

Immanuel Kant

Pt. 3

HUMN2001 – VIDEO LECTURE – WK8
M. Curtis Allen

Brief Context for Kant in Relation to the Theory of Burke

Burke's Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime

- Edmund Burke (1729-1797) was a conservative English statesman and philosopher living during the Age of Enlightenment.
- Written at the age of 19, he published *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) in his late 20s.

WHO WOULD WIN?

Some revolutionary Frenchmen



One concerned Irishman



Brief Context for Kant in Relation to the Theory of Burke

Burke's Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime

- It was his only purely philosophical work, and it gained the respect of many philosophers, intellectuals, and artists throughout the remainder of the 18th century, including especially Kant.
- Before the 18th c, the beautiful and the sublime were not often separated out as distinct aesthetic categories. Burke was central in this development.
- As the title suggests, it focuses on the concepts of the Beautiful and the Sublime, and takes these to exhaust the field of aesthetic pleasures.



Brief Context for Kant in Relation to the Theory of Burke

Burke's Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime

- Burke, like Kant after him and Addison before him, took the imagination to play a central role in both feelings, but the imagination adopted complex relationships with the pleasure of the senses in B's theory
- The 'perfections' of these two feelings and their description constituted the fulcrum of the theory
- these both relied on the passions, according to B, and were divided along the lines of social promotion and self-preservation (an idea about pleasure and pain adopted from Hume)



Brief Context for Kant in Relation to the Theory of Burke

Burke's Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime

- The perfections of social feelings arise from pleasure or its absence.
- The **beautiful** arises from the social passion of love.
- It is characterized by the small, the smooth, the various, the delicate, the clear, and the bright

(Shelley 2018)

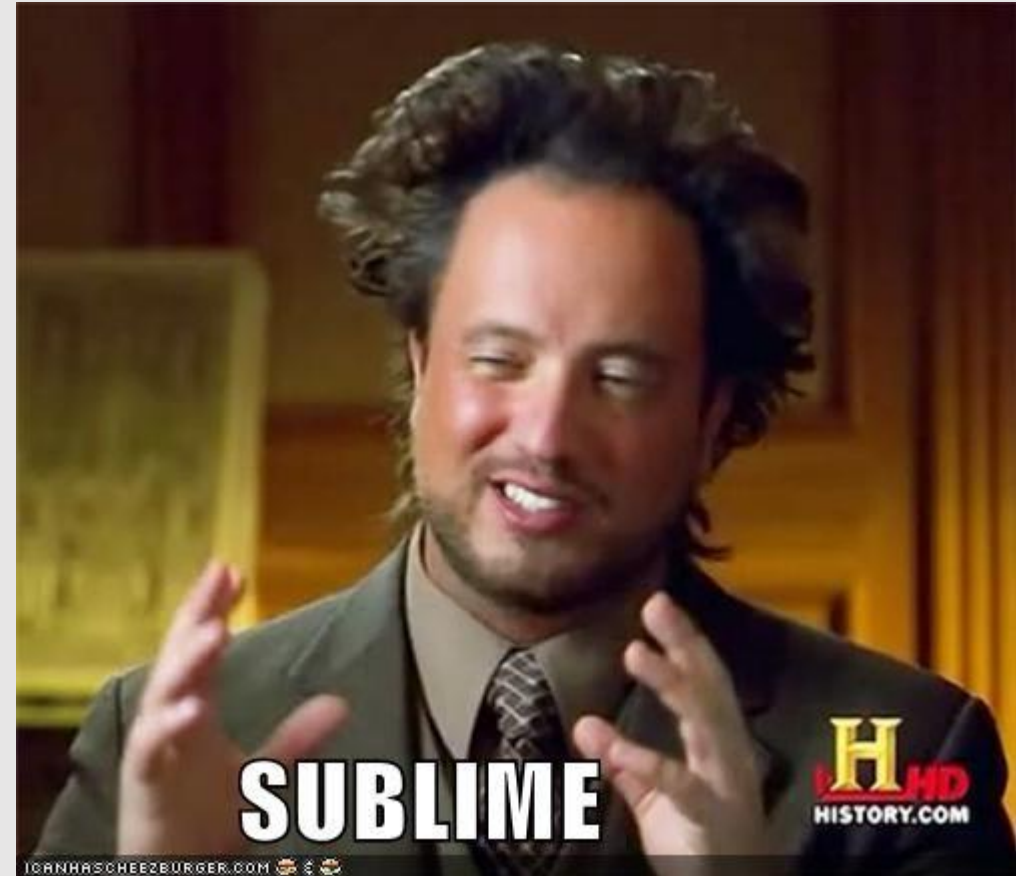


Brief Context for Kant in Relation to the Theory of Burke

Burke's Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime

- The perfections of self-preserved feelings arise from pain or its absence.
- The **sublime** arises from the self-preserved passion of astonishment.
- It is characterized by great, the uniform, the powerful, the obscure, and the somber.

(Shelley 2018)



Brief Context for Kant in Relation to the Theory of Burke

Burke's Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime

- So we can see that Kant takes much of the framework from Burke's *Enquiry*
 - that aesthetics deals with forms of pleasure
 - That the beautiful and the sublime are distinct and have differing, but essential roles to play
 - And that Burke's understanding of these categories roughly align with Kant's own.



Brief Context for Kant in Relation to the Theory of Burke

Burke's Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime

- Nevertheless Kant will focus on their roles in relation to the understanding and to reason
- He will also separate out the idea of perfection from them
- And he will perform an *a priori* rather than empirical analysis of them in line with his project of transcendental psychology and philosophical anthropology.
- Thus Kant's work seeks to place aesthetics within a broader philosophical system of transcendental philosophy—the hallmark of Kant's 'critical' project.



Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

What the beautiful and the sublime have in common

- The sublime is also a reflective judgement
- The satisfaction of the S is "connected to the mere presentation or to the faculty for that [imagination]" (128)
 - e.g. with the state of feeling not with determinate concepts.
- S is singular (128), but universally valid.

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

Differences between the beautiful and the sublime

“...([T]he feeling of the sublime) is a pleasure that arises only indirectly, being generated, namely, by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital powers and the immediately following and all the more powerful outpouring of them...” (128-9)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

Differences between the beautiful and the sublime

“[T]hat which, without any rationalizing, merely in apprehension, excites in us the feeling of the sublime, may to be sure appear in its form to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination, but is nevertheless judged all the more sublime for that.” (129)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

Differences between the beautiful and the sublime

“We can say no more than that the object serves for the presentation of a sublimity that can be found in the mind; for what is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though no presentation adequate to them is possible, are provoked and called to mind precisely by this inadequacy...” (129)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

Specificity of the sublime

“From this we see that the concept of the sublime in nature is far from being as important and rich in consequences as that of its beauty, and that in general it indicates nothing purposive in nature itself, but only in the possible use of its intuitions to make palpable in ourselves a purposiveness that is entirely independent of nature. For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground outside ourselves, but for the sublime merely one in ourselves and in the way of thinking that introduces sublimity into the representation of the former” (130)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

Specificity of the sublime

- The sublime is divided into the **mathematically** sublime and the **dynamically** sublime
 - The first relates the imagination to the faculty of cognition *as faculty*
 - The second relates the imagination to the faculty of desire *as faculty* (131)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“Now if I simply say that something is great, it seems that I do not have in mind any comparison at all, at least not with any objective measure, since it is not thereby determined at all how great the object is.” (132)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“Now it is noteworthy here that even if we have no interest at all in the object, i.e., its existence is indifferent to us, still its mere magnitude, even if it is considered as formless, can bring with it a satisfaction that is universally communicable, hence it may contain a consciousness of a subjective purposiveness in the use of our cognitive faculties: but not a satisfaction of the object... rather in the enlargement of the imagination itself.” (133)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

Which is more sublime?

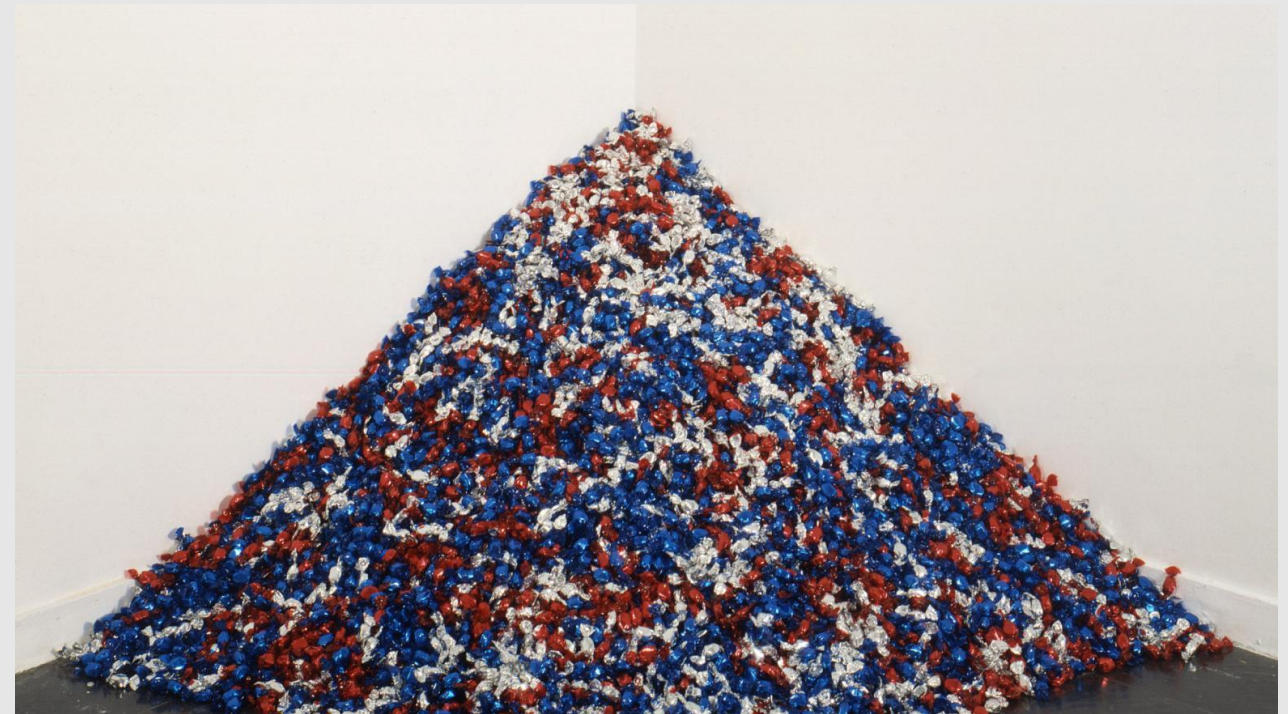


Edward Burtynsky, *Oxford Tire Pile #5*, Westley, California (1999)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

Which is more sublime?



Félix González-Torres *"Untitled"* (*USA Today*) (1990)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“That the sublime is therefore not to be sought in the things of nature but only in our ideas follows from this; but in which of these it lies must be saved for the deduction. The above explanation can also be expressed thus: That is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small... Thus nothing that can be an object of the senses is, considered on this footing, to be called sublime.” (134)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“the very inadequacy of our faculty for estimating the magnitude of the things of the sensible world awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty in us...”(134)

“That is sublime which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses” (134)

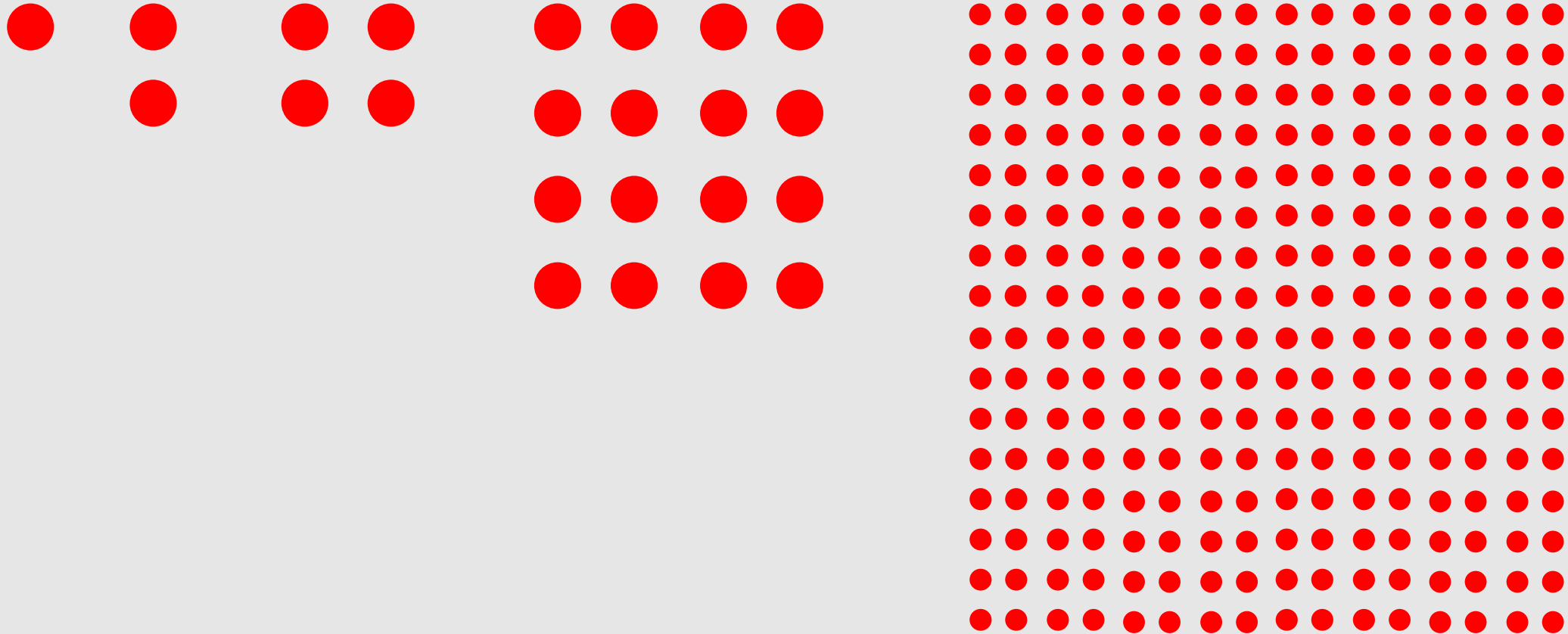
Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“There is no difficulty with apprehension... but comprehension becomes ever more difficult the further apprehension advances, and soon reaches its maximum, namely the aesthetically greatest basic measure for the estimation of magnitude” (135)

“Analytic of the Beautiful” Recap.

Intuitively estimating magnitude



Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

- The experience of the intuitive magnitude is one of scale.

“ ... that in order to get the full emotional effect of the magnitude of the pyramids one must neither come too close to them nor be too far away. For in the latter case, the parts that are apprehended (the stones piled on top of one another) are represented only obscurely, and their representation has no effect on the aesthetic judgment of the subject. In the former case, however, the eye requires some time to complete its apprehension from the base level to the apex, but during this time the former always partly fades before the imagination has taken in the latter, and the comprehension is never complete.” (135-6)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

"... I only note that if the aesthetic judgment is to be pure... and if an example of that is to be given which is fully appropriate for the critique of the aesthetic power of judgment, then the sublime must not be shown in products of art... nor in natural things whose concept already brings with it a determinate end... but rather in raw nature... merely insofar as it contains magnitude" (136)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“Even a faculty for being able to think the infinite... is great beyond all comparison even with the faculty of mathematical estimation, not, of course, from a theoretical point of view, in behalf of the faculty of cognition, but still as an enlargement of the mind which feels itself empowered to overstep the limits of sensibility from another (practical) point of view. Nature is thus sublime in those of its appearances the intuition of which brings with them the idea of its infinity.” (138)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“Thus, just as the aesthetic power of judgment in judging the beautiful relates the imagination in its free play to the understanding, in order to agree with its concepts in general (without determination of them), so in judging a thing to be sublime the same faculty is related to reason, in order to correspond subjectively with its ideas (though which is undetermined...” (139)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“The feeling of the inadequacy of our capacity for the attainment of an idea that is a law for us is respect.” (140)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“Thus the inner perception of the inadequacy of any sensible standard for the estimation of magnitude by reason corresponds with reason’s laws, and is a displeasure that arouses the feeling of our supersensible vocation in us, in accordance with which it is purposive and thus a pleasure to find every standard of sensibility inadequate for the ideas of the understanding*.” (141)

* The translators have followed the second edition here in translating *Verstandes* as ‘understanding,’ whereas in the first edition it read as *Vernunft* (‘reason’). I’m not totally sure which one it should be. (MCA)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The mathematical sublime

“For just as imagination and understanding produce subjective purposiveness of the powers of the mind in the judging of the beautiful through their unison, so do imagination and reason produce subjective purposiveness through their conflict: namely, a feeling that we have pure self-sufficient reason, or a faculty for estimating magnitude, whose preeminence cannot be made intuitable through anything except the inadequacy of that faculty which is itself unbounded in the presentation of magnitudes (of sensible objects).” (142)

Immanuel Kant

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Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The dynamical sublime

"Power is a capacity that is superior to great obstacles" (143)

- 'Power' is the capacity to overcome things.
- 'Dominion' defines one power over another power

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The dynamical sublime

“Nature considered in aesthetic judgment as a power that has no dominion over us is dynamically sublime.” (143)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The dynamical sublime

"We can, however, consider an object as fearful without being afraid of it, if, namely, we judge it in such a way that we merely think of the case in which we might wish to resist it and think that in that case all resistance would be completely futile." (144)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The dynamical sublime

“Bold, overhanging, as it were threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, etc., make our capacity to resist into an insignificant trifle in comparison with their power. But the sight of them only becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, as long as we find ourselves in safety, and we gladly call these objects sublime because they elevate the strength of our soul above its usual level...” (144)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The dynamical sublime

"...likewise the irresistibility of its power certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness, but at the same time it reveals a capacity for judging ourselves as independent of it and a superiority over nature on which is grounded a self-preservation of quite another kind than that which can be threatened and endangered by nature outside us, whereby the humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion." (145)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The dynamical sublime

“In this way, in our aesthetic judgment nature is judged as sublime not insofar as it arouses fear, but rather because it calls forth our power (which is not part of nature) to regard those things about which we are concerned (goods, health and life) as trivial, and hence to regard its power (to which we are, to be sure, subjected in regard to these things) as not the sort of dominion over ourselves and our authority to which we would have to bow if it came down to our highest principles and their affirmation or abandonment.” (145)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The dynamical sublime

“In this way alone does religion internally distinguish itself from superstition, the latter not providing a basis in the mind for reverence for the sublime, but only for fear and anxiety before the being of superior power, to whose will the terrified person sees himself as subjected without holding him in great esteem; from which of course nothing can arise but the attempt to curry favor and ingratiate oneself, instead of a religion of the good conduct of life.” (147)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The dynamical sublime

"...because it is a dominion that reason exercises over sensibility only in order to enlarge it in a way suitable for its own proper domain (the practical) and to allow it to look out upon the infinite, which for sensibility is an abyss. In fact, without the development of moral ideas, that which we, prepared by culture, call sublime will appear merely repellent to the unrefined person." (148)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

The dynamical sublime

“...rather [the sublime] has its foundation in human nature, and indeed in that which can be required of everyone and demanded of him along with healthy understanding, namely in the predisposition to the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e., to that which is moral. This is the ground for the necessity of the assent of the judgment of other people concerning the sublime to our own, which we at the same time include in the latter.”
(149)

Reading Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime"

Criticism of Kant's aesthetic ideas

- Cultural chauvinism
 - (cf. 148)
- Racism (white supremacism)
 - Again 148
 - Also 147
 - The 'normal idea' in the AoB
- Classism
 - What conditions are needed to have these feelings empirically?
 - Contemplation
 - The safety of the sublime
 - Etc.
- Human exceptionalism in relation to nature
 - The superiority of our faculties is predicated on the relation of dominance over nature.