as well as Ralph Kennedy, Win-chiat Lee, Charles Lewis, Josefine Nauckhoff, Byron Wells, and Ralph Wood. I would like to thank the Wake Forest University philosophy department for inviting me to present and discuss an early version of chapter 4.

I am grateful to my friends and colleagues at Gwynedd-Mercy College, PA, for their support as I researched this book. Michael Clinton kept me honest about taking Kant too seriously, and Donald Duclow pushed me to evaluate the entire Kantian project. The staff at Lourdes Library was very helpful in preparing the manuscript.

This project has benefited in various ways from discussions with Andrew Bickford, Jim Boettcher, Jason Broverman, Corey Dyck, Christine Gottstein-Strobl, David Kim, Claudia Neudecker, Brian Treanor, Andrew Valins, and Joseph Westfall.

I am indebted to Hilary Gaskin, Tom O’Reilly, and Gillian Dadd at Cambridge University Press, and to the Press’s anonymous readers, for their encouragement, advice, and help in the production of this book. I would like to thank Kate Mertes for preparing the index.

I would like to express gratitude to those individuals who read parts or drafts of the manuscript. Reidar Maliks read a draft of chapter 6, and Peter Lamarque graciously commented on an early version of chapter 5. Uygar Abaci and Dan Heider read a late draft of the manuscript. I am indebted to the reviewers of parts or drafts of this manuscript. Needless to say, all of the errors and infelicities that remain are entirely my own.

I am especially thankful to have received the support of my wonderful family. I gratefully dedicate this book to my wife, Elisa.
Abbreviations and notes on Kant’s texts

Except for the references to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, references to Kant are to the volume:page number of *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (*KGS*), published by the Deutsche (formerly Königlich Preußische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–). The references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the A and B pagination of the first and second editions, respectively. References to the *Remarks* are to the volume:page number of the *KGS* followed by the page number in the Rischmüller edition (Bemerkungen in den “Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen,” ed. Marie Rischmüller [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1991]). Translations from the *Remarks* are my own, as are translations from works for which no English translation is listed below. References to the *Observations* are to the volume:page number of the *KGS* followed by the page in the Goldthwait translation from which I quote (Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime, trans. John Goldthwait [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960]).

The abbreviations below are used to cite Kant’s texts; any texts not abbreviated below are cited only by the *KGS* volume:page number. English translations that are used in citations are listed below. It should be noted, however, that I have occasionally modified these translations. Translations that were consulted but not cited from can be found in the bibliography. Finally, it should be pointed out that bold font is used throughout this book to reproduce Kant’s original emphasis.

**AM** Anthropologie Mrongovius

**AP** Anthropologie Parow


xii  Abbreviations and notes on Kant’s texts


GTP  Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Principien in der Philosophie


ID  De mundi sensibili atque intelligibili forma et principiis [Inaugural Dissertation]


M  Menschenkunde

MA  Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte


PPH  Praktische Philosophie Herder


Refl  Reflexionen

Rem  Bemerkungen in den “Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen”
Abbreviations and notes on Kant’s texts


**VK** Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes